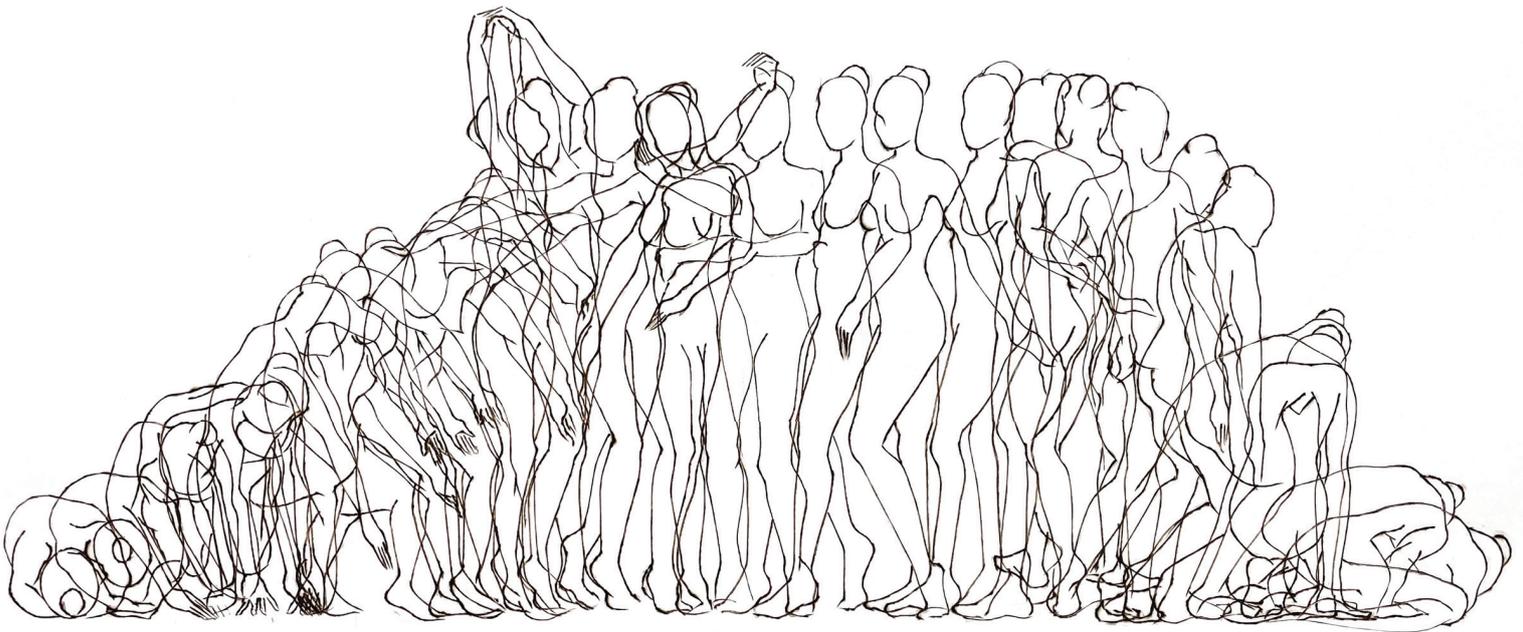


Produced by and for Autistic people

The *Spectrum*

Edition **115** July 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-sixteens). 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 unless the writer asks for their full name to be used.

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 Goth for a subscription form. All contact details are below. Organisations requiring multiple copies: please get in touch.

Editor: the Goth

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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 for this group.

The provisions for editor's and sub-editor's post was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at. This post also provided the possibility of work experience and responsibility and has benefited those who have held the position. These are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds, John Joyce and the current editor, 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 the group of original readers as the most "appropriate name" for the publication. 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.

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

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Tel: **020 7923 5779** (geographical charges apply)

The Spectrum is available in **large print** on A3 sheets (double the size of this page). If you need large print, please let us know using the email address or postal address above.

Contributions for the next issue should reach *the Spectrum* by **16 October 2023**

Welcome to the delayed July edition of *the Spectrum*.

I am sorry for the delay; yet further changes have resulted in surprising alterations to how this magazine is going to be run.

It is with a heavy, heavy heart that I am informing you that this is my last edition of the magazine. This became clear to me in August, and it is due to a redundancy programme that has affected many people at the National Autistic Society's Head Office.

Due to the previous delays that set back the April edition by nine weeks, and which were due to a widespread update to a famous piece of software, it will not be possible for me to work on the October edition before I leave. I had recovered some of the weeks of delay, but the

redundancy process added some weeks of delay.

At the time of writing, I do not know what the plan for the magazine is, nor who will be writing the next editorial. The National Autistic Society is committed to the magazine and to having an Autistic editor.

Eighteen years producing this magazine, with almost fourteen as editor, feels like a life's work, and, for me, it is, as this is the only job I have ever held down, and that is thanks to extensive support from the NAS.

I shall very deeply miss looking forward to the postbag.

Yours,

the Editor

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What is creativity?

by Louise

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When I think of creativity I think of freedom from the constraints of ordinary life. The ability to visualise and imagine fantastical worlds, or assemble plans for crafty projects and gifts. Creativity comes in so many forms that I think people often believe they are not creative, only because what they do is not typically within the “artsy” realm or what society deems as a creative individual. But if you paint your nails and experiment with patterns, experiment with spices and flavours, decorate your room — all of these things are creative — creativity is the ability to create. *Anything.*

About me

Being diagnosed autistic last December, aged 28, and having struggled with lifelong anxiety and OCD, one of the first things I thought was: but autistic people aren’t creative. Now I’m sure we all know this is nonsense and an outdated way of looking at ASD, but at the time it really caused me to suffer a bit of an identity crisis in what was already a fragile time. Having believed I was simply a chronic worrier who could one day overcome all my worldly concerns, but being confronted with this reality that my brain operated differently, I looked inwards at myself. I examined what was important to me. *Creativity and learning.*

Now on the road to recovery from a mental breakdown, I can take a step back and acknowledge that being creative and learning new hobbies played a pivotal role in my recovery . . . and continues to do so. Why this very evening I’ve been altering cookie recipes and printing off cross-stitch patterns whilst planning homemade Christmas gifts. (Okay, sometimes being creative can be exhausting.) Dabbling in a myriad of hobbies and creative outlets has let me compile

an exhaustive list, and when I saw that the theme of this quarter’s *Spectrum* was going to be “art and creativity” I thought it would be helpful to share some of the things I’ve learnt and how you can go about using creativity as a form of therapy.

My six tips:

- 1: Anything can be creative if you want it to be.
- 2: You do not need to buy expensive supplies to be creative. There are some hobbies that will require more investment, but you can start off small. Test the waters.
- 3: You do not have to strive for perfection when learning a new skill or taking up a new hobby.
- 4: Be creative for *yourself*. Do not think “I must get really great at this so I can make a side business and . . .” — disappointment will haunt you. I cannot count how many times I’ve walked this path.
- 5: If you enjoy it, invest time in it.
- 6: Find people who share your creative interests and foster new friendships. Equally share your creativity with friends and family.

Creative activities you could try right now:

Baking (most people have the basic essentials of baking already — eggs, flour, sugar and butter — you can make shortbread biscuits with just three of those ingredients).

Cooking (can be as simple as pasta and sauce — you don’t need to be the next Jamie Oliver).

Keep and decorate a journal (it's amazing how far a basic notebook, pen and coloured pencils will take you — also great for keeping track of your mental health).

Photography (you can use your phone camera or a basic camera for this — you don't need fancy equipment).

Sketching (get a pencil and a piece of paper and off you go!).

Write a short story (you can tell a story in five words you know: the mouse stole the cheese).

Creative activities that require more of an investment in time and money:

- Candle making
- Card making
- Diamond art
- Jewellery making
- Knitting and crocheting
- Lego building
- Lino printing
- Nail art
- Painting
- Play games that let you create (*Animal crossing* is great for designing a town, but there's loads of options)
- Pottery
- Sewing (by machine, by hand, cross stitch, sashiko, quilting, embroidery)
- Soap making
- Woodwork

The way I use creativity as therapy

When I'm anxious or depressed I find picking any of my hobbies up and creating something really lifts my mood. Depending on how I'm feeling I gravitate towards different creative outlets — if I want to take time to think about something then I'll bake or do cross stitch. It's almost meditative.

If I want a distraction then I'll write stories, decorate letters to penfriends, or pick up a complex sewing project. Find what works for you. If you're getting stressed by it then it's not therapeutic. Take a step back. Maybe you will prefer being creative in a group setting.

Benefits of creativity

I've found being creative and getting involved in local groups with fellow creative people, some of whom are also ASD, has really nurtured my ability to use creative outlets as forms of therapy. It's allowed me to network with people, form friendships, and feel less socially isolated. So much so that I'm now taking a break from seeing a professional psychiatrist. (However, I'm not suggesting that creative ventures alone should be used to replace serious medical and professional help when it is required).

Creativity enables you to problem-solve, be innovative, challenge yourself and can be immensely satisfying. On a biological level being creative activates the same part of the brain where we process emotions — I don't think you can worry and be creative at the same time!

I am a firm believer that creativity can really make a difference. I took a break from all things creative when I was studying at university and let me tell you that included some of the unhappiest moments of my life. Never again. Creativity will be my constant companion throughout my life and a tool for sustaining my mental health. I hope you take something away from this and find your own creativity as a form of therapy.

Alien in a meat suit

by **Kendra**

© Kendra 2023

I fell into a deep denial waiting for my results because I knew what they were going to say. And I was angry because I had finally found the thing “wrong” with me, and I couldn’t change it. No amount of therapy, hot yoga, or Brené Brown vulnerability was going to change the way my brain works. You can’t self-help your way out of autism.

I have had days of heavy sadness for my younger self. I was so cruel, critical, and unforgiving to myself for so many years. I can’t help but imagine what my life would be like if I was diagnosed earlier, who I would be. But that version of me will never exist. I will only ever experience this version and all I can do is live my life as my authentic self from this point.

Because of my black-and-white thinking, I believed I had to either present as feminine or masculine, deeply stuck in that binary. The masculine and feminine felt like enemies in my body, fighting for my attention. I thought that if I leaned into one I would have to reject the other completely. I don’t know what my femininity would look like if it were authentic, and I’m still figuring out what masculinity means to me, but my hope is that one day I will see them as partners and not opponents.

I thought my diagnosis would make me feel more separate, more alien, but it’s done the opposite. I feel more human because autism is a human experience. Often individuals don’t see autistic people as dimensional human beings that can experience what they do, only differently. They often see us as a lack of something, a lack of humanness. I don’t believe I am lacking. If anything, I feel like I have more of everything.

I felt like an alien because I was squeezing myself into the neurotypical world that was never

made for me to thrive. But there isn’t a right way to be a person or a right way to exist. All people aren’t one person’s experience of being a person. And autistic people are not one autistic person’s experience of autism. Our differences aren’t threats to humanity; they’re evidence of it.

But I longed for connection, I believed I was defective, so I became something I saw as more acceptable. While this is specific to my journey as an autistic person, I think this is a universal experience. I abandoned myself to become something more acceptable to society. I left myself behind to create false connections with people who would never see me. I had been so dissociated from my body that there were days when I wasn’t sure if I was alive. There are many people walking around half-dead, living for others, and suppressing their true selves, autistic or not. It takes an unbelievable amount of human strength to fight and bring yourself back to life.

I am a human having a human experience on Earth. I thought I was searching for evidence for why I am different, but I had been searching for evidence for how I am the same.

No

by **Paigetheoracle**

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No parade, no trumpets blowing.
No marching band. No way of knowing.
Yes, this was Autistic Pride, our town alert.
The courageous were here, just me and Bert.

Work and employment

by Nick

“What do you do” is a question I am often asked but I have never really understood the concept as I find it bizarre to define someone by their role. As if a minimum-wage job somehow becomes part of me. Like so many on the spectrum, I have struggled both in finding and keeping a job. I first worked as a trainee YTS (Youth Training Scheme) gardener with a council museum service. Although I grew up helping my great-grandfather in his garden and enjoyed it, I found working in the sector much different. I was bullied and mocked for trying to pronounce Latin plant names which I struggled with due to undiagnosed dyslexia. My autism was also undiagnosed at this time, which did not help.

I went on to work in the council offices in the post room which was of course, a big mistake as trying to fit in with an office culture was something I could not adapt to with all the office politics. I left and went litter picking via an agency but as much as I liked being outdoors, I was being paid half the wages per hour compared with the council workers so I was racing to stand still in financial terms.

I decided to go to university to obtain a degree and hopefully be able to find a better job. I was diagnosed with dyslexia during my course and gained a 2.1 degree in 2008 which of course was the year of the crash so most graduate job schemes were suspended, leaving me to battle with the JobCentre. I worked hard at looking for work but was lucky if one company responded to my application. Due to not finding work, I was placed on the Work Programme which meant I spent more time commuting to an office to look for work instead of my local library. I asked about graduate jobs but this was not something they could help with.

I struggled so much to keep up with the ever-changing requirements and being forced to

apply for jobs where I knew I would not meet the job requirements. I am still unsure about what some of the jobs actually were as I was not provided with much detail. I had a brief period of self-employment which was a joke, given my dyscalculia. I was promised support but this was not given so I had to do my best to deal with the task of bookkeeping. I was also paid less than the minimum wage but this was only pointed out by a neighbour, not the JobCentre. I was signed off sick due to the stress and anxiety all this caused.

During this time, I was diagnosed as being on the spectrum so this meant I could seek more support. After a few years’ effort of re-applying for PIP, I managed to claim it and was able to buy equipment to help me. For the first time in my adult life, I can buy such equipment without having to cut back on other essentials.

I am not frightened of hard work and volunteer each week with litter-picking but the mere thought of having to go back into the JobCentre system fills me with dread as I would lose so much and gain little. I do however, look forward to the forthcoming Buckland report on autism employment. The system is not fit for purpose for autistic people with its confusing job-search requirements. Why force people into unsuitable jobs that will leave them struggling to cope? Why not allow us to find a job that suits us and our interests?

The planned changes to ESA are a good idea as being able to keep claiming while working would be a big help. I would struggle to cope with budgeting on a minimum-wage job as in the past. The extra costs involved in commuting would be unaffordable. It is an appalling statistic that 71% of autistic people are unemployed. If only employers were aware of such a talented pool of workers. If given the right support, then we can thrive.

Origami

by **Maria Z**

© Maria Z 2023

photographs © Maria Z 2023

I have never really understood why I have a strong personal passion for origami.

It just happened that in my school's library there was this book that stood out. It didn't have the same format as all the other books, it had a rather square format and it didn't fit in the line with the other books. Also, it was extremely colourful, it was full of numbered steps and it had thick padded covers, something unusual back then (1990 when I was nine years old and I didn't know I was autistic).

That book had changed my life: it helped me understand shape and geometry by motivating me to create those simple, fun and unbelievable patterns. For days I would be fascinated with how a simple plain paper would change by just folding it: boats, jumping frogs, flowers with beautiful petals. Some shapes could be inflated: a fox's head, a human body, all those 3D objects presented to me as a huge opportunity to visualise and reorganise my entire reality.

I kept practising origami as a child for the joy of creating my own toys, but I would have later picked up again this hobby when I really struggled as an adult.

I had many issues forming relationships all my young adult life and I didn't know why because I wasn't aware that relationships would be an area I would have to work hard at. When forming relationships and maintaining relationships became a concern, I tried to find a way to escape the loneliness and I went back to that joyful habit of my childhood by practising origami again.

It gave me strength and joy, something that I had I thought I had lost because I was completely disappointed by the lack of meaningful relationships in my life. Fast forward, I invested a little time in origami, I created a small exhibition of origami art on Facebook in March and coincidence or not, in August I would have met my husband (10 years ago).



an article (continued) and a notice

Origami was there for me in another crucial moment of my life, when, as a new immigrant, coping with all the changes and challenges of a new culture and obviously more complex and intricate social interactions became overwhelming I found myself a new origami project that I thought would only be fun (you can read about this legend of recovery after illness here *One thousand origami cranes* — Wikipedia).

Now, I know that each of those thousand cranes (built from £1 colour memo pad from Poundland) gave me time with myself to process what is happening with me, to adjust to the expectations with the new environment, the new relationships and most importantly while my hands worked the pattern, my brain worked on strategies to build myself a new life, my heart filled with the courage to dream, and I as a person aspired to be brave and to dare.

Where is my origami now? It's there when my daughter gets bored and I build aeroplanes that she throws through the air happily, it's there for a quick Christmas gift if I struggled to plan carefully how many presents I needed to buy.

I can't count the ways origami has supported me: improving my perception of space, planning



strategies, ability to follow instructions, it's been my micro-teaching topic when I completed my award in education and my wedding favours.

Thank you, Origami, for making my life better, beautiful and bountiful.

If sufficient material is sent in, the theme for October will be either **working** or **socialising**, or maybe **both, as for a lot of people working and socialising are interconnected and an important way to gain friends**. Vote with your contributions: the more submissions on a subject sent in (from different people) the more likely that that subject will be the theme. Writing on

any subject is still welcome as are ideas for new themes, small pieces to fill awkward spaces like this, and art. **Please fill in a permissions form** when you submit something, as all published pieces require a completed permissions form. Remember, if you want to see different content in *the Spectrum*, the best way to change it is to send something in!

letter to the Editor

Dear Goth,

I've discovered that being an adult with autism is just as challenging as being a child or teenager with autism; new challenges show up all the time, and in many ways, has made me realise just how equally unfair the adult world can be to those with autism than the children's world. The most striking of these to me, is the lack of support for those with autism in the work environment. I know I'm not alone in this, while the COVID-19 pandemic caused the lowest rate of unemployment in the UK since 1974, for autistic people who have already struggled with the inaccessibility of work, the pandemic has only made this situation more dire. A study released last year showed that only two in ten of autistic adults are in any type of employment.

This needs to change. Us autistic people deserve a chance to work and contribute to society just like everyone else. With the right support, we can be successful in any career we want, but not if our employers don't understand the significance of supporting those with autism in the correct way and being able to make reasonable adjustments that will help us excel in the workplace.

Throughout my time of being open about my autism and how it affects me personally, it appears to me

that it's common for autistic people to be underestimated or to be seen as lesser than neurotypical people. But what many people don't realise is that autistic people are just as capable as neurotypical people — they just think and process information differently, which means that while autistic people shouldn't have their needs undermined, it's also important to acknowledge that this also means autistic people often have unique strengths and abilities that can be extremely valuable in the workplace.

However, many autistic people, like me, have yet to find their place within the working world, through no fault of our own; it's not because we have an unwillingness to work or that we don't have the skills, or that we haven't even tried, but more because those with autism are often being overlooked for job opportunities or a lack of understanding and necessary support and adjustments made within the workplace environment has led to such a staggeringly low employment rate.

While I have been happy to see that employers are now beginning to recognize the value that people with autism can bring to the workplace, I still firmly believe there are certain issues that need to be addressed in order to support people with autism at work. The biggest of which being, while employers

and companies claim to be accepting and willing to take on workers with autism, the autistic employees themselves often find themselves being put into a situation with no adjustments being put in place to meet their needs in order to make them thrive in a work environment. In my personal experience, when I have made it clear that I have autism, it seems like people are unable to know how to react, or how to support me, not once have I been asked what support that I feel would be necessary to help me succeed in the position at hand, and when it's the other way around and I ask what support they can provide, it seems like I've asked a question that there's no answer to, and it becomes clear that no list of options has ever even been put in place to help support people like me. After speaking to other autistic people I know, it's clear that this is not an isolated experience. Any workplace needs a put-in-place plan for how they support autistic workers in order to overcome the challenges that having autism comes with, especially those prevalent in the workplace.

One of these challenges happens even before getting the job, and in a lot of cases, why people with autism find it much harder to get jobs. The current job interview format as we know it is unfair to people with autism. Employees can judge potential employees from their handshake, eye contact,

letter to the Editor (continued) and an article

body language and other unspoken social cues, making this much more difficult for those with autism; I believe that applications for jobs should always ask if there are any adjustments needed to be made not just for the work itself, but for the interview, as this gives autistic people more of a fair chance when attending their interviews.

This can cause even further problems whilst in the job, as communication and interaction is usually the most important thing in any job. For autistic people difficulties in communication can make everyday working a very difficult situation to navigate, with autistic people often finding explanations too vague, and struggling with understanding what work needs to be done. It can also lead to isolation from co-workers due to

miscommunications and difficulty interacting, and in some cases, can even escalate into bullying and abuse.

There are many things that I believe employers can do to support people with autism in the workplace. For example, employers can provide training for managers and co-workers on how to communicate with and support people with autism. Employers can also create a workplace environment that is supportive of people with autism, by making accommodations for their needs. Job accommodations are important for people with autism because they provide a level of support that helps them succeed in the workplace. Since many people with autism have difficulty with social interaction, having a quiet space to work in or breaks from social interaction can be extremely helpful.

Other accommodations that can be helpful for people with autism include flexible work schedules, clear and concise communication, and a focus on routine and structure. The exact support an autistic worker needs would of course come down to what would best suit the autistic person as everyone with autism is different. Working with an autistic person with this one-to-one will always provide the best results.

People with autism often have a lot to offer employers, but they need the right support in place to be successful. Job accommodations are an important part of making that happen. By taking these steps, employers can help create an inclusive workplace environment where people with autism can thrive.

Harvey

Unseen: a face of hidden autism

by **Lottie**

© Lottie 2023

Today I handed my mother a piece of paper. That paper left her quiet and glassy-eyed. That paper detailed that I had been diagnosed with autism and that I had significant characteristics. I wanted my mum to read it so that she could see me, so that she could hear me, because I really can't put my mind into words.

You see, she saw my brother was different to his peers at a young age, but she couldn't see me. From what I understand, my brother's diagnosis was quick and straightforward. Yet, we both hid under beds, flinched at sound and light, organised instead of imagined, struggled

to handle literal comments, had monotone voices and a lack of expressions, and lived and played in our separate worlds with little room for anyone else. So, if we both presented with similar issues, why was my brother diagnosed in his first decade, and me close to my third?

an article (continued)

The Internet will tell me it's gender, and that may be. My mother will say, despite our similarities, "I just didn't think you could be autistic because you didn't behave the same as your brother." Maybe it would be that my demeanour was more passive and inward than my brother's. Or maybe it was because my special interests were stationery, Barbies, and books, which were common for my peer group.

I think there's a blindness for everyone on the spectrum who presents or looks outside of the portrayed version of autism.

I also think there is no clear answer, as autism is still yet seldom understood and seldom seen. I have no doubt my experience is not unique and that I am another voice in a sea of unheard voices.

My mum blames herself for not "seeing me", and yes, she bears a responsibility. However, my dad, teachers, doctors and even occasional dealings with social services also didn't see it. I imagine, and I wish I wasn't exaggerating this, in my lifetime, including teachers, doctors, and mental-health workers, somewhere between 50 to 100 professionals did not so much mutter a concern that I could be on the spectrum.

That is except for one young psychiatrist. I can't remember her name or the majority of her words. But I

remember her calm words that saw me: "Do you think you could be autistic?"

Now, I didn't think I was autistic at the time. Because my brother was diagnosed and I wasn't, because I'd never understood what autism meant and how much of a spectrum it was. And because of one silly test I was made to do at 7, after my brother's diagnosis, I believed I had no chance of being autistic.

It's clear as day today, my mum has reflected and can recall all the signs I had, and she grieves for that, though she's been a trouper and has decided to take courses to get educated to best support me. My partner, my brother, and many friends of mine, all of who are autistic, can see me share the struggles they also have. And with an AQ (Autism quotient) of 44, an EQ (emotional quotient) of 10, an RQ (risk quotient) of 23 (26 adapted) and an ADOS-2 showing significant characteristics; there's no doubt.

Now, if you research those results, you'll see that my scores are high and of someone who is pretty autistic. The thing is though, if you see my face, I'll blend in with the crowd. I dress and look similar to my peers. I have had friends, I have had partners, I've held down jobs, got a degree, survived big life events and navigated the same milestones my peers

have. Autistic people can be capable, intelligent, social, and able, but what you don't always see is the physical pain and mental struggles they feel as they navigate a world that is not tailored to support or accept them.

I didn't always mask, I learnt to. It wasn't a conscious decision really, it was something that came to be from those early years of being punished for meltdowns; for being ignored when stressed; for being rewarded for participating in things that I didn't enjoy. I was pavlov'd into hiding my autism.

Maybe the image society has of autism isn't the image of autism at all. Maybe linear thinking and media portrayals condition us to ignore the abstract art at the foundation of an autism spectrum diagnosis.

My image of autism is the girl who gets married and has a dog. The girl who builds a career and embraces her skills. The girl who travels and learns about the beautiful locations, languages and foods of the world. The girl whose sense of justice makes the world safer. And the girl whose special interest means that she never has to run out of conversation with those who share the same. I am that girl, and I am, most certainly, completely confirmed, autistic. Because you see, autism isn't a line, it's a kaleidoscope.

Slough of despond

fan fiction by **Paigetheoracle**

Sirius Cybernetics Corporation and Marvin the paranoid android are
© Douglas Adams 1978-2009
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Daleks are © Terry Nation 1963
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“Life, don’t talk to me about life. I have been stuck on this God-forsaken, swamp-filled planet for more years than I can remember. Actually it’s thirteen thousand, seven hundred and twenty two years but who really cares? I don’t. Well yes I do but nobody else does, do they? I am just a worthless piece of metal with wiring to them.

“As for God — who is this mythical character anyway? He didn’t create me, the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation^{®™} did and I will get my own back when I finally get off this deadbeat world. People personality? What insane idiot came up with that worthless exercise in mediocrity?

“Oh dear, I am starting to sound like a continuous-loop cassette. Brain as big as a planet and I am reduced to talking to myself. I could be discussing something interesting with an egg timer but no, here I am alone on this rock, floating in space, light years from anywhere. Pathetic isn’t it?”

With squeaks and hisses that befits a rusting hulk of a robot, Marvin made his way through the trees.

“What a surprise! More mud, more water, more mangrove trees; after all the other mud, water and mangrove trees. Stunning beauty and variety wherever I look.

“Oh look, there’s a crashed rocket. I wonder if the crew are all dead? Sadly not. It’s full of Frools climbing all over the control panel and

that stinking piece of metal, thrown out on impact, is still alive. Oh I lied about being alone on this planet. Makes me a more sympathetic character don’t you think. No? You’re right. Well I tried.

“How are you today, you busted up freak?”

“You are an enemy of the Daleks!”

“Isn’t everybody?”

“Exterminate, exterminate!”

“Is that any way to greet your best buddy? Besides that, your ray-gun is busted.”

“Die human, die!”

“I can see that I need to clean your eye stalk again. Is that any better?”

“Die Movellan, die!”

“I’m an android, not a Movellan.”

“You are an enemy of the Daleks!”

“Have you heard of a continuous-loop machine or a Möbius strip? Staggeringly simple — a bit like you really.”

“How dare you talk to me like that?”

“Is this your organic component coming out? I can promise you no decent robot would

a story (continued) and an article

threaten any other robot, even your Movellan friends would tell you that; destroy you with a subatomic mega-death ray, instantly and without a second thought, yes but waste their breath on you — which they don't have any of anyway — no.

“I would offer you a Zubelax twisted mint, if I had one and you could get it into that tin box you call a head but I don't have any; besides, I hate them with a passion and what would a robot want with them in the first place? Can't chew them, swallow them or process them. I could pour acid over them, to imitate a human being eating one but I don't see the point really, do you?”

“Here I am, able to make a million computations in the blink of an eye, which of course I don't have — unless you count the two Psymorphian cameras inside this bucket, on top of this suit of armour — yet here I am saddled with you to talk to. I'd lend you a brain cell but I don't know if you could cope with your capacity to think being doubled.”

“The Grand Battle Fleet will return for me some day —”

“Why? Are you micro-chipped?”

“— then you'll be sorry!”

“Oh no, not another threat. What did I say to you about threats? Do you know how depressingly predictable you are? I doubt it.

“I bet you don't realise that truly intelligent beings have no need to lie, but knowing the truth doesn't make you happy; just look at me. Still it is better than being a belligerent scaredy-cat like your race is — trying to wipe out everything else that eats, sleeps and breathes. Do you really believe that by wiping out everything else in existence, you can hide from the fact that the Daleks are useless failures as beings? No wonder with metal scatterbrains like you in existence that I am depressed, is it?”

Even the Dalek fell silent at this onslaught of logic. Then God introduced a chorus of Gsingalling dancing girls and closed the show for the night.

“Tomorrow is another day Grizelda” drifted through the ether, from another time and another place, to be greeted by a screaming robot, if ever there was such a thing, pushed over the edge by a thousand years of monotony . . .”

Unmasking autistic identity: navigating experience and identity through Internet memes

by **ACromby**

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In the vast realm of the Internet, where cultures collide and communities thrive, some autistic people have found a unique voice through an unexpected medium: Internet memes. These quirky, creative, and often hilarious memes

have become a powerful tool for some autistic individuals to navigate their experiences and negotiate their identities. In this article, we delve into the world of autistic identity through Internet memes, exploring how these humorous

and engaging digital creations help some autistic people embrace their uniqueness and foster understanding. So, fasten your seatbelts and get ready for a wild ride into the captivating realm of autistic memes.

Memes as a language of self-expression

Internet memes have evolved into a universal language that transcends traditional barriers, allowing individuals from diverse backgrounds to connect and communicate. For some autistic people, memes provide an outlet for self-expression, enabling them to share their thoughts, experiences, and unique perspectives with the world. By harnessing the power of humour and creativity, autistic memes offer a way to navigate the complexities of autistic identity in an engaging and relatable manner.

Navigating the spectrum of experience

Autism is a spectrum, encompassing a wide range of experiences and perspectives. Internet memes act as a dynamic tool for some autistic people to navigate and negotiate their own self, experience and identity. Through memes, individuals can share the challenges, triumphs, loves, hates and idiosyncrasies they encounter, allowing others to understand and empathise with their journey. These memes serve as a navigation chart, helping some autistic people explore and embrace the

multidimensionality of their identities.

Embracing neurodiversity

Autistic memes are not just about individual experiences; they also celebrate neurodiversity. By showcasing the diverse talents, strengths, and perspectives within the autistic community, memes promote acceptance and challenge societal norms. They encourage individuals to embrace their differences and reject the notion of a single “normal”. (Whatever that is . . .) Autistic memes amplify the voices of the community, spreading awareness, and fostering a spirit of inclusivity.

Finding connection and support

The Internet has been instrumental in creating a sense of community for some autistic people, and memes play a vital role in this process. Memes create a shared language that brings people together, allowing individuals to find a sense of belonging and connection. Autistic memes act as a bridge, linking individuals across geographical boundaries and fostering support networks. Through shared experiences, humour, and understanding, some autistic people can find validation, encouragement, and

solidarity within these digital communities.

The power of self-negotiation

Internet memes give some autistic people agency in negotiating their identities. By creating and sharing memes, individuals can define and express their authentic selves, pushing back against societal expectations and stereotypes. Through humour and creativity, some autistic people reclaim their narratives, shaping their identities on their own terms. Memes become a vehicle for self-discovery, self-acceptance, and the exploration of the diverse facets of autistic identity.

Internet memes have emerged as a remarkable avenue for some autistic people to navigate their experiences and negotiate their identities. These memes provide a universal language of self-expression, enabling some autistic people to embrace their uniqueness and foster understanding. By celebrating neurodiversity, fostering connection, and empowering self-negotiation, autistic memes create a vibrant digital landscape that challenges norms and promotes acceptance. So, let's continue to explore, create, and share these engaging and enlightening memes, forging a path towards a more inclusive and understanding world for all.

Goldilocks in bare necessities

by **Sammy**

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Monday morning. Goldilocks had set out on her run. Being new to the area, she thought it would help her to get to know people, something she wasn't really good at, liking her own company. So she had decided to train for School's Summer sports events: their 10k would bring things together. The hardest thing about competitive running, it was so noisy, with lots of coughing and grunts and dodging the banana skins. "Just play some tunes, girl." She jogged past the Beech pub, all the tables upturned and dripping, the cigarette ends being brushed by a man into the road, and headed for the Sydney Smith grid. "Smelly. They should try those E-cigarettes."

Along to the village green, admiring the huge oak tree, then crossing the road, she noticed the telegraph pole, labelled: Danger of death 48421.

Did they all have numbers? She should find out. She arrived at one of the many entrances which took you into the waterpark.

"Right, just take it steady, once around the lake and home for *Woman's Hour* and breakfast." She strode out

along the gravel path. She liked to watch her feet, especially wearing her new trainers, shiny blue Reeboks. They were going to help her run faster.

She'd got so involved with following the wooden kerning, eighteen of her feet to every length, that she hadn't looked up for a while. She stopped, and looked around. No, this didn't feel familiar. On Saturday, her mum and she had walked the path with Fred, the wire-haired terrier from Mrs Cooke's, their new neighbour. Goldilocks liked the dog. "The river should be on my left, now there is no river, just rose bushes and small trees. How did this happen? Best retrace my steps." Goldilocks turned and ran back, but this seemed to complicate the matter.

"B*gger! I'm lost. Don't panic, give Mum a text, then think."

GOING 2B LATE. LOST. "No signal. It lit up like a Christmas tree last time, now I'm surrounded with the bloody things."

Putting the phone safe, Goldilocks started to jog, deciding it would become clearer soon; can't get lost, just mislaid herself.

Nothing seemed familiar.

Then a cottage appeared. A picture-postcard dwelling, the quintessential two-up, two-down, porched doorway, shiny slate roof, two-pot chimney and white picket fence.

"Chocolate box . . . Brill, they'll put me right." Goldilocks tried sending the message again, waving the phone around as she walked up to the little gate and entered the garden. "Nothing." Inspecting her feet crunching on the path, which was made up of white bits, she bent down and picked up a handful for a closer look: "scallop shells," throwing it quickly back down, then brushing her hands on her shorts.

A sign read: NO POACHERS, PELTERS OR TRAPPERS.

"Well I'm none of those. Not sure about pelter."

Goldilocks took the door-knocker in her hand. "What? A brass bear's paw!" Rapping it three times, she waited. Nothing. She decided to call out.

"Hello, anyone home?" Looking around. "Nice

garden, never seen a bear-hand birdbath.” Which a blackbird had decided to visit.

On giving the oak door a heavier knock, a thump, it swung open.

“Should I go in? Can’t stay outside, need to get home.”

Goldilocks went inside and stood in the hallway. Taking off her Oakley shades, she left them hanging around her neck. And her eyes quickly adjusted.

A bear’s hind leg held an arrangement of walking sticks, carved with fish heads, a very posh shooting stick and a huge golfing broly. “I drank Canada Dry” slogan. Above it, photographs of snowy wilderness landscapes.

“Bit different,” she thought.

She opened a door and went into the kitchen. “Anyone around?”

“Oh, nice place.” A lovely blue Aga was warming the place, a matching Le-Creuset kettle sitting on the simmer ring.

“Why did they leave in such a hurry? Everything’s set for breakfast.” Porridge boxes were lined up on the table. “MornFlake, Ready Brek and Scots. “Good graphics,” said Goldilocks, scrutinising the illustration and type, then noticing the honey, golden syrup and salt. “Looks gorgeous. Should I? I could try a little.

Naughty . . . breakfast — best meal of the day!” Goldilocks noticed a DAB radio, picked it up and switched it on. It said: “Hello, and welcome to *Woman’s Hour*, coming today from Manchester with me, Jenni Murray . . .”

“Great! Radio-four fans.”

Goldilocks sat herself down in the big wooden armchair, but she slid around, needed a cushion, something to prop her up. “No, that’s not for me.” Moving to the second chair, which was not so different, she couldn’t get close enough to the table, so she moved on, “Third time lucky.” Sitting down, “Nice fit.”

Maybe too nice, she was in but she couldn’t get out. “Does my bum look big in this?” she laughed, wagging the chair about. “Stuck, this is so daft.” Banging it back on the floor, which was heavy slate, it suddenly fell apart and Goldilocks landed on the floor herself. Goldilocks was now looking at a stool and decided to eat standing.

Trying the first bowl, digging her spoon in deep. “Too hot.” She waved her hand in front of her mouth, “Let it cool, try the others,” taking the next bowl. “No, that’s a little bland,” pulling a face and putting it back down on the table and reaching for the last bowl. “This is more like it, sweet and sour,” she said licking the spoon and dipping it again in the syrup jar.

“And now, time for our serial, *A small-town murder* with Meera Syal as Family Liaison Officer Jackie, who must today talk to the cottage owner, where the murder took place . . .”

“I’m too full of porridge. I’ll catch Jackie later, it’s more suitable for the evening and I should have a nosey around; I might find a map of the area, then make tracks.”

Goldilocks made her way upstairs, admiring the paw-print wallpaper.

“Got it bad, I thought I was obsessive.” Goldilocks had started to collect stuff she found: key-rings, trolley tokens, badges . . . kept it all in a Harrods bag she’d been given by her aunty, no present, just the bag, not fair.

“Tight as a duck’s arse,” her dad had said of his big sister.

At the top of the stairs was the master bedroom. A beam of light was filtering in through the curtains. The stripy orange duvet was all aglow. Goldilocks threw herself onto the bed: “Ow! Wow! Where’s the bounce?” Quickly getting off.

“Try the three-quarter. Nice yellow cover, matching pillowcases,” pushing her hands into the quilt like a cat and climbing on top.

“Well, looks fantastic, but hard as nails, I ain’t no

a story (continued)

princess, but this bed's made of dried peas. Rubbish."

She got up and wandered around the room. A collection of bedtime reading: *Paddington goes back to Peru*; *Winnie and Tigger play Pooh sticks*; *Yogi and Booboo leave Yellowstone*; *Jungle Book* and Chekhov's short stories? A group of teddies sat one shelf down, dressed as Canadian Mounties.

"Someone's sure got it bad." Then, flicking back a jazzy red curtain, an alcove with: "Wow! A little put-me-up, now this looks inviting, all cosy." Goldilocks got straight in and the bed was so comfortable, she just went right to sleep.

Downstairs, the owners had returned.

"We've had guests."

"What do you mean?"

"The chair, it's broken."

"I told you to lock the door."

"I'm sorry. Thought we were only going to be five minutes or so."

"Eaten all the porridge, too. My chair, Dad."

"More a milking stool now."

"I'll put the bowls in the sink."

"Fingerprints! Ma, shouldn't we call the police? A

burglary should be recorded, it's our home."

"Let's just check upstairs first, see if anything's missing."

They went up, very quietly.

"Everything seemed okay until: 'Well, look at that, a sleeping beauty. Tried all the beds, liked yours the best. Wakey, wakey, sleepyhead!'"

"What? This is a dream, right?" Goldilocks stretched, closed her eyes, then reopened them in amazement. "No kid, three bears!"

Jumping out and standing up quickly, she said: "Look, guys, it's not what you think, I don't live here . . ."

"No, we do."

"You talk. I got lost, couldn't find my way home, just don't eat me . . ."

Goldilocks fumbled in a pocket for her phone, and a plastic card flew into the air, landing at the smallest bear's feet.

The bear picked it up and passed it to the big bear.

"Don't panic," he said taking off his head! She gulped.

"Alert card," he read.

Goldilocks felt she was going to faint, and also a little embarrassed.

"Sit down, youngster. We're just in costume, training for the Summer sports. We are the Bare family."

"The Summer sports? That's how I got so lost, I thought I'd enter the 10k."

"Let's go and put the kettle on," said the lady bear, taking Goldilocks' hand and leading her downstairs.

"Goldilocks smiled. 'Sorry about the chair.'"

"Oh no worries. A bit of Superglue would do the trick. I've phoned your ma, she's on her way."

"What's Autism?" Asked the small bear/boy.

"I'm not sure really, I seem to live in my own world, and have a rainy head. Everyone talks about me, but no one talks to me."

"That can't be easy. Well, if we're at the same school, it can't be that bad. We can train together if you'd like that?"

"Thanks. That would be great. Then I won't get lost." She paused, before asking shyly, "Can I just ask, I hope you don't mind, why you guys are so deep in character . . . this bear thing that you do . . . ?"

He leaned forward and said confidentially, "The thing is, Goldilocks, my family are all a wee bit odd."

stuff you might like to know about *the Spectrum*

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.
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Quetzalcoatl

Precious serpent
Serpent of precious feathers
Wisest of men
It makes too much sense, when you think of it
Everywhere you go, you see precious serpents
Digging their fangs into those less precious
They are vile, but they wear precious feathers
They live in nice houses and exchange pleasantries with the wisest of men
Many serpents look wonderful at first
The paintings are beautiful and statues are strong
But a snake pit is a snake pit
No matter how many precious feathers it has
Many fear serpents, and for good reason
But few say anything, few act
Because you are just a man and they are precious serpents
That's the greatest lie a serpent ever told
The idea that a man in a suit, surrounded by placards of empty campaign promises
The idea that this serpent is in any way precious
But it's a lie many believe
A wrong, immoral lie
But it's undeniably clever, like a serpent should be
Maybe that's why they are
The wisest of men
The heads of state
The precious serpents

by **Jack**
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