Produced by and for autistic people

The Spectrum

Edition **116** October 2023

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National Autistic Society

The Spectrum

The Spectrum is run by and for autistic adults (although some parents subscribe on behalf of their under-16s). The magazine is owned and run by the National Autistic Society, and aims to connect autistic people through their letters and articles and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

Please note that *the Spectrum* receives many letters 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. The magazine protects the identity of contributors by not printing full names.

The Spectrum is available at

www.autism.org.uk/theSpectrum

or by paying a subscription. To subscribe you, we need your postal address. Please subscribe online or contact the email address for a subscription form. All contact details are below.

Editors: Fiona and Charlotte
Production support: the Content team
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Database support: the Data Support team

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 dearth of services for people with Asperger syndrome 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 magazine has also provided work experience for those who have held the position of Editor and Sub-editor. These are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds, John Joyce and the Goth.

Pamela Yates provided support and advice to the editors until the publication was handed over to the National Autistic Society in 2000.

The name *Asperger United* was chosen by a group of original readers. This was suggested by **Anna Kaczynski**. The name *the Spectrum* was suggested by dozens of people and chosen in an online poll in 2018.

Please send all correspondence and subscription requests to:

Web: **www.autism.org.uk/theSpectrum**

and follow the link to the submissions form.

Email: **spmag@nas.org.uk**

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Welcome to the delayed October edition.

We are sorry for the delay to several editions of the magazine this and last year. This is the first issue of *the Spectrum* following the departure of the magazine's longstanding Editor, the Goth, who left recently as part of a redundancy programme at the National Autistic Society.

During the Goth's 18-year tenure at the magazine, with 14 years as its Editor, his unique curation of writing and artwork by autistic people helped guide us through the important issues, diverse perspectives, challenges and joys of autistic experience. We want to convey our deepest respect and gratitude to the Goth for his outstanding contribution to our community.

The Spectrum is now edited by Fiona and Charlotte, two autistic members of the charity's Content team. Fiona is Senior Web, Creative and Brand Lead and is the Chair of the charity's Autistic Colleagues Network. Charlotte is Senior Autism Copywriter, working mainly on our online advice and guidance content.

We hope you enjoy the great variety of articles, poetry, artwork and even a how-to crochet guide in this edition. We invite you to send your contributions for the next edition. Our suggested theme is on page 7.

We hope you enjoyed the festive period, however you spent it, and wish you all the best for the new year.

Yours,

Fiona and Charlotte

the Editors

Contents

My journey as a book worm

by **Chloe**

Are you one of those people who read a lot of books as a child but not so much now as an adult? Have you recently taken up reading again as a hobby? Well, me too.

I used to read so many books as a child, my parents took me to get my own library card very young. My mum has vivid memories of me sitting in the living room at three or four years old just turning pages of my books. I think she could see, there and then, that I was going to turn out to be a book worm.

Many neurodivergent individuals will have a hobby or a love for collecting. Mine is books. I have five bookcases filled to the brim with books and a book trolley that I can move around the house. I always like to keep a book or my Kindle in my hand wherever I go, even if I don't actually get a chance to read them. As a child, reading was known as quite a 'nerdy' activity and I think this is why I stopped. I look back at my childhood and notice that a lot of things were masked and are starting to unravel now in my late 20s.

I remember reading the Horrid Henry books to start with and then moving into Jacqueline Wilson books as I grew older. A core memory of mine is visiting my local book shop to buy the newest book Wilson released, which at the time I remember was *Candyfloss*. My mum bought me the boxset of the first four Harry Potter books for Christmas when I was eight years old because I did very well in my piano lessons. I only read the first book at that point, but I have gone back recently to check them off my list.

In 2017, my life was slowly getting into a routine with a full-time job, so I started using my spare time again to read. With my constant migraines, I found it hard to concentrate for long periods, so I started off with audiobooks and started tracking my reading. My annual reading has improved each year. Last year, I finished 70 books.

I try to encourage all my friends and family to read. It's so good for your mental health and can encourage your imagination. I have the best dreams if I go to bed after reading a book. Here are a few reasons I think you should read more:

- to increase your vocabulary
- to reduce stress
- to aid sleep
- to encourage focus
- it could help to alleviate depressive symptoms.

Housework as therapy?

by **Nick**

This may seem a strange concept but bear with me. I am aware that many people on the spectrum struggle with cleaning as it can be quite a daunting task. I developed an obsession in childhood with hand sweepers, so it started there. I also spent school holidays helping my great-grandfather, who was a caretaker at a local social club. I was quite short for my age and can remember struggling to move a set of large dust mops, but I loved using them. I had the same issue with the floor polisher, but, again, enjoyed myself once I manoeuvred it into place. I did go on to turn professional in my cleaning career but am now happy doing my own cleaning at home.

Ok, so this is why I consider cleaning to be therapeutic. I stick to routines and have set days for cleaning, otherwise it would get on top of me. It only takes me an hour to clean all the surfaces with a damp cloth and sweep and mop, so I do not end up battling with major cleaning. I take pride in keeping my home clean, so this in itself is therapy, but it also allows me to switch off from the world and daydream. I have had on-going issues with anti-social behaviour in my neighbourhood so being able to switch off is a relief. Not that I want you to think I am lazy and simply push the mop around; no, that would be too easy. I get down and scrub beforehand to really get a shine on the tiled floor. Who needs gym membership with a workout like this? Yes, there are floor scrubbers but the sheer cost of them plus the eye watering electric bills means this is not an option for me. I then dry off with a squeegee and mop and dry again. If I was really keen, I would polish the floor, but due to my dyspraxia this would end up with me crashing into walls – something that I do from time to time already, so I do not need any more risk. I have tiled floor to make it easy to keep clean given my habit of dropping things and food, sigh!

I only use Method cleaning products as they have no harsh chemicals and for the scents that come with them. I quite enjoy the fresh smell after cleaning the floors. So, when it comes to cleaning, little and often works well for me. And no, I am not for hire. Hmm, large bar of Toblerone, you say? What time do you want me?

It’s the stimming

by **Finlay**

So, it’s the tone,
it’s the drone,
It’s the pace,
or a place.
It’s a mention
or a reference
to a fixation
that I hate
or I love
or debate.

This is how I stim,
On a whim,
just like her,
just like him.
There’s no need for
complications,
it’s just
communications.

It’s the body as it hums,
It’s the flick of my thumbs,
It’s the click of my tongue.
It’s that sound that I make,
It’s these knees that I shake.

It’s a slap of my wrists,
It’s a tap of my fists,
It’s an elbow as it twists.
It’s the nod of my head,
It’s the phrase that you said.

This is how I stim,
on a whim,
just like her,
just like him.
There’s no need for
complications,
it’s just
communications.

It’s the beads as they land,
It’s the clapping of some hands,
It’s the rocking ‘cause I can.
It’s the swaying with alarm,
It’s the waving of my arm.

It’s the jumping up and down,
It’s the dance in the town,
It’s my scream as I frown.
It’s the stomp of my foot,
It’s the lace on my boot.

This is how I stim,
how I speak,
unlike you,
just like her,
just like him,
with purpose,
or on a whim,
this is how I speak,
that is how I stim.

The suggested theme for the January 2024 edition is: **A new start**. You are invited to interpret this any way you like and respond to it in writing or with visual art. Ideas could be sparked by a new activity or hobby you started recently, a new friend you made, something that prompted a new outlook on life or a realisation you had on your autism journey. Note that you vote with your contributions, so the theme will only happen if there are enough submissions. 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 here: www.autism.org.uk/the-spectrum/submit-work a poem and an article

Ode to a spider

by **Logan**

Oh spider spider I love you so

With your hairy legs that grow and grow

Your spindling web, is just like net,

it could catch a baseball I bet!

Oh spider spider you scare my brother so,

you make him shiver from head to toe

Oh spider spider you're so slick

I adore the way, you move so quick

Every morning, I look for you,

one day I found you, in my shoe

I don't mind

because you're sublime

Oh spider spider I love you so

I hope you never ever go!

Coping via crochet

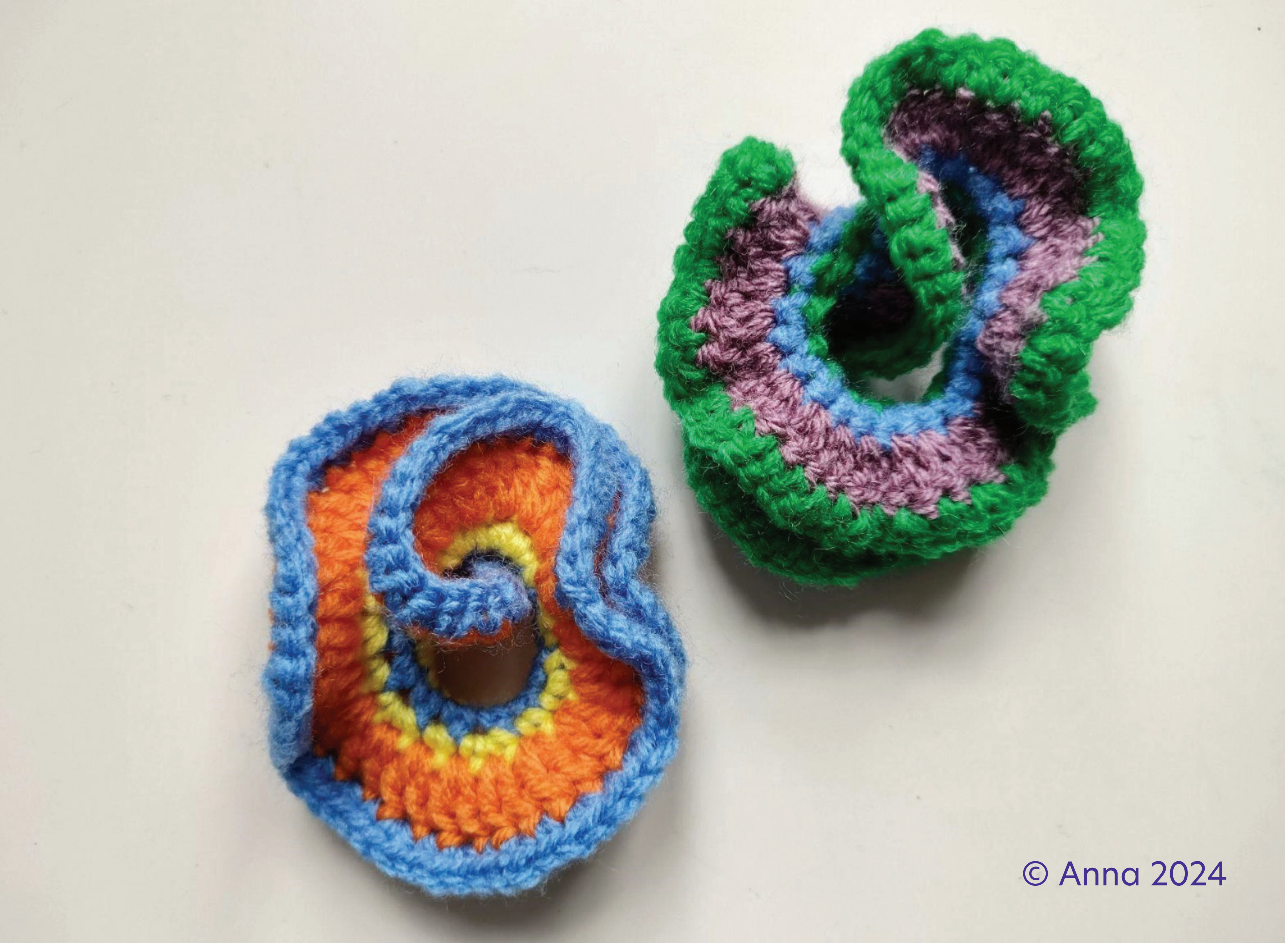
by **Anna**

These days, I rarely leave the house without a crochet hook and a ragged ball of wool. Crochet has become a coping mechanism, a means of surviving uncomfortable situations. It keeps your fingers busy and your mind occupied; it imposes both physical and mental separation from the outside world. After all, it is harder for that persistent fear to creep in or the crashing tsunami of external input to overwhelm, if some part of you is simply not there, but rather resolutely counting stitches inside your head.

Looping the wool over the hook over and over stops you from incessantly picking at the raw cuticles of your nail beds; focusing your gaze on the orderly rows of stitches prevents the dreaded nightmare of 'Should I be making eye contact?'

Crochet, you could say, has become a means of stimming for me – but in a more 'socially appropriate' way. It would be ideal if all coping mechanisms were unconditionally welcomed, without disapproving glares or muffled sniggers, but so often we are forced to hide the strategies we use to get by. It is rightly unacceptable to ridicule someone using crutches or mock a person's hearing aid; why should the self-soothing behavior of a neurodivergent individual be treated any differently? After all, the crutches, the hearing aid and the stimming serve much the same function: they are adaptations to manage in a world that isn't quite suited to that person's needs.

But until then, I continue to bring my crochet hook and wool with me. It helps me stay that little bit more in control. Plus, it often produces useful things – such as this soft, tactile, infinitely-looping fidget toy.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You will need:

1. DK ("Double Knitting") wool
2. 3.5 mm crochet hook
3. Scissors
4. Wool/tapestry needle

Stitch index (US terms):

Ch = chain
Sk = skip a stitch
Sc = single crochet
Sl st = slip stitch
Dc = double crochet
FO = fasten off

Instructions:

1. Ch 15. Sk 1 chain then sc into the back loops of the remaining 14 chains.

2. Bring the two ends of the crochet piece together, twisting one by 180° to form a twisted loop. Sl st into what is now the top of the other end of the piece.

3. Change colour. Ch 1 then sc into the same stitch. [2 sc in the next stitch, 1 sc in the stitch after that] for the rest of the round. When you come to the join for the first time, continue on, so that you end up working into both sides of the crochet piece. Sl st into the first stitch of the round.

4. Change colour. Ch 3 then dc into the same stitch. [2 dc in the next stitch] for the rest of the round. Sl st into the topmost chain of the ch 3.

5. Change colour. Ch 1 then sc into the same stitch. [2 sc into the next stitch, 1 sc into the stitch after that] for the rest of the round. Sl st into the first stitch of the round. FO and weave in the loose ends.

My experience learning to use speech

by **Melanie Louise**

My name is Melanie. I'm 36 years old. I was diagnosed autistic when I was 12 years old. My article is about delayed speech. I didn't start speaking until I was seven years old, so my aim is to give readers a first-person perspective and to shed some light on what it was like during my early years of not talking.

I was born with a cleft palate – like in your lips, but mine was at the palate of my mouth. As a young child, I had no speech, no sign of 'typical' baby behaviour. I would play alone, line things up in order. I wouldn't point at things; I wouldn't ask for things. It was common for me to faint at school because I was paralysed in asking for things, for example if I was hungry or thirsty.

I had a seven-hour surgery to repair my cleft palate, which is known as pharyngoplasty. I don't remember much of the recovery. At age seven, I spoke a sentence. It was: "Look Buzz, there's an alien," from the famous Disney film, *Toy story*. Around this time, I was introduced to speech therapy and to Makaton, a simplified version of sign language. With this, I was able to communicate simple requests for a drink or a biscuit.

My parents would often show the motion of a Makaton sign to me and train me to copy it, then it just grew from there. This was also helpful in hospital. The doctors realised I would calm after being shown what was going to happen first. I was given a children's toy version of a doctor's suitcase, and I started using it on myself, testing my own heartbeat and temperature, and I was mostly fine after that.

I had intense schooling at a special school. Through this, I was able to eventually read and write to university level. The school was full of caring teachers and it's thanks to them that I got where I am. I have been to university and have a certificate of higher education in archaeology. I still have trouble pronouncing my words and speaking loudly enough for people to hear me. I tend to stutter and stumble over my words when I'm nervous, but in general my speaking is fine now. According to my husband, I never shut up!

There's so much more available now than compared to ten years ago, both in terms of technology and knowledge of the autistic spectrum. For example, my palate wasn't repaired to its full potential due to the lack of technology. Now there are apps such as Speak and Spell to help autistic people to communicate, and if you want to stay away from technology, there is a system called Picture Exchange Communications, fondly known as PECs.

I now live independently with my husband. Previously, I had an appointee to take charge of all my money, but they signed off on that once I got married and was considered able to take charge of it on my own. We pay our own bills and take charge of our own benefits. It's a big leap for someone who was expected to be living in assisted living facilities.

People should understand that just because there's no speech, it doesn't mean that there isn't any thought. Sometimes, supporting autistic people can just be about patience – a willingness to go into their world and to find out new ways to communicate with them.

Silver

by **JAS**

I purchased silver eye drops.
They made everything
Silvery.
I am unsure why
I never purchased gold.
Perhaps on account
of not wanting to be
Ostentatious.
Silver suits my complexion.
So they say.
I go forth, feeling
Silvery,
Like the scales
of a swimming fish,
Silvery,
or the liquid in a
measuring device.

© JAS

A conversation

by **Charlotte**

One, two, three, four.
Look away.
One, two, three, four.
Remember to blink.

One, two, three, four.
Ask how they are.
One, two, three, four.
Did you ask how they were?

One, two, three, four.
Nod and smile.
One, two, three, four.
Wait what did they say?

One, two, three, four.
No! Don't look over there.
One, two, three, four.
BLINK! SMILE! You're being rude.

One, two,
One, two,
One, two,
Make up an excuse.

One, two, three, four.
It was nice to see you.
One, two, three, four.
Headphones on.

One.
There are over 7000 species of frog.
Two.
The largest frogs can weigh over 7lb.
Three.
I can breathe.

Taking the time to be alone at last

by **Marlyn**

A few years back, I decided to step out of the lively town of Glastonbury and, for the same reasons, decided to stop posting on social media. I seemed to spend all my time socialising, then recovering from that effort. All those long blog-like posts I'd craft everyday took up so much time and all my creative juices. People started to notice that I was a good writer. 'I feel as though I'm there with you Marlyn, you should write,' they said. My body was a mess too from all the stress of social engagements.

The last straw was lockdown when many opinionated folk began to tell me my views were wrong. Stuff that I thought! It all felt too much like masking, and I wondered who I would be if I wasn't influenced so much by my peers.

So, I stepped out into the wild, accompanied by a great book, *The artist's way*. Many a lonely vigil between the Cornish coast and East Anglia later, stealing my time back for myself seems to have paid off. I now write several pages a day, paint and sketch every day, and even play the cello in a band.

Here's the first watercolour that has worked. It's taken me many failures and days of procrastination. I am lonely, but realise the feeling is originating from all the feelings I've run away from until now. This era of introspection in my life has opened up a whole new world of insight and observation. I'm sitting here now, where I painted this picture, the winds from the Atlantic buffeting my van, making hauntingly spooky sounds, but I'm glad I've taken the time to be alone at last, instead of running away from, maybe, a perceived loneliness.

Perspectives on family gatherings and parties

by **David**

Family gatherings are supposed to be fun and enjoyable, although they can be stressful, especially when they don't go to plan. Speaking as someone diagnosed with autism, I find festive gatherings, especially Christmas and Easter, to be quite difficult. Last Easter Sunday was no exception. I find it difficult to sleep on the night before Easter Sunday because I am thinking about chocolate (which I love).

This year, my sister had her two-year-old son with her. One of the sensory issues I have is with children screaming, which my nephew does to perfection. When he screams, it feels like a million needles are piercing my head and I find it very difficult to block it out. The pain effectively prevents me from being able to think properly.

My nephew started his Easter egg hunt rushing into the garden shrieking about chocolate – it's one of only a few times in the year he's allowed to eat it. He found all the eggs and then came back into the kitchen squealing. I was feeling broken with all the noise. Not only was the squealing disabling me, but I could even hear the sound of the tin foil as he peeled it off the eggs. It made my stomach churn as the sound reverberated in my ears like a thousand doors slamming at once.

My actions caused the jolly atmosphere to become awkward, as I stomped into the garden. The other people present probably thought I was upset because a two-year-old was eating chocolate in front of me, but actually I wanted to withdraw because of the excruciating pain in my head.

There are often times when a noise is so difficult to shut out that it temporarily disables my thinking. It is difficult to explain this to people, because they often think it's a social problem and that I don't want to talk to other people. People who have a diagnosis of autism are often seen as rude or abrupt and only thinking about themselves over other people. It's always worth asking if there was something in the environment that was causing the problem, but only some time later when they have recovered.

Another factor that is difficult with large gatherings, especially at times like birthday parties and Christmas, is the fact that they can be very busy. It makes me feel claustrophobic because I prefer to be in a room by myself with little demanded of me socially rather than in a big group of people hoping for me to be relaxed and chatty. I find it hard to adapt quickly to lots of people saying lots of different things one after the other.

People often think I don't like special occasions, parties or family gatherings but this is not the case. Although I prefer being on my own, I do actually like seeing other people. However, I tend to clam up – either due to sensory issues that overpower my thinking or my inability to keep pace with frequent changes of conversation.

It's important for me to know who will be coming as this helps me to feel less anxious. I find these occasions are more successful if I can take a break when I experience sensory overload. If I can slip out of the room for 10 to 15 minutes without anyone asking why I'm leaving I find I can have some thinking time to clear my head and then return with a cool state of mind.

Is there such a thing as a calm, quiet party or family gathering? If there is, I'm the perfect guest.

How my hobbies and interests give meaning to my life

by **Natalie**

Hello, this is Natalie. I'm an artist, animator and illustrator, as well as general creative individual who has a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome and also some mental health issues such as schizoaffective disorder, social anxiety and depression.

I wanted to write about how having a range of hobbies and interests has given meaning and direction to my life and has also given me a sense of direction and helped my mental health too in the process.

When I was younger and had recently graduated from my animation degree, back in 2005, I went for a couple of years not having many hobbies in my life and had lost my passion for art. It did affect my mental health, especially the depression and feeling directionless felt scary, like life was pointless. In late 2006, I had my first psychotic episode, where after this my mental health became increasingly poor.

But around 2012 I tried doing some digital illustration on Photoshop and found it very rewarding. Around the same time, I joined an art group through the mental health team. These experiences spurred me to get back into being creative again and very soon I tried doing a short animation. So my passion for art slowly came back.

By 2014 I had a volunteer job where I sold some artwork at Polly's Place, a centre for people with autism and a shop that sells products made by people on the autism spectrum or those that support them. I also began to have artwork on display at art exhibitions and this evolved in 2016 to me having my animation short films screened at a film festival. These achievements improved my confidence in myself as a person and made me feel a sense of direction in my life.

My hobbies and interests are mostly creative ones. These include doing digital illustrations, painting acrylic on canvas pieces, creating 2D animation and a very special hobby/vocation that I started in 2009 filming video diaries and things in my life on a video camera.

To this day I still film these video diaries talking about my life and mental health themes, and last year it evolved to me having more video cameras, including a Go Pro action camera and then later last year getting my first 360 camera, which I really enjoy using.

The hobby has become a lifelong vocation I will aim to do for the rest of my life – filming my life.

Recently, my interests have developed and evolved, to wanting to learn more about science subjects, particularly wanting to learn about quantum physics and environmental themes such as wildlife and the natural world.

I feel that having these different hobbies and interests helps to give a lot of meaning and focus to my life. Over the years since around 2012, when I started to get my passion for art back, it has helped my mental health and has enabled me to heal with some of the more severe aspects of my mental illnesses. I have hope that in the future when I am mentally stronger and more healed inside, that I can pursue these hobbies and interests as paid employment in the creative field, either working for myself as a freelancer, entrepreneur or in a creative company such as an animation studio.

I hope to continue to learn new things, as I enjoy being curious and like learning in general. Future hobbies I would like to learn about are coding, playing a keyboard and making electronic dance music and also learning to create 3D CG animation.

I feel that as a neurodiverse person with mental health issues, which at times can make my life very challenging and stressful, having all these hobbies and interests can help to give me a sense of personal identity in my life and ease my suffering, helping my self-esteem that bit more, to feel like I'm a person that has a meaning to being on this Earth.

Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoy and/or will enjoy finding hobbies and interests that give meaning to your life too.

This article mentions mental health. For advice and guidance about a variety of mental health topics from the National Autistic Society, visit **www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/mental-health**

Writing a song in memory of my friend Z

by **Bobby**

I first became interested in music as a young child. I loved songs older than my time, such as Celine Dion. I remember standing on the dining table in my nappy and singing *My heart will go on* to my Nana. I have older siblings who influenced me with the music they listened to – 90s and 00s style. For my 21st birthday, my sister bought me singing lessons as I was always on the karaoke. When I arrived for my first lesson it was with one of the Journey South brothers, Karl Pemberton. As he had been on *The X Factor*, I was a little shy to sing in front of him, so we started looking at my love of song writing, and it has flourished from there.

When I heard of the death of my friend Z, I felt all sorts of emotions. I was struggling to stop thinking about it and felt so sad as well as shocked. When I went to my social group, Autism Matters, where Z also attended, a lot of the other members were also feeling a mix of emotions. For people with autism, processing emotions can be difficult; one way that I could express mine, and that of the Autism Matters group, was through music. In my mind as I was walking one day and thinking of Z, song verses started to form. I then worked with Karl to get those emotions out to form the tribute song. I wrote the lyrics, but the wonderful Karl Pemberton and Beth Miller sang it.

Because people with autism can struggle to express emotions, this can come out in other ways such as depression or outbursts. It was important to write the tribute song for me, for that reason, but also for Z's memory. Although Z is not with us, I believe he knows through the song how much we love him. My inspiration for music comes from good old ballads, such as those by Celine Dion and Adele, who sing about emotions – I just feel their emotions in their lyrics.

If anyone would like to listen, you can find my song on YouTube, sung by Karl Pemberton and Beth Miller (aka Beth Jackson) and it's called *Missing you*. Hopefully it will be ready to be downloaded on Spotify soon. Feedback I have got from those who have listened to it is that they find it emotive and a great tribute. People have said it has had them crying, especially those who knew Z.

My calico cat

by **AK**

My calico cat's coat is as smooth as silk

Her orange, brown and black colours glisten in the sun

She meows like a lion and her favourite drink is milk

Playfully purring as she hisses for fun

Hearing her calls calms my anxiety and stress

My fear of people subsides whenever she's around

I am able to talk rather than regress

She enables me to not be housebound

I wonder if she is autistic like me

She sits alone but she is my blanket of hope

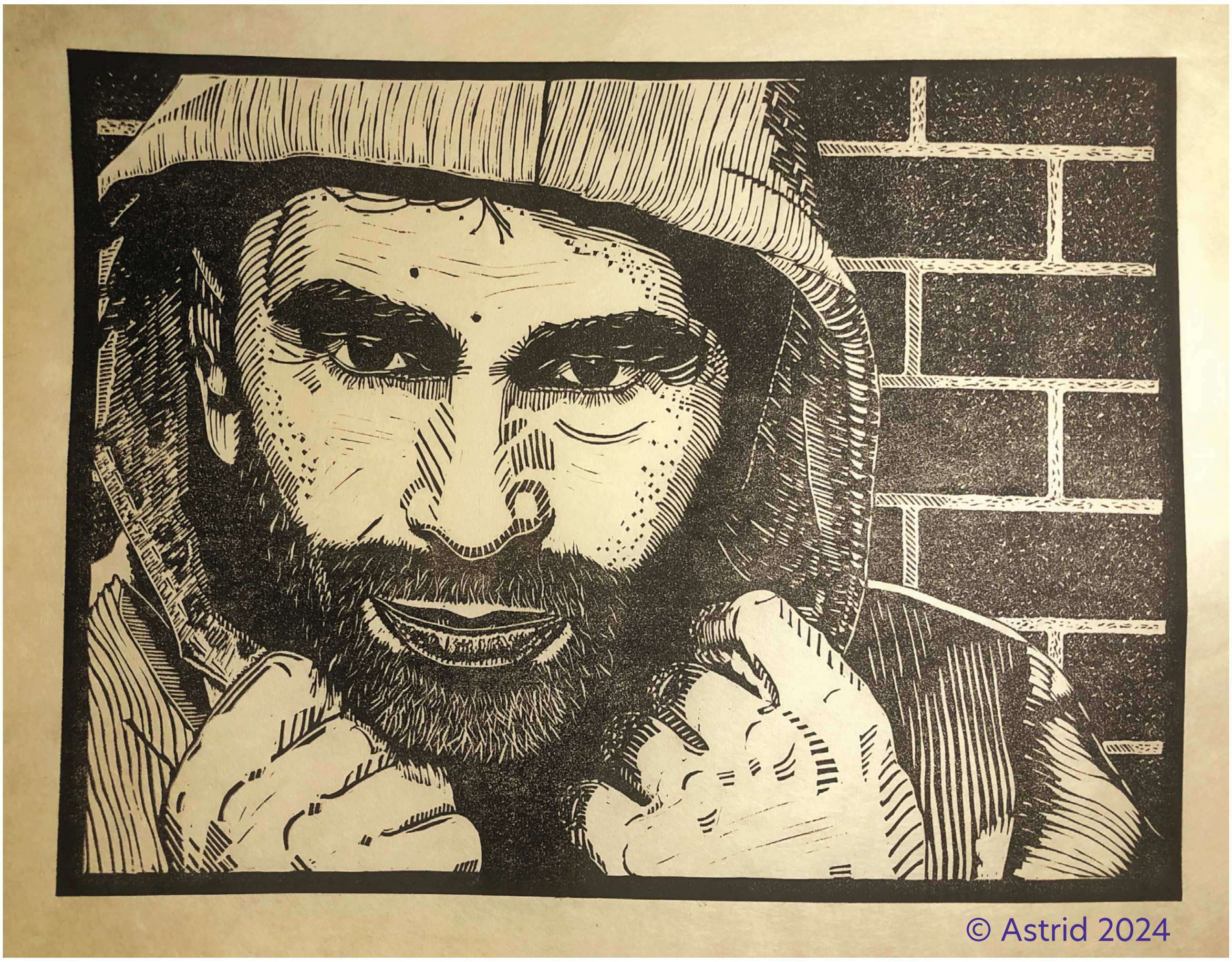
To me she lifts me up and holds my lock and key

Her constantly changing moods are like a kaleidoscope

She is as bright as a rainbow on a cloudy day

My world is full of colour never gloomy or grey

artwork and letters to and about the former Editor



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Dear Goth

I am emailing to say that my son and I are very sorry to hear that you are no longer going to be the editor of *the Spectrum*. We have enjoyed reading the magazine over many years with you as Editor and you have done a very good job with great understanding and skill.

Thank you for everything you have done to create this unique and interesting magazine and we wish you all the very best and good luck for the future

with best wishes

C and A

Dear Spectrum,

I'm very sorry to learn that Goth won't be continuing as Editor after this issue. This is a significant loss, as he has been a stalwart presence throughout, and I certainly wish he could continue.

Best wishes and thanks to him for all he's done to make the magazine the success that it has been.

Sincerely,

Molly

The rules of *the Spectrum*

(contact information for *the Spectrum* is on page 2 and again on page 20)

1) *The Spectrum* is funded by the National Autistic Society and readers' subscriptions. We welcome submissions on any topic from people across the whole of the autism spectrum.

2) *The Spectrum* is quarterly, published in January, April, July and October. If you do not receive a copy when you expect to, please contact the magazine.

3) Pieces that appear in *the Spectrum* are credited using the author's first name only, unless the author requests something different. This is done to protect your privacy.

4) Book reviews are the most popular thing with readers of *the Spectrum*, so please consider submitting one. They can be about any book, not just books about autism. If you do not want your review to appear in other National Autistic Society publicity about that book, please make this clear.

5) When you send in a piece for publication in *the Spectrum*, you need to complete a permissions form. The online permissions form is at

   www.autism.org.uk/spmagpermissions

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

7) The National Autistic Society would like to keep in touch with you about National Autistic Society services, support, events, campaigns and fundraising. If you want to hear from the National Autistic Society, you can opt in to this on the National Autistic Society website. The National Autistic Society will only contact you in the ways you want.

8) If you subscribe to the paper edition and move house, please inform *the Spectrum* and include your old address as well as your new address. Even if you've paid for the Royal Mail forwarding service (or another forwarding service), you still need to inform *the Spectrum* that you have moved address.

9) You do not have to be a member of the National Autistic Society to subscribe to *the Spectrum*.

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The Spectrum
magazine

National
Autistic
Society

Freedoms

What do freedoms mean to me,
It could be the sway of a tree
Or the buzz of a bee,
That's what freedoms mean to me.

55 years of trying to fit in,
Thinking I was in the very wrong skin
Turns out I was fine all along,
I was just singing to a different song.

Fit in with this, fit in with that,
'Why do you always wear a hat?'
'Can't you just be like everyone else?'
No, I just really like being myself.

Now I'm empowered and strong and free,
I can be who I am
I understand Me,
And that's all the freedoms I can see.

By Lavender Girl

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