National Autistic Society

The Spectrum

Edition **126** April 2026

produced by and for autistic people

About *the* Spectrum

The Spectrum is produced by and for autistic adults. We welcome submissions on any topic from autistic people who are over 18.

The Spectrum is published quarterly, in January, April, July and October, in print and online.

To submit an item to *the Spectrum*, please go to **autism.org.uk/theSpectrum** and follow the link to submit your work.

Although most issues are themed, submissions on any subject are welcome. Only some of the magazine's content will follow the theme. All submissions may be edited, especially for privacy, libel and for fitting the space available.

Please note that *the Spectrum* receives many submissions each quarter, so it is not possible to respond to every one, nor for every contribution to be printed. Discussions on editorial choices will not be entered into.

Pieces that appear in *the Spectrum* are credited using the author's first name only, unless the author requests an alias. This is done to protect their privacy.

The National Autistic Society promotes *the Spectrum* on social media using pieces selected from the magazine.

Please note: the views expressed in *the Spectrum* are not necessarily those of the Editors, the National Autistic Society or those involved in the publication of the magazine.

The Spectrum online version is available at **autism.org.uk/theSpectrum**

You can email *the Spectrum* at **spmag@nas.org.uk**

History

This magazine was founded as *Asperger United* in 1993 by Pamela Yates and Patricia Howlin, in association with the Maudsley Hospital, and Mark Bebbington and Judy Lynch of the National Autistic Society.

This was in response to a recognised lack of services for autistic people and the potential for self-help and networking as a means of support.

The purpose of the magazine was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at.

The name *the Spectrum* was suggested by dozens of people and chosen in an online poll in 2018.

The former Editors and Sub-editors are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds, John Joyce, the Goth and Charlotte.

In 2024, Fiona and Charlotte, autistic members of the National Autistic Society's Content team, became joint editors. In October 2025, Helen, another autistic member of staff, took over from Charlotte as Co-editor.

Welcome to the April issue

No matter the time of year, routines are the glue that hold life together. Whether your routines are small rituals or carefully planned days, the safety of consistency can never be underestimated. Finding a way to navigate this chaotic world often requires us to create our own predictability. For each of us, that looks different, but there can be a sense of peace so deep and physical from the routines we create. Maybe that helps explain why the loss of routine can be so painful, so overwhelming. Peace is hard-earned and often fragile, and especially now, protecting our peace where we can find it is essential.

We greatly enjoyed reading and admiring all the submissions on the subject of routines. In fact, putting together this wonderful magazine is one routine we particularly look forward to.

We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we did.

You will find our suggested theme for the July issue on page 15, but we also welcome submissions on any topic of your choosing. Remember to complete a permissions form for your submission, as we can't publish anything without it.

Please submit your work at autism.org.uk/the-spectrum/submit-work.

Happy World Autism Acceptance Month.

Yours,

Fiona and Helen

Contents

Article

Food for thought

By Deborah

© Deborah 2026

Today, I enjoy humor in my oh-so-clearly autistic routines. Before the diagnosis, I thought of them as efficient and organised. I still do. Except now, I see patterns of reducing decision-making and using less energy – helpful information when planning my time, as seen in a routine worth sharing: cooking.

Sunday, I plan a meal menu for the week. I clear the table after breakfast and take out two cookbooks, a spreadsheet of favorite meals, the 'Bee' happy clipboard with the notes gathered during the week, monthly calendar and a pen. Once everything is spread out on the table, I am ready to begin.

Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Sunday are dinner cooking days. Wednesday is Monday leftovers. Thursday is Tuesday leftovers. Friday is homemade pizza. Saturday is any remaining leftovers, soup or takeout. Sunday rotates between three routine meals. Lunches mostly follow the same outline.

Each recipe is pulled out for review. Missing ingredients are added to the shopping list. Sticky notes mark pages in the cookbooks, and paper recipes for the week are hung on the side of the fridge. The magnetic clip moves to the microwave and cookbooks on a stand for easy viewing when in use.

The dry erase board is filled in with the week's menu for quick reference. The calendar is returned to the hook next to the board. The clipboard goes below the calendar. The pen goes in the bathroom organiser repurposed for writing utensils in between the calendar and clipboard. Then, off to the store.

When it's time to cook, music is turned on first. Complex meals are instrumental only to keep focus. Easy meal music varies. Next, the menu is pulled out. Pots, pans, measuring cups and spoons go on the stove. Dry ingredients are grouped on the counter. Fresh ingredients are cleaned and cut.

The recipe is followed step-by-step. As each ingredient is used, it's placed on the other side of the counter to ensure all ingredients are used. Remaining fresh ingredients are set aside until all are ready to go back in the fridge. Timers are set. Dishes go in the sink and are washed during waiting periods.

No stopping to go back and forth to find items. No last-minute trips for missing ingredients. Planned and prepared cooking is fun and relaxing. Now, this is how it works on paper. Life happens. Skipped meals move to next week's schedule. Despite lists, I forget things and make adjustments. It's okay.

This routine is an adjustment of my mother's cooking routine. She hangs recipes on the fridge, makes lists and moves ingredients after using them. Hanging the recipe on the microwave is easier on my neck. Sharing that small change keeps us closer and is a way we take care of each other.

Is my cooking routine 'autistic'? No. I grew up watching my mom's routine and her showing up with ready-to-eat meals for family members. It's part of her love language. Mine includes demonstrating that learning love languages and cooking is possible with practice and the support of a familiar routine.

Routine

By Sammy

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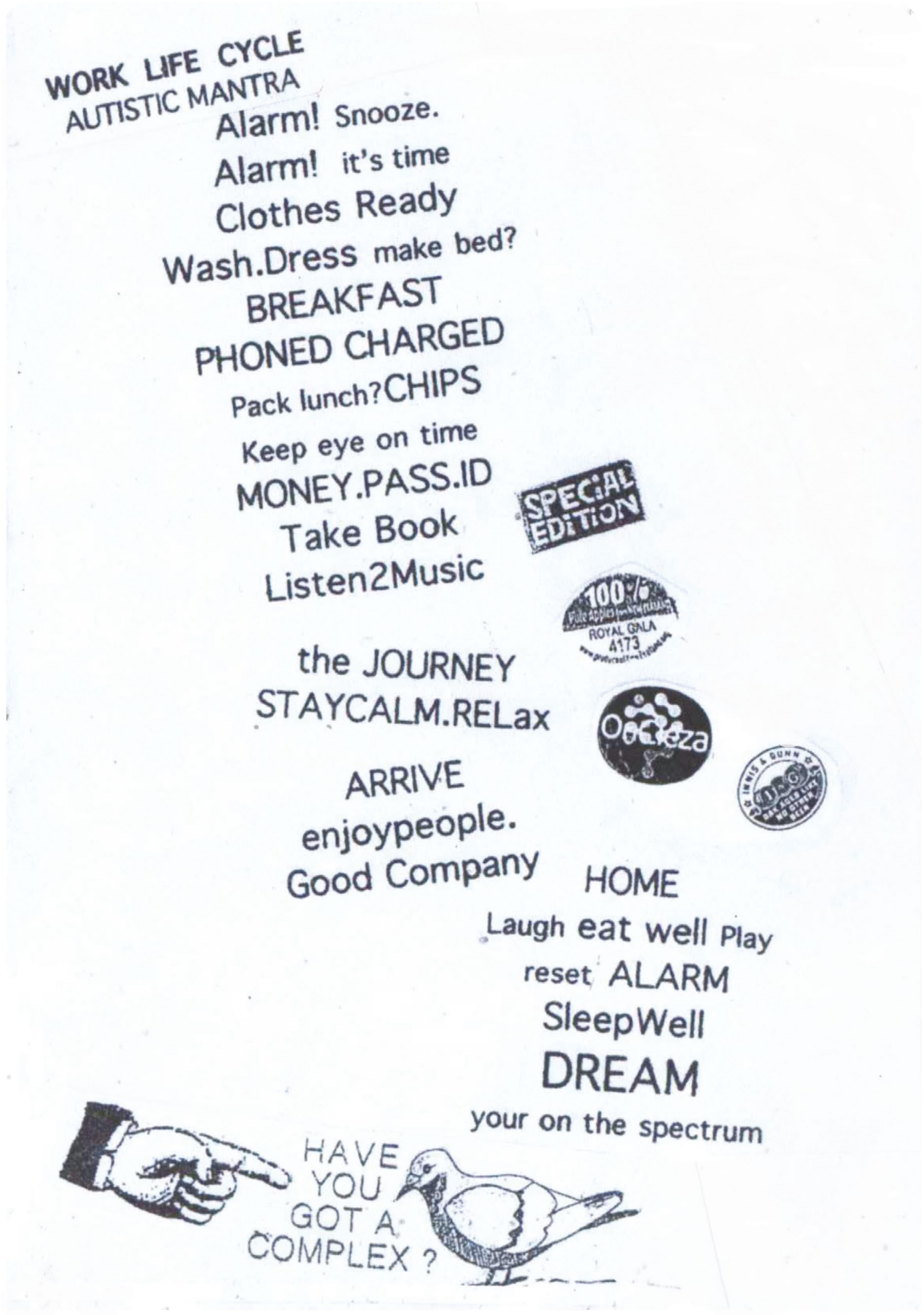
Artwork



WORK LIFE CYCLE
AUTISTIC MANTRA
Alarm! Snooze.
Alarm! it's time
Clothes Ready
Wash.Dress make bed?
BREAKFAST
PHONED CHARGED
Pack lunch?CHIPS
Keep eye on time
MONEY.PASS.ID
Take Book
Listen2Music

the JOURNEY
STAYCALM.RELax

ARRIVE
enjoypeople.
Good Company

HOME
Laugh eat well Play
reset ALARM
SleepWell
DREAM
your on the spectrum

Article

High performance doesn’t mean unaffected

By Lilian

© Lilian 2026

As a young woman who was recently diagnosed as autistic, it was the biggest and most validating relief of my life. I am a trainee Clinical Scientist in Cancer Genomics – a role that is complex, high-pressure and requires precision, consistency and focus. On the surface, I appear to manage it well.

As a woman, I learned early on how to adapt. Like a lot of late-diagnosed women, I masked for decades because I felt I had to. Growing up, I was described constantly as shy, quiet and clever. As an adult, those labels shifted – introvert, unsociable, blunt. I once got taken into a room at work and told: “you can’t deal with change”. None of this quite fit, but these comments followed me anyway, and I never forgot them.

What those labels didn’t capture was the effort behind everything; the constant monitoring of how I was coming across. Rehearsing conversations and then over-analysing interactions afterwards. Adjusting my tone, my facial expressions, my responses – all in real time. Over time, it did become instinctive and natural, but never easy.

I noticed that in the workplace, masking is often mistaken for simply being professional. People see someone organised, driven, detail-oriented. What they don’t see is the sensory overload, the mental exhaustion or the moments where everything becomes too much behind the scenes and the meltdowns that happen in private.

And yet, at the same time, autism is also what allows me to do well. In cancer genomics, the work is intricate and high stakes. It requires sustained focus, pattern recognition and a deep need to get things right. My attention to detail is not just helpful – it is essential. My ability to become fully absorbed in my work is not a weakness. It is part of what makes me effective, and that duality is something that is rarely acknowledged.

For me, the drive to be good at my job – to be precise, reliable, professional – has always been strong. But that drive is not separate from my autism; I would argue that, on reflection, it’s shaped by it. The same traits that allow me to succeed are also the ones that can make the experience more intense, more exhausting, often overwhelming.

The need for routine

Before my diagnosis, I didn’t have the language to articulate this. Now, I recognise that one of the most important things I have come to understand is how crucial routine is for me. It always has been, but now it makes sense why.

From the outside, routine can look like preference, organisation, maybe even rigidity. But for me, it is not optional – it is a foundational part of every aspect of my life. Routine is what allows me to function at the competent level that people see. In short, it reduces the number of decisions my brain has to make. It creates predictability and provides a structure that holds everything together, particularly in a role where the cognitive demands are already high.

Routine is not about control for the sake of it. It is about conservation of my cognitive energy, allowing me to direct my focus where it matters – on the science, on the data, on doing the job well – rather than on constantly trying to regulate an often unbearable sensory, communicative and social overload.

So, routine is not a limitation. It is what allows me to be the most effective version of myself, both professionally and personally. Without it, things do not simply become minorly inconvenient; my entire system becomes less stable.

Being autistic in clinical science is not something that needs to be hidden or compensated for. It is something that exists alongside the work – contributing to it, shaping it, and yes, at times, making it more challenging. For many autistic people like me, that experience is hidden in plain sight.

One of the hardest parts is not the work itself; conversely, it's often the easiest part for me. It makes sense. It has structure. It rewards the way my brain naturally works. What is harder is navigating the neurotypical world around it, and ultimately, it is robust routine and clear communication that best allow me to do this.

Artwork

Undisturbed

By Emma

© Emma 2026

Article

Routines

By Emily

© Emily 2026

“I do, like many of you, appreciate the comforts of the everyday routine, the security of the familiar, the tranquillity of repetition” – Every Hammond in *V for Vendetta*

I am now hopefully only a few months away from getting an assessment at the age of 33, and one of the biggest things in my life, among many, that made me consider an autism assessment is routines. Or more accurately, my meltdowns at the changing of routines. As the realisation of being autistic grew more obvious to me in my adult years, the impact of changing routines was also glaringly obvious. It has taken some time to navigate, but I wish to share what has worked for me in the hope it helps someone else.

One of my earliest meltdown memories was when I was six years old and in the back of the car. After school, instead of the usual routine of having tea, then baths and bed, mum and dad packed me and my younger brother up into the car for a ‘surprise’.

I vividly remember feeling stressed and anxious. Why was this happening? Where were we going? I was so upset and crying my eyes out, which was received by my parents as me having another moment.

We arrived at our destination, which was the Hippodrome Theatre in Darlington, to watch the Dick Whittington pantomime with my childhood idols, The Chuckle Brothers. Once I came to terms with the new plan and became familiar with my surroundings, I did enjoy my evening, particularly when they were throwing sweets into the audience. I suspect I was mentally exhausted when we got home, as that is where the memory ends. This is just one example of a simple change in routine that would send me into meltdown. Even when that routine change had come from a place of love, it was hard to recognise it as such as an undiagnosed six-year-old.

My partner and I have been together for eight years, and after some trial and error, we think we have nailed routines, or as much as we can within our control. He works shifts that are different day to day, including weekends - sometimes starting work at 4am, sometimes 4pm and other shifts in between. I work a predictable 9-5, Monday to Friday, with two days at home and three days in the office.

I found it difficult to keep track of the shifts and remember which days I was having tea on my own and which days I was the last one out of the house. We tried having a digital spreadsheet of shifts; however, the effort of finding it on my phone and waiting for it to load wasn’t very helpful and didn’t allow for the easy adding of notes. We then tried writing all the shifts on a paper calendar pinned to the fridge so I could refer to it easily and write notes when things arose, and this worked. We then planned the week’s meals in advance so I knew which days I would be eating on my own, which days my partner would be cooking and what to buy from the shops. Both of these things we still do today.

For me, it is about having a ‘file’ of routines at my disposal, using different ones when needed. When my partner is on early shifts, we have some time together in the evenings and have our little evening routine. When he’s on late shifts, I have the evenings to myself, so I enable that particular routine and enjoy some hobby time.

Having a plan A and B and sometimes C when planning a day out is also a key lesson we have learned. What if the weather is bad and we can't get to place A? We can go to place B instead. If restaurant A is full, we'll try restaurant B.

Going on holiday was a whole other ball game. Whenever we stayed away from home for more than one night, I would have a meltdown on the first night due to the huge change in routine, despite wanting to be on holiday. I would be determined not to ruin the first night AGAIN every time we went away, but once again, the emotions overflowed, and I felt like everything was too much. I would, however, eventually settle into the holiday and enjoy myself.

We came up with a new routine for our holidays. I love food and eating in restaurants, but only if they are highly reviewed and I have scoped them out in advance; I can't just 'go with the flow' and see what takes my fancy. So, before a holiday, I research restaurants to eat at every night of the holiday and book a table, with the first night being something really familiar, like a chain restaurant we have at home. Then we get a little more experimental on other nights once I am more settled. Some of my all-time favourite meals have been on holiday through this routine.

This has been a game-changer for holidays. It is such a small change, but knowing where we are eating every night, and having a familiar meal on that first night whilst I am still adjusting to the new surroundings, is the key. Ensuring we are staying near a supermarket for familiar snacks and having a kettle in the hotel room for a calming cuppa are other staples for a successful holiday for us.

Life chops and changes at a moment's notice, and we cannot control that sometimes. But having mini routines that you can pull out when required can help us feel a little more comfortable and in control. It can be trial and error, and things may not work straight away, but finding what works for you can be wonderful.

Article

Routines for reducing anxiety

By Piers

© Piers 2026

One of the interesting things about reading *the Spectrum* is discovering how many things we have in common, and yet also how different we all can be. I wonder if this is the same for routines. I have two autistic friends locally who seem to have little routine – they eat at random times when hungry, go to bed when they feel like it – quite different from my way of doing things.

Routines can be disrupted by events, excursions, unexpected visitors or phone calls (which I rarely answer), but when I have days home alone (which, being mainly retired, is usually the case), my days have a regular routine. It helps to give my day shape, reduces anxiety, gives me things to look forward to and gets rid of unpredictability. This is how my day goes:

9am – breakfast followed by checking emails/doing admin

11am – coffee break followed by looking after my many little pets (bugs, tropical fish, shrimps, tortoises)

1pm – lunch followed by gardening

3pm – tea break

6pm – supper and TV

9pm – to bed and read

10pm – listen to BBC Radio 4 Extra

11.30pm – fall asleep (on a good day!)

This has been my basic routine for many years, long before I was (late) diagnosed autistic. It wasn't contrived for any reason; it just naturally developed and seemed to make sense to me. It never feels boring. It also feels healthy – the regular mealtimes and sleep times. I enjoy cooking (and eating), and lunch and supper are usually ready to the minute at 1pm and 6pm. So I have perfected timings when it comes to cooking!

Most other people don't seem to understand why this routine might be important to me; why, if they ring at 6pm, I am unlikely to answer. A friend has been running monthly eco-walks on a Friday, but starting at 1pm. When I queried this odd time to start, it seemed that lunchtime hadn't been considered! When I said I had my lunch at 1pm, I had quizzical looks, which I translated as just 'have your lunch earlier, weirdo!'

I can and do make exceptions when necessary, of course, but most days, the routine is a major part of my survival kit.

Shutdown

By Izzy

© Izzy 2026

Poem

Quiet hours

By Tadgh

© Tadgh 2026

The kettle hums, the morning waits,
Light leans too sharp against my eyes.
I line the cups, recount the plates,
Yet numbers slip, defy my tries.

Instructions tangle in my head,
Steps vanish before I can act.
I pause, retrace, then guess instead,
And hope my answer will attract.

A comment lands, I take it plain,
Its meaning hidden, folded, thin.
I answer truth, not what they feign,
Then watch the room shift, quiet within.

The radio roars; the streets intrude,
My hands fidget, my thoughts collide.
A breath, a hum, a small reprieve,
Before the world resumes outside.

Summary: The poem explores autism by staying close to my inner experience of routine, showing how ordinary moments like making tea or following instructions can feel unexpectedly difficult or overwhelming as a result of the sensory and cognitive challenges faced by those on the autism spectrum. Routine is shown as something I lean on to cope with sensory overload and social or cognitive misunderstanding, with small, personal strategies offering brief moments of calm in an otherwise confusing world.

Poem

When the world falls silent

By Sally

© Sally 2026

Somedays the world is just a place
Inside your head
Your voice
Your breath
So still
So dead

Breathe in
Breathe out

Feel the life within each cell
You've learnt the piece where peace
Should dwell

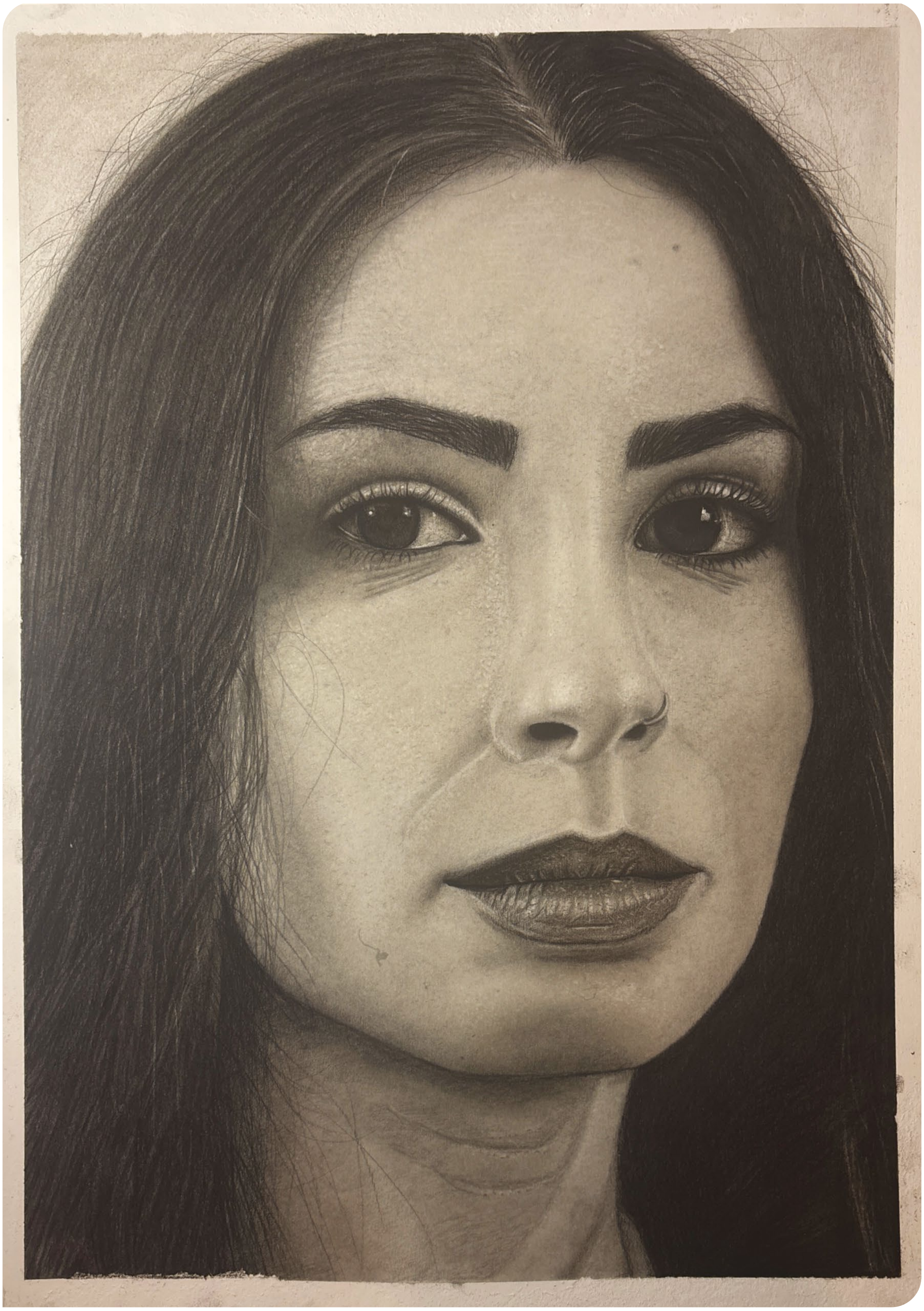
Your place
Your space
Your pace

Own your steps
Your story awaits

Kintsugi

By M

© M 2026



Poem

Routines

By L.V.

© L.V. 2026

I can do it all
On days when I have nothing,
I can still do work
Work on my old injuries
Work on my old scars
Work on the things that
bother me the most
Old regrets from the petty
to the legitimate
And what is this strange feeling,
like I'm changing from within
Like a phoenix rising from the ashes
Or a snake shedding its hide
I can do it all
Even on days when I have nothing

On days when I have
everything, I wear faces
I can't go out a healing mess
And I like the people I interact with
I can wear any face
A loyal worker
A wannabe charming talker
They are 'myself' but different
parts of what I can be
And I save the darkness in my
soul for people I trust
Could I ever talk to people
at work about it?
Never never
That's not how it works
As much as I like my coworkers
You don't just spill the darkness
in your soul to people at work
That's not what people at work are for
I put my music on because I'm allowed
And as Taylor Swift sings
about being a mirrorball
I don't think she meant the
song to be empowering
But I feel like I can do it
Just for a while

Tuesdays and Thursdays I have my coach
And I can talk to her
It's okay if I have darkness in my soul
I don't have to shove it aside
to do a good job
I can talk to her as I can talk
to my family and friends
Or my therapists
And Wednesdays and Fridays are free
That's when I work on myself
Get stronger
Tougher
In the nick of time

That's the way my routine is
And it works for me
It may change
I may be challenged
But that is how my life is and for
now, it not only works for me
It is me

Short story

Time

By River Sky

© River Sky 2026

The kind of morning Ms Brown liked was one where nothing unexpected happened. She generally preferred the rest of the day to follow suit. Days were punctuated with breakfast at 8am (now), lunch at 12 noon, dinner at 6pm. Today, alas, was not to be an ideal day for Ms Brown.

As she cycled to work over a bridge, an upstream lock burst. The floodwater hit hard. Her anxiety hit an all-time high. All she could feel was swirling water. Strong currents pulling her down. Smacking her against hidden debris. Battering her body. Slicing flesh. All she could see was light and dark. All she could smell and taste was muddy water as she tried to stay above it. Grab one breath. Down. Another. All she could feel was fear. Darkness claimed her.

Light found her again. She came round looking up at a nurse's fob watch, reading 11.55. It was upside down, like she felt. She'd been bandaged up. They gave her a packet and encouraging 'eat this' nod. "We've no casualties. Let's not start now."

Ms Brown smiled. Not the morning I planned, but at least I still get lunch at noon.

Next issue's theme:
The suggested theme for the July 2026 edition is: Holidays.

You are invited to interpret this any way you like and respond to it in writing or with visual art. You may want to share something about your holidays; for example, why you choose them or how you plan them or deal with any change they bring.

We also welcome submissions on any other topic of your choosing, unrelated to the suggested theme. Remember to complete a permissions form for your submission, as we can't publish anything without it. Please submit work at autism.org.uk/the-spectrum.

Poem

The sensory express

By Lewie

© Lewie 2026

Overhead lights blind me as eyes pinball around the carriage.

Hearing a million voices echoing,

the sound penetrates through my ear drums.

Hyenas cackling in the background, ready to feast on their prey.

My skin on fire, stomach tied in knots, sweaty armpits, clammy palms, mind racing,

I'm a deer trapped in headlights,

frozen stiff, unable to move.

An overbearing smell of body odour lingers, a poison to my olfactory system.

I dissolve into a corner desperately trying not to make eye contact,

hoping no one will notice me.

Anxiety strangles me,

like a snake wrapped tight around its prey.

Struggling to breathe, struggling to cope,

I feel myself going faint

and before I pass out,

the train finally stops!

Like a herd of wildebeest on a mass migration,

everyone empties at once.

Boxed in, STUCK!

Looking for a way out

but with nowhere to go.

Clenching teeth and fists

I grin and bear it, carrying on uncomfortably, just trying to fit in.

Hearing a thousand footsteps pounding the pavement,

it feels like a violent stampede.

Heavy breathing felt either side of me,

I'm exhausted and ready to give up,

until suddenly, I see the station exit up ahead.

I'm nearly there, just one more push,

now I'm finally FREE!

Article

When everything is loud: sensory overload and university life

By Beth

© Beth 2026

From being very young, I became more and more aware that I did not fit into the world, and my experience of the world was very different compared to neurotypical people. Feelings were bigger. Sounds were louder. Change felt unbearable. The world was not built with autism in mind or to adapt to how my brain works, and because of that, I struggled to function in a world that was not accessible to me.

That feeling of not fitting came from the environments and sensory experiences I had to endure.

Throughout education, I was always expected to fit in, adapt and act like I was fine, without anyone understanding that my brain was not built or wired in the same way as everyone else's. I did not have the language skills to be able to explain how I was feeling or how I was experiencing the world at the time that this was all going on. Even if I did, I do not think anyone would have had enough knowledge to understand.

I felt alienated in the world, being expected to live by social rules and norms that I did not naturally understand or know about. I felt like I did not belong - like I did not fit in, as though I had no place in this world. I was not able to cope or function in the same way everyone else seemed to be able to. Because of this, I was not socially accepted and always seen to be strange. As I grew up, I was able to gain more and more understanding that I did not do things that other people did or understand things the same as other people, as my experience of the world was very much heightened in every way. Instead of people trying to understand why, my behaviour and the way I acted were often seen as something else – as being disruptive, 'naughty' or difficult just because of the way I acted and that I did not follow what was deemed to be socially normal and accepted.

That had a long-lasting negative effect on me. As I grew up, I felt like I was failing at something everyone else appeared to do so naturally. I knew I was different and did not fit in, but I didn't know why. When you carry that burden for years – that you are getting it wrong, that you do not belong, that no one really understands you – it does not just disappear quickly. It stays with you, and it influences how you see yourself.

Support, where it faintly existed, within my school and college settings, mainly seemed to focus on helping me to seem as though I was coping, instead of addressing the reality that I was not. I was expected to sit and be still in overwhelming environments and situations, to concentrate in spaces that felt like chaos and to meet expectations that didn't account for my needs.

Over time, that teaches you something – mainly that you are the problem, that you are the one who needs to change how you react to situations.

As I grew up, I started to look for answers as to what was different and why. I read information about autism. I listened to people talk about autism. And still, none of it was the same as how I experienced the world. None of it seemed to explain the way my brain worked, the way my needs impacted everything I do or the way I struggled. I felt alone inside a diagnosis that was meant to explain how I saw the world.

I am not writing to tell people exactly how autism is. I'm writing for autistic people who don't see themselves reflected anywhere and quietly wonder if they're the problem. If you have ever felt this same disconnect as me, I want you to know this: you are not on your own and you are not something that's broken and needs to be fixed.

There is so much to my autism. It is not simple, and it cannot be summed up or briefly explained. My brain is complex, full of too many connections and nowhere for them to go. The way I visualise the world is complex. I have spent my life realising that very few people actually understand that, not because they are not capable of understanding, but because they have never been asked to try.

Despite the bad times, my experience at university has been different.

There have been consistent, genuine efforts to adapt the environment around me and to understand my needs as a whole, and this has made a significant difference. For the first time, I have felt like people are trying to meet me where I am and not constantly expecting me to adjust to their neurotypical world. This does not take away all the challenges, but it changes the way that these challenges are supported.

Even within a more supportive setting and among people who have actually tried to understand my needs, the way I experience the world on a daily basis has not changed. When I walk into university, the sensory overload suddenly hits me before anything academic does. The moment I go through the first door, all of my senses are heightened – not gradually, but all at once. It feels like I am in a constant state of high alert or something very close to it. I become hyperaware of all that is around me. I am listening to every sound, watching the lights, constantly having to monitor the environment and tracking movements around me. I am not doing this consciously. I am doing it because my brain needs to know that nothing has changed.

When walking into an environment that I am familiar with and even one small thing is different - a layout that has been altered, a door that does not open the way it usually does or a noise that should not be there – I feel unsettled, on edge. Everything inside me is screaming for familiarity.

Most people would think, just use a different door. But for me, that door was never just a door. It was part of a sequence. A pattern. A routine. A part of knowing what comes next. When that changes without warning, my brain does not register inconvenience. It registers threat and danger – a type of danger that I did not want to become a reality.

Even when there are no changes, the entire sensory experience itself can still be overwhelming.

People tell me that they have the built-in ability to consciously block out background noise. That is something I have never been able to experience. I would love to experience what it is like to experience the world in that way. My brain's ability to filter background noise is non-existent. I hear everything at once and all at the same volume. The lecturer's voice, movement and conversations – everything arrives at the same time and volume. Nothing is background noise for me. Everything is constantly competing for my attention all at once, and it is an exhausting place to be.

Suddenly, it becomes too much.

It starts to feel like everything is becoming a backlog inside my head – information piling on top of itself faster than I can process it. I continually try to process my environment, but sometimes everything is too fast for me to process. When my brain finally gets on top of the backlog, it hurts. Internally – there is a deep sense of overwhelming pressure from trying to process too much information all at once, that people cannot see looking at me from the outside as it is not visible.

After a while of this intense, constant sensory input, I reach a point where I no longer have any ability to physically take in any more information or stimulus. Everything becomes too loud. The environment. My thoughts, everything. It feels like my mind is moving too fast and completely stuck at the same time.

That is when I have reached my limit.

This is an insight into how I endure and the way I experience sensory overload. This is my real experience of the world every day, stuck in a world where everything is heightened all of the time and a constant lack of understanding from wider society.

Not a lack of interest. Not a lack of effort. But my brain doing everything it can in a world that asks too much of it and is only just starting to learn how to adapt in return.

I also want to acknowledge and thank everyone at my university who has played a massive part in supporting me throughout my entire degree and university experience. The continuous efforts that have been made to adapt where possible and in understanding my needs have made an enormous difference to my whole personal and academic experience. That support has not gone unnoticed, and it has helped me reach a point that, at times, I never thought was possible.

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