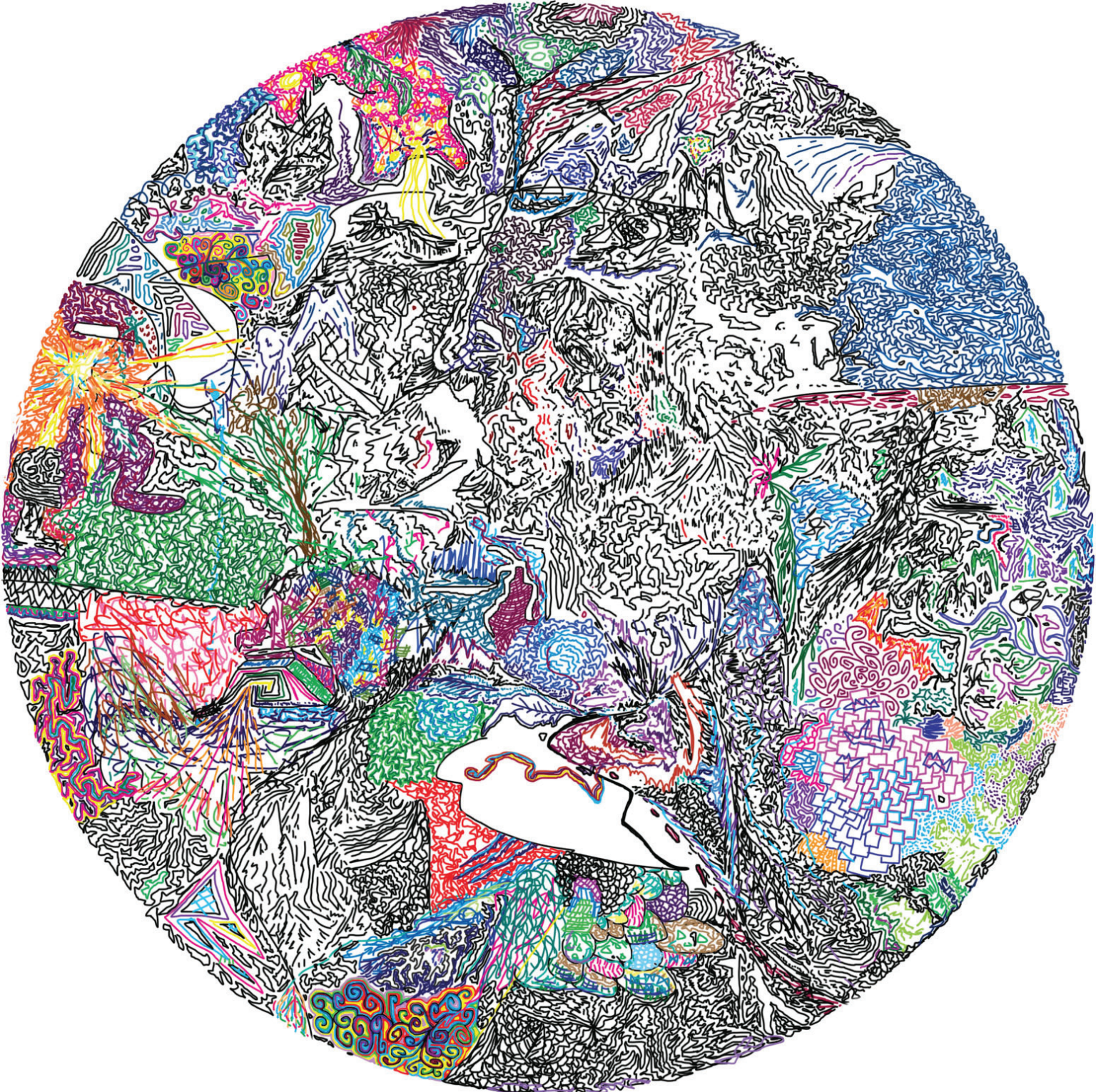


# AUTISM'S OWN

Volume 1 - 2013





## AUTISM'S OWN

*About Autism by Persons with Autism*

### Volume 1 - 2013

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Autism's Own is a University of Victoria peer-reviewed journal about autism culture authored and edited completely by persons on the autism spectrum. It offers an intimate first-hand depiction of the subjective experiences and thoughts of autistic persons. Autism's Own was founded in 2012 by Joseph Z. Sheppard, a UVic student and author with autism as a compilation of works by members of "Authors with Autism," a UVic peer-support group for students and lifelong learners with autism. Professor, Dr. James Tanaka became a co-founder by suggesting it become a true academic peer-review journal. This vision was later actualized under the guidance of Dr. Catherine Mateer, A-VP Academic of UVic. We are now pleased to warmly present readers with Autism's Own.

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Iris Gray runs an Asperger Meetup group in Victoria, British Columbia. Her group meets monthly to share dinner and talk about their experiences having Asperger's Syndrome. Iris Gray is also an editor and writer, as well as an advocate for autistics. She has a very special interest in cats.



“The reason I say I am autistic rather than a person with autism, is that to me, autism is my life.”

# “I am autistic.”

by Iris Gray

I am autistic. I do not call myself a person with autism. I say that I am a person with Asperger's Syndrome, because most non-Aspies do not know what the word "Aspie" means. Therefore, I can't usually say, "I'm an Aspie," though it would be a heck of a lot quicker. It's shorter than "Aspergian," which is the writer John Elder Robison's preferred term.

I prefer "autistic" to "a person with autism." I sometimes get irritated when other people insist on calling me "a person with autism" because they assume, without asking an actual autistic person, that that is what all autistic people prefer to be called. I get annoyed when people get annoyed with me for calling myself autistic. Calling myself "a person with autism" isn't going to change the fact that I am autistic, and no one else has the right to tell me what to call myself.

I don't think I ever made a conscious choice to refer to myself this way. I just happened to hear myself saying one day, "I have autism," and I realized it just didn't sound or feel right to me. It seemed quite unnatural.

I call myself a woman, not a person with femaleness. I call myself Canadian, not a person with Canadian-ness. I call myself bisexual, not a person with bisexuality. So why do people have so many problems with my saying "I am autistic"? I am autistic. I do not have autism. To me, autism isn't something I have; it's something I am.

I do not think of autism as a disease. A lot of people use person-first language to classify autism as a disease; these are generally the same people who try to convince others that autism is like cancer, even though autism and cancer are not even remotely the same. I was told that if I would just use person-first language to describe autism, then I would understand the comparison. Sorry, I still don't see the similarities between autism and cancer.

Autism is a set of neurological differences. I see it in its milder or higher-functioning forms as sort of like being left-handed, and in its more severe or lower-functioning forms as being like a person being born with a body part that is missing or that doesn't work properly. Neither of those is a disease nor is autism a disease.

Most of the time I will say, "I am autistic." When I'm on Twitter or another Internet site that has a word or character limit for posts, I will quite often say "autie" or "Aspie" just to use as few characters as possible. When I'm writing a blog post, I am probably more likely to say "autistic people." I still don't say "persons with autism." It just doesn't feel natural to me.

The reason I say I am autistic rather than a person with autism, is that to me, autism is my life. It is who I am.

It is part of everything I do and everything I am. It is the way my brain works. It is my personality. It affects pretty much everything. I cannot find a "me" separate from autism, and I'm okay with that. I can't find a place where I end and autism begins, nor can I find a place where autism ends and I begin. Autism and I are all bound up together in one identity.

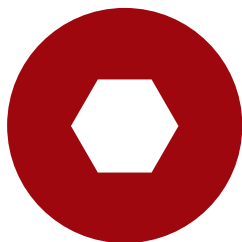
I do believe that most people who use "person-with" language are trying to be considerate and respectful. They believe they are simply seeing the person, not the disability, disease, condition, etc. They think that most people prefer it that way. After all, haven't plenty of people insisted that "I am a person, not a disability"? But to me, autism is "me." I am autistic. There is no "me" without autism.

No one has the right to tell me what to call myself, and I choose to call myself autistic. That is what I am, but more importantly, to me that is who I am. You can't change that by changing the words or the order in which you say them. No matter how you choose to refer to me — as autistic, an autistic person, or a person with autism—that will not change the fact that I am autistic.



# Autism Community

by Iris Gray



I run an autism group in my community. It's called the Asperger Meetup Group. It is mainly a social group, though there is an aspect of peer support to it as well. Everyone is welcome, regardless of whether or not they have an official diagnosis of autism or Asperger's Syndrome. The group has no agenda, no formal structure, no check-ins, or preset topics of discussion.

For me, running the group is rewarding. I really like it when people come to the group for the first time and I can see their gradual awareness that "everyone here is like me."

One group member ordered a glass of wine at the first meeting she attended. It was her way of coping with social situations that were normally anxiety-inducing for her. At the end of the night, she realized that she'd barely touched her wine. The glass was still almost full. She didn't need the wine to help her adjust to this social situation. She didn't have to drink to fit in.

At a recent meeting, someone said to me that this group was the only place where he could talk about his special interests and have people listen to him talk about them without rolling their eyes and walking away.

Some people have objected to the idea of an autism community. They believe having our own autism community means segregation, cutting ourselves off from the world. This was voiced to me by a parent of a child with an autism spectrum disorder. This parent wants their child to be "just like everyone else." However, the fact is someone who has Asperger's, or another autism spectrum disorder, is not like everyone else. As a person with Asperger's, I can't be, even if I wanted to be. That is why having an autism community is important.

In an autism community I am more like everyone else than I am elsewhere. It is true that when you've met one autistic person, you've met one autistic person; we're by no means identical to each other. But we have plenty of things in common, whether it's a tendency to make social faux pas, a perseveration over an obscure topic, a clumsiness that makes us trip over our own two feet, or a sensitivity to sound that causes even the smallest sound to be magnified to an unbearable level.

When a person attends a meeting of the Asperger Meetup Group, he or she will be welcomed and not judged. When I've spent the day dealing with people who do not have Asperger's, it's a relief to be among my peers. I don't have to explain why I just tripped over that chair getting to my seat. It doesn't matter to them that I just dropped spaghetti sauce on my shirt. No one cares if my clothes are covered in cat hair.

Aspies need to be around other Aspies. It's tiring to be around people who don't have, or don't understand, Asperger's Syndrome. As well-meaning as they might be, they can never truly understand what it means to be on the autism spectrum. They don't know what it's like to live in my world; so instead, they try to make me live in their world. That world is not a comfortable place for me to live in. It's too loud. It's too bright. The clothes aren't comfortable. People don't always say what they mean, and I often get the impression that they expect me to read their minds. They assume I understand them when I don't.

The members of the Asperger Meetup Group learn from each other. A common discussion topic when we are together is: "Does anyone else...?" Sure enough, the person asking that question will find that yes, other people do that thing, or feel that way, or have that particular problem. Sometimes when one Aspie has a problem in a certain area, he or she can learn coping strategies from others who have had trouble with the same thing. Who better to help an Aspie with a problem than another Aspie who has had the same problem?

I am by no means an autistic separatist. I don't think people with Asperger's should associate only with others who are like us. But for me, spending time with others who are like me is easier than spending time with those who are not like me. It's like having a tribe, a clan, or a group that I belong to. I can identify with others in my group. It's comfortable. I need that sometimes. It helps to know that I'm not alone.

I think the Internet has helped to form an autistic community. It's a great way to meet others on the spectrum, especially for people who might live in isolated areas, those with mobility problems that make it difficult to go out, or those who are simply too shy or socially anxious to attend an autism/Asperger meet in person.

I hope that by running the Asperger Meetup Group I have helped to contribute to fostering autism community here in Victoria.

-- Iris Gray

"Aspies need to be around other Aspies. It's tiring to be around people who don't have, or don't understand, Asperger's Syndrome. As well-meaning as they might be, they can never truly understand what it means to be on the autism spectrum."

# Healing Rose

By Rose Guedes

My name is Rose Guedes, otherwise known as “Rosie.” I am a writer, poet, Autism Self-Advocate, music artist and mom of two. I was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome at 26, just last year. I also deal with having autoimmune health issues in the form of Fibromyalgia and Arthritis. This is, in truth, a challenge. Currently, I have a blog, poetry blog and Youtube channel called A Girl Outside The Box. I started all of this with only the desire to share my story and my experiences regarding autism and the diagnosis, health, and social justice; in hopes that others would relate. Luckily, that seems to be actually happening and I’m both thrilled and taken aback. Being that I was diagnosed late and misunderstood for a long time, I’m not used to being so appreciated. It’s a bit surreal, but great.

I both did, and didn’t expect to get the kinds of responses I’m getting. It’s really cool. In the past few years since coming to the realization that I’m on the autism spectrum, I have learned so much and only continue to learn. I’ll admit, some of it’s been really intense; to look back on my life, and see how my experiences were affected by my autism, which I didn’t realize at those times. One of the main reasons it never occurred to me that how I was behaving and reacting in situations was due to having Asperger’s, is the fact that I’m a girl. I’ve taken a special interest in how females on the spectrum react and present. This is a major issue that I’ve blogged about often, because females tend to get missed due to the lack of awareness and the fact that femininity seems to mask the diagnostic criteria; on the outside at least. The female brain seems to handle autism a bit differently, even though there are core similarities that can be identified by a very knowledgeable clinician who truly understands autism. The traits of females appear more subtly, and females often don’t act out in school as much as the boys do. So they don’t seem to get assessed in school, nearly as often. In saying that, the females become very emotionally affected inside, and this may begin to show as they get older--in ways that get badly misunderstood. Because of the verbal skills, they may be misdiagnosed as just having ADD, when they actually are autistic. This seems all too common; that many people on the autism spectrum are labeled with ADD only, even though it’s just a symptom of the autism. I actually believe that ADD is on the continuum in some way, as well.

Rudy Simone, the author of Aspergirls, says it’s more about the females being “perceived” differently. This could be true as well. Growing up I always felt the pressure to be socially acceptable and appropriate. I knew I was different on some level, by the time I was about 6. For this reason my diverse abilities were masked by my efforts to mimic what was “socially appropriate.” I always found my own ways to try to understand things I didn’t fully understand or process, often creating pictures in my mind, with actions; like a film-strip. Also, one of my major strengths, or “savants” is my working memory... so when I observed people in real life, television, or movies I was instantly able to memorize the dialogue. I ended up with a massive script in my mind, and knowing how to apply it in exactly the correct context; even though I may not have fully understood it. I had very high vocabulary. I still have this and

the drawback is that even though it's a honed skill, it doesn't come naturally to me, it's like a big, powerful and fast running word machine in my head that I have to turn on. I myself am the fuel for this machine...and it runs a lot slower when people talk to me and I have to understand them. I then need to bring out my other machine, the "filmstrip" one. I still can't be exact in social situations, especially if the rules change abruptly, because I'm not neurotypical. I have a different way of understanding the meaning of words. I respond to them by executing my "performance" which at least today is actually me being myself, and not just what I'm picking up from others. But I still have to "turn on the machines" in my head. Because ultimately, it doesn't come naturally to me; it takes work to use this skill and therefore it can exhaust me or over stimulate me. I'm so glad I understand all this now.

There were many things that I did as a kid (and still do for that matter) that my brain just needed to do; but I hid them.

After a long conversation with someone, I would have to go for a brisk walk down a quiet road, or pace privately and "script" or repeat parts of the previous conversation, in order to process it. I also stimmed by retreating into my room and rocking or bouncing on my bed. Sometimes if I had had a really hard day, I actually almost gave myself whiplash. I also rubbed my hands together often, but this is something I didn't notice until recently. My mother told me I've always done it. I had to retreat and go stim, involuntarily. I was so ashamed and secretive about it...that the idea of that relating to autism wasn't obvious to me at the time. I had a very close connection with an autistic girl at school. The teachers always asked me to bring her outside during recess because she was much calmer around me than her EAs'. I could understand her through her echolalia; and I knew she heard everything I said to her.

One time she even got angry and had a meltdown because I was being bullied. She kept flailing her arms and yelling "shut up ... now ... you shut up!!" The EA's had to come over and intervene. I would watch her flap and have this strange urge to do that too, but could not allow myself. When I was nervous at school, I would go onto the top field in a secret area, and bite the skin on my hands. At one point briefly; I had asked myself the question; is there such a thing as being "a little bit autistic" and could I be that way myself? I was 10 at this time. I came across info on something called "Asperger's Syndrome" and I was fascinated, so I read about it. It was so ironic because I didn't have the insight or maturity at the time, to see it; especially past the male traits listed in the information I was reading. So I pretty much forgot about it.

There are still, and were many times--where my different-ness showed through. In fact it always does at least slightly, but not everyone notices it or they, at least, don't attribute it to autism. As a kid, the teachers passed me off as just quirky. Because of my high vocabulary and my ability to mimic maturity, the teachers had higher expectations of me than I could meet. When

"There are still, and were many times--where my different-ness showed through. In fact it always does at least slightly, but not everyone notices it or they, at least, don't attribute it to autism."

I struggled with organization, short term memory, some aspects of math, messy writing, sports, lack of ability to follow directions or interpret what people meant, sensory issues and other processing issues; the teachers assumed that I was merely lazy and had an attitude problem. Even though I was a good speller and had a high vocabulary, I had weak fine motor and writing by hand was (and still is) difficult for me. I actually have a permanent callous on my left hand, from struggling to finish my homework every night. I'd actually do my homework in bed--and many times I wasn't able to finish it. I really struggled with athletics as I had poor gross motor development. I dreaded PE--in fact it was my worst nightmare. It was a huge source of my deficits becoming apparent because it was obvious that I was clumsy and awkward; so I found it humiliating. I could barely catch a ball, and ran with an awkward gate at which time I was laughed at. I was never able to spontaneously get into sports. I cringed at the ball flying in my direction, and stayed on the sidelines as much as I could. Eventually, I got a note omitting me from PE altogether, from my mother and from a doctor who claimed I had flat feet and an "inverted hip" so I could be injured during sports. I then had to log my physical activity in a book, to make up for it. Unfortunately, I was also bullied by the kids in school--they would tell jokes and then laugh at me because I didn't understand them. I made many attempts to try and relate with them by sharing my special interests in detail (because I didn't know how else to relate) and they would just respond with "OOook." And, They would snicker.

I was very demeaned and between the kids and the teachers, I ended up feeling like an idiot and a failure; by the time I was about ten. Now, I can look back and give that little girl peace because I am blessed with the rightful diagnosis in which I was lucky to come to, and fought so hard for. I survived to know the truth.

My adolescence was very tough. I initially did well in high school, and got on the honor roll as well as invited into English Honors, even though I had to make a lot of effort to do that. Out of desperation to not be bullied again, I had become very good at "faking normal" in a way that made me seem charming and just a little slightly eccentric. I was very giggly and bubbly; I followed the latest fashions but added extra colour, and I even made fun of myself to win points. I became well liked and had a large group of superficial friends ... but I couldn't be my true self. I was trying to control everything too much, and even developed some issues with food. I secretly felt very suppressed, even though I always had a coy smile on my face and was dressed "funky." I ended up leaving high school due to feeling completely overloaded. I ended up feeling like it took way too much energy to keep up with 'my act' as well as with schoolwork. Even though I had made my inner troubles known to the EAs in the resource room, nobody tried to stop me from leaving, or suggested that something wasn't quite right. I find that a bit absurd. I withdrew and turned from happy to depressive, and "emo goth." I tried to do homeschool but didn't have the attention span. Unfortunately I met with some "bad influences" that hurt me. I was not able to pick up on it because I was very naive.

I feel throughout most of my young life, I was autistic enough that it could have been easily noticed if I had crossed paths with someone who really understood autism and was not gender biased. But I did not cross paths with that person, and instead I went through many life experiences where I ended up hurt. I struggled so hard to keep up, working in fast food and retail jobs to make money to survive, but often ended up struggling with many of the tasks at hand, "feeling like a failure" and wondering what was wrong with me. There were also times where I did well and "won the game." It certainly was like a game, either socially or situation wise. I was often at the mercy of how predictable that situation was. If I was new at the type of situation or "social game" I fell through in the way that I would say or do something that

seemed awkward or anxious to someone else, and ended up making a bad impression. Many people who had no understanding of what was going on for me were judgmental, and that was traumatic. In turn I was really hard on myself and would promise myself to "do better next time." This only caused me to become an extreme perfectionist, and have unreasonable expectations for myself. In my teens and up until I knew, I had developed a lot of poor coping mechanisms that were not only not helpful, but harmful to me, for my sensory and other neurological challenges. I did not know what else to do or where it was coming from other than the fact that anything I wasn't used to made me anxious. I avoided a lot in my life, including succeeding and trying new things because it would involve change and I knew that I would run into problems. I felt like I was merely walking around in circles, surviving life as I was used to living it, and not growing very much. Unfortunately, since life and income were already a struggle--I didn't feel very hopeful or positive. I felt very negative about myself, and my ability to get anywhere. I did, and still do, have intense dreams within my special interests, such as with writing and music, but I couldn't ever get very far with them and this disheartened me over and over again. I didn't have the insight as to why. A few times, when I reacted emotionally to any of this, I was judged subjectively, and slapped with psychiatric labeling that I strongly felt didn't fit me and was not true, although I didn't know why. I couldn't understand why I seemed to find being a mother more challenging than other mothers did, although I love my kids deeply and stuck it through for that reason. My husband and I often supported each other in parenting and I'm not sure if I could have done it on my own. I found the baby stage particularly difficult because of the noise and the unpredictability. I found escapes, some of them not so great such as using medication to quell my anxieties, and some of them better like going to the gym. I also escaped into part time jobs, especially fashion retail, although there were many stressors there too. Although I was good at doing the visual merchandising and selling clothes due to an ability to see and suggest what would look good on someone, I struggled hard with multi tasking and this would irritate my managers. Often because I did have strengths in certain areas, they would keep me on part time and assign me to those areas, keeping in mind that I was not reliable to run the floor by myself. I never did work a full time job; I don't think I could have handled it.

Once again, like I had as a kid, I simply assumed that I just "couldn't do things as well as other people" which fuelled low self esteem and had me finding other ways to overcompensate for that; such as spending a ridiculous amount of time "looking perfect" for work. To be honest, at the time that I discovered the idea of my being on the spectrum, my coping and covering up was beginning to run dry and I was at the point of a near breakdown. I was actually starting to get sick with Fibromyalgia and felt that I was at the end of my rope regarding working in any kind of job; I just couldn't take the internal stress anymore. In fact, I had had several meltdowns throughout the years, but covered them up, medicated them and hid myself from everyone including my kids.

It wasn't until my son was diagnosed with autism, that the truth started to get uncovered. Even as a baby, I knew my son was different. People thought I was crazy when I said, "I think he's autistic" when he was just a baby. I had, and still have, an animalistic connection with my son. I knew how to communicate with him, as a baby, I used a lot of tone and particular cadence in my voice. I could tell he understood that, even as a baby. When he started to have challenging behaviours, speech delay and outbursts ... I fought for a referral to the children's hospital. It was rough and it took far too long for him to get in ... but when he was seen the result was as I'd thought; autism. He did start getting the help he needed at the time he needed it. I feel that he has pretty strong communication skills, even though he has a lot of challenges. This kid is extremely bright. I definitely think that my ability to communicate with him in a mom/son on the spectrum connection, helped him, and contin

ues to help him, a lot.

Even when I first started feeling that my son had autism, I didn't initially think about myself; I thought about my husband. My husband struggles to communicate and with expression, he has a flat affect ... so he more obviously fits the profile of what I then understood to be Asperger Syndrome. At the point of first looking at it, my own struggles had become buried by my coping mechanisms and the ways in which I was reacting, which I now know isn't uncommon for undiagnosed adults. I find it funny that when I first looked up info on Asperger's, it was for my husband. I didn't expect, at that point, to discover newer and more up to date, detailed info that actually described me. When I had my husband read it on the internet, he turned to me and said "yeah, some of this sounds like me ... but a lot of this sounds like you too, you know." I was a bit stunned, and read it again. After reading it I was more stunned to find out that he was right ... and I wanted to know more. I needed to know what Asperger's was like specifically in a female.

I suddenly thought about how I'm very much like my husband's mother, my mother in law whom I'm very close to and relate with. I always wondered how we could be so similar and have some sort of special connection. She had had some significant struggles of her own when she was younger, of course nothing was known about AS in her time or in Brazil. For this reason, she had turned to things like Buddhist meditation and having certain boundaries, as well as just maturing, in order to deal with what she had thought was depression, mood disorder and panic. She would always joke to me "I'm really weird ... I'm crazy you know; I talk to myself!" Something clicked.

All of a sudden thinking of her gave me a revelation. I decided to search "traits of Asperger's in females" and what came up was author Rudy Simone's chart. I read this chart, and almost fell off my chair. It completely described me, almost every word. So the process began. Soon after that my son was diagnosed, and I began babbling to many of his clinicians and therapists about how I thought I myself was on the spectrum. I would describe my thought processes, and things that I did in the past. One of them helped me understand that I have sensory issues; she said she could see and recognize them. She told me what they were, and how they bothered me and affected my health; she even thought that how internalizing them for so long could have possibly contributed to developing health issues. It was surreal to become aware of the sensory issues that I had been stuffing down for so long. At first, I didn't know what to do to protect myself from them; but today I take any measure I need to when I can, and don't apologize for it. I became very interested in what Rudy Simone was saying about Asperger's and Females, so I ordered her book. I'm not normally someone who reads or gets through books in a typical way, because I find all the words over stimulating and prefer to just skim over them in order to grab up the why/what/when/where. I prefer info to novels. But I was so mesmerized by this book that I actually read it word for word, from start till finish. It helped me massively and broke everything wide open for me. After reading this book there was no doubt in my mind that I am on the spectrum, and the deep need to obtain my rightful diagnosis began. At first, I didn't realize how hard it would be for me, being that most clinicians severely lack awareness on how to recognize Asperger's in a previously undiagnosed adult, amongst all the learned coping mechanisms. I had some idea of how notorious psychiatrists really were at diagnosing Asperger's but I didn't know how hard it would be. I went through 4 psychiatrists in total, each one was very closed minded to my situation and the information I tried to present. I feel that my being a female blinded them. Each time I was disheartened and upset, but I wouldn't give up. It was painful when in November of 2011; my husband was diagnosed by a psychiatrist, the same one who had turned me down. He easily met the DSM 4s' description of Asperger's. I did too, but it was inconspicuous. Although I was very happy for him, it hurt because I had been fighting longer and harder to prove the truth about myself.

**"To be honest, at the time that I discovered the idea of my being on the spectrum, my coping and covering up was beginning to run dry and I was at the point of a near breakdown."**

I needed the truth officially confirmed, in order for me to move on, access supports and heal from the past. I finally decided to go to a Neuro psychologist who could evaluate me more objectively, and who would review my evidence including childhood footage. I had my mother's full support, as she had read all my information and fully agreed with me that I have always been on the autism spectrum. I found the name of a good Neuro Psych through my sons' behavioural consultant, who also fully supported me. I called this lady and discussed my situation. I told her I was at the breaking point and needed the truth, and that I was tired of being misunderstood and treated condescendingly by many people who didn't get it. I wanted the truth so I could be open about it. She agreed to accept a series of monthly payments from me. Even though making the payments out of my social assistance cheque was a huge challenge, I felt it was well worth it. It was worth my life, really.

We went through a thorough assessment, and she did many psycho educational tests on me, which uncovered several learning and processing differences, especially perceptual reasoning difficulties. My profile came back with huge discrepancies between my challenges and my strengths. This showed that I had used my strengths to try and overcompensate for my difficulties, which somewhat pulled me through, albeit the bumps and bruises.

My mother and even the videotapes also confirmed my gross motor challenges. A sample of my writing as a child confirmed lack of fine motor development. My mother was interviewed for 3 hours, and the video footage was all reviewed.

In the end, the Psychologist confirmed that all the evidence was positive of Asperger Syndrome. She did a huge report that was emotional to read. I'll never forget the day, after a long and agonizing two-month evaluation process; when she sat me down and gently said to me "I have made the diagnosis." It was an intense day filled with both grief and joy. Ever since then, I have worked on accessing supports and sharing my experience. I had already started my poetry and my blog before and leading up to the diagnosis, and my sharing of information and experience has only continued to grow. This year, my goal is to publish a poetry book, and eventually self produce a music album.

I have a savant skill for writing and creating pop music. There is nothing that engages me and makes me happier than doing my music, so it's something that is a huge goal and dream for me. Ultimately I'm an artist, in writing, words, music and how I express myself ... and the arts calm me and make me feel the happiest. Even though I'm also interested in science and academics, I prefer the arts. I love being involved in the autistic community, and talking with others that understand my thought processes as well as relate to my experiences. I felt alone for so long, so it's awesome to now have friends who really get it. I really enjoyed going to the ANCA convention last year, with Peter, Rainbow and Dylan. I met so many great people and I'll definitely be going there again next year. To be honest, I've still got a lot of healing to do; but all these things help me heal. I'm also working on my health. Natural treatments and health science have become another special interest of mine. In saying that, it can be overwhelming to treat myself all by myself, but luckily I have found a naturopath who charges a sliding scale for people on disability. She has a son on the autism spectrum so she understands how I think, process and deal with my health issues. I'm really excited about this. I'm also finally starting physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy next month, something long overdue. Some days I flare, and need to try to be gentle with myself and just rest, even though I'm an ambitious and stubborn person who doesn't like to feel debilitated. I have researched and blogged about the connection between autism and autoimmune health issues, and have found that it's clear we are prone to them. I have blogged about how mainstream

healthcare has not yet completely recognized this fact, nor do they know how to treat us. This is another issue in which I'm passionate about. I am an advocate from many angles regarding autism, and I'm glad that I can use and articulate all the info I've learned over time, for this purpose.

At this time in the world, we do need to advocate for ourselves because society and systems do not yet have a grasp on autism and autistic people. Luckily, more and more of us are doing this and it's becoming very powerful. I believe that all we need to do is keep going, writing and speaking out, and being our true selves and society will eventually develop an acceptable level of understanding. Those who don't will be a minority. I don't do any of this with any plan, anymore; it's all from the heart and the spirit. I used to want to plan everything out completely, and want to see what the end would look like. However, I don't do this with my blogs because I feel like it's one of my true callings and this time, I don't have to. I'm comfortable just being myself and sharing my knowledge and experience. A few years ago I was a different person ... different in the way that my true self was buried. The best thing about where I'm at today, above all else, is that I'm actually being me, and not mirroring other people. Although I'm still healing and will continue to heal, this is very important. Today I am who I am, and who I always truly was. Again, thank you for having me tonight. Before I finish, I would like to share some poetry with you, in which illustrates my journey.

-- Rose Guedes



“At this time in the world, we do need to advocate for ourselves because society and systems do not yet have a grasp on autism and autistic people.”

# Healing and Connecting

By Chris McIntosh

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## 1. Various Goals for the Autism Community

A lot of thought has been put into what should be accomplished by therapy and services for those of us on the autism spectrum. Goals for services should ideally reflect a spectrum, just as the functioning levels and ages of those of us with autism are on a spectrum.

Typically developing children face changing and more demanding developmental goals as they age. These include developing gross motor, fine motor, language, cognitive, and social skills. Cognitive and social skills have been broken down further by various psychological theorists into models, including Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, and Kohlberg's stages of moral development, to name just two.

Those of us on the autism spectrum face our own specific developmental challenges. They are not different from typical developmental stages, but they often pose unique challenges for us.

For some parents, a major challenge and goal is simply to toilet train their child on the spectrum. If or when this goal is accomplished, parents will develop a novel goal for their child to overcome severe behavioural challenges. When and if this goal is accomplished, parents will develop a goal plan for a non-verbal child to become verbal. If progress is made, as children age, goals progress to knowledge acquisition and skill development. The greatest goal parents usually have for their children on the spectrum is for the development of social skills. These skills are seen as a foundation for leading a meaningful life, which includes gaining, and keeping meaningful employment and friends, having a healthy social life, and making meaningful contributions to society.

A recent goal for those of us on the autism spectrum is to achieve our highest potential – a laudable goal for anyone on or off the autism spectrum.

## 2. Achieving our fullest potential

I believe the fullest potential anyone can achieve is accepting ourselves and others, and contributing to each other's lives in meaningful ways. These might seem like impossible dreams for those of us on the spectrum. I do not believe they are. Historically, disenfranchised groups have fought then worked in partnership with society to achieve their dreams. We must do the same.

## 3. Concepts that may be helpful in understanding the autism spectrum

I have found it useful to use leprosy, now referred to as Hansen's disease, to illustrate some of the psychological reality of my own Aspergers, and to develop concepts for my own emotional healing.

People with Hansen's disease do not have a sense of pain. Their pain cells have been destroyed by bacteria. Therefore they do not realize when they are injured, so do not get medical attention for their injuries. This causes great disfigurement.

People with Hansen's disease are now taught to visually inspect themselves to determine when they have been injured. Although this protocol is helpful, it is not without limitations. Internal injuries cannot be detected by this method.

### 3.1. Coping Methods – Appearance, Functional and Meaningful Coping

People with Hansen's disease could be taught to inspect their hand, see a cut on it, and say "My hand hurts". I call this "Appearance Coping". It would serve no useful purpose except to try to make them appear normal.

People with Hansen's disease could be taught to inspect their hand, see a cut on it, and get medical attention. I call this "Functional Coping". It serves a functional purpose.

*"Some appearance coping skills are necessary in today's society. We often need to appear normal to gain and maintain employment, and to navigate our way through society. I paid a high price in developing this skill. My mental health suffered. I came to believe my true self was unacceptable, and had to be hidden at all costs."*

People with Hansen's disease, who might not understand the concept of pain, could be taught that other people do feel pain, and need pain killers when they are injured. They could be taught to bring others a pain killer when they see they are injured. I call this "Meaningful Coping". It serves a meaningful purpose in the lives of others, even if a person with Hansen's disease might not fully understand why this is necessary or what it achieves.

### 3.2. Coping Methods Applied to the Autism Spectrum

Many current therapies help children function at basic levels to address toileting needs, mitigate severe behavioural issues, and teach basic communication skills. Such therapy teaches us functional coping skills. It is a foundation that allows us to function at higher levels.

I think much social skills therapy can teach us more appearance than functional coping skills. The skills, scripts and dialogues I learned made me appear normal, to a degree. But I learned to become like an actor playing a role. I was never able to get out of character. I did not know what "out of character" would look like. I could not reveal my true self to or connect with others. This was obvious when a conversation went in a direction I had not developed a "script" for.

Some appearance coping skills are necessary in today's society. We often need to appear normal to gain and maintain employment, and to navigate our way through society. I paid a high price in developing this skill. My mental health suffered. I came to believe my true self was unacceptable, and had to be hidden at all costs. This would not be positive resort for anyone's mental health.

Our mental health can be improved through the process of mutual understanding. We can realize we need to develop some scripts to not inadvertently hurt others with our words. Emotional pain is as real as physical pain. We can learn we are not developing scripts to hide an unacceptable inner self. Others can understand that our difficulty with the emotional suffering others is a combination of a lack of a sense, similar to a lack of pain,

and a fear of the judgment of others when we are not able to respond in an emotionally warm manner. People can learn that our scripts are a genuine attempt at kindness, not insincerity.

When we and others can accept ourselves, our mental health will improve, as will our capacity for meaningful coping – helping others in ways that are meaningful to them.

I believe that simply acknowledging we are on the autism spectrum to appropriate others, without saying anything else, can be a start towards better mental health.

The development of knowledge through education, the development of skills through vocational training, and the development of adaptive functioning capacity through life skills training are just some of the functional coping skills we need to learn. Everyone needs knowledge and skills to obtain and keep employment. We are no different.

I believe the greatest gains both to us and society lie in us developing more meaningful coping skills. Both we and society face the greatest challenges trying to achieve this goal. I believe that today there is little, if any, therapy which helps us develop meaningful coping skills.

#### 4. Categories of Behaviour

The concepts of three different types of behaviours might help people on and off the spectrum develop more appropriate expectations of those of us on the spectrum.

##### 4.1. Good Things We Might Never Do

No one would expect a blind person to see, or a deaf person to hear. I believe it is unrealistic to expect us to give empathetic emotional support to others, in the same measure that typically developing people can. I believe such expectations lead to hurt and disappointment on the part of those close to us, and frustration, anger, defence mechanisms and low self esteem for those of us on the spectrum. In saying this, I want to make a distinction between empathy and compassion.

I believe empathy can be likened to emotional support. Just as pain killers alleviate physical pain, empathy alleviates emotional pain. I believe compassion can be likened to physical support. Just as medical attention is critical when you receive a physical injury, in the same way kind, caring, supportive physical actions are required to help others when they are going through various life challenges.

I believe empathy cannot be taught any more than pain can be taught. I believe compassion, in the form of consistent kind and caring actions can be taught and we can learn and give it.

I am familiar with the tenet that if you believe and work hard enough, you can achieve anything. I trained for and completed Ironman Canada in 2002. I believed. I worked. I achieved.

I tried this with many things associated with my Asperger limitations. I believed. I worked. I did not achieve. I could not figure out what the problem was, until I imagined myself standing on the top of a building, flapping my arms and trying to fly. Would I succeed? If not, why not? Would the problem be a lack of belief, or a lack of effort?

I think the biggest favour we can all do is to identify, in the world of autism, what are “muscle” things and what are “wing” things. We can grow muscles, not wings.

In some cases, we can achieve our goals via other means. We can buy a glider and fly. In other cases, I do not believe we can achieve goals via other means. I am not sure that genuine substitutes for emotional support exist.

Often, people wanted emotional support from me. Substitutes would not do. I did not believe that was fair or achievable. It was a reality often resulting in frustration and grief.

People without Hansen’s disease need two things when they are injured – medical attention to heal wounds, and painkillers to alleviate pain. People with Hansen’s disease need the first, but not the second.

I believe people need two things when they face life’s adversity and challenges – physical support in facing their challenges, similar to medical attention; and emotional support to alleviate their emotional suffering, similar to painkillers. I found I could understand and meet people’s needs for physical support through compassionate acts of service. I could not give the emotional support required to meet people’s emotional needs in traditional ways.

If something is not achievable, I do not believe it is in our or anyone else’s best interest to continue to devote time, energy, or resources into futile efforts to achieve it. If we have impaired empathy, I do not believe it is in our or another’s interest to continue to try to develop elaborate strategies to “prove” we have it or to develop or demonstrate it.

#### 4.2. Inappropriate Behaviors We Can Reduce

I believe once we are aware of what we cannot do, and stop trying to achieve the impossible, a whole new world is opened up for us.

I struggled with the issue of the emotional pain I caused other people. I thought people who caused pain were bad people. Sometimes, I thought I was not a bad person, so I could not be causing anyone pain. Other times, I could see I was causing pain, so thought I was a bad person. People struggle with this too. They see we can be so smart in other areas, so believe that we must be aware of the pain we are causing, and causing it intentionally.

I finally realized there were conditions, such as cancer, that caused tremendous hardship and grief to both the person with cancer, and those close to them, where no one was to blame. An inappropriate behaviour we need to reduce is refusing to acknowledge to others that our actions sometimes cause them grief.

I often did what I thought should be done rather than listening to what others really needed. I found my thinking only took physical needs into account. My assessment of what should be done ignored the emotional needs of others.

I refused to ever admit I was wrong. When a mistake is made, physical and emotional amends must be made. I could make physical amends. I found I did not have the capacity to make emotional amends. My only “answer” was to be perfect and refuse to admit to ever making mistakes.

I was both a procrastinator and a perfectionist. I believe both traits stemmed from my inability to make emotional amends for mistakes. If I procrastinated and never started anything I could never finish it “incorrectly” and be criticized. If I always did things to perfection, again I never had to make emotional amends.

I suspect that many of the behaviours of those of us on the autism spectrum are in fact a very functional adaptation to impaired empathy in an empathetic world. I believe if society were to reduce the blame and harsh judgments associated with impaired empathy, it would reduce a large part of our seemingly inappropriate behaviour, which I believe are largely defence mechanisms.

I had difficulties switching from one task to another task. I had trouble switching from a “special interest” / perseveration to working on something I found less interesting.

I had a habit of arguing beyond the bounds of what was a reasonable discussion. I criticized others far more than was reasonable.

Often, people wanted emotional support from me. Substitutes would not do. All of these things were inappropriate behaviours I could reduce. With blame taken out of the equation, it was easier for me to recognize, acknowledge and reduce these behaviours.

#### 4.3. Helpful behaviours we can increase

We have a great number of good qualities which have the potential to contribute considerably to the lives of those around us, including our family, friends, and employers.

We can persevere on certain things, and work long, hard hours. We can pay great attention to detail, producing high quality work with few errors. We can work quickly and accurately. We may have good intelligence and good analytical and problem solving abilities. All of these have the potential to be great assets to employers and to society.

All too often this potential for good goes unrealized for a variety of reasons.

#### 5. Understanding as the Path to Connecting

All of the above speaks to us becoming more functional in society, which forms the foundation to achieving a meaningful life. A meaningful life involves more than just functioning.

Leading a meaningful life involves having meaningful connections with the people in our lives. As autism is a neurological condition with a core symptom being difficulty with social relations, is this even possible?

I believe much of our social difficulties stems from people on and off the autism spectrum not understanding each other. Genuine acceptance is impossible without understanding.

If we do not accept and understand ourselves, we will not be able to reveal ourselves to people off the spectrum in a safe way. They will not be able to understand or accept us as we truly are. Consequently, we will be unable to connect with each other in a meaningful way.

In addition to understanding and accepting ourselves, we must learn ways to understand and accept people off the spectrum in order to connect with them. We must learn that just because we do not see, sense, or understand something, does not mean it does not exist.

Someone who is colour-blind cannot see the colour red. That does not mean it does not exist, or that the colour does not have meaning, such as when it is on a red light at an intersection. People with Hansen's disease do not feel pain. That does not mean pain does not exist, or does not cause people hardship and grief. I often felt it was safer to refuse to acknowledge another's emotional pain, or pretend it did not exist, rather than acknowledge to myself or them that I could not respond empathetically to them. I had to change this behaviour, and acknowledge other's emotional pain before I could connect with them.

#### 6. Understanding How We Are Different

We have autism awareness today. That does not mean we have autism acceptance. As stated, no one can truly accept anything they do not understand. I believe there is little understanding of autism today from a psychological point of view.

I believe one path to having people off the spectrum understand and accept us is as follows.

We must understand ourselves. We must accept ourselves. We must learn to identify safe people. We must reveal ourselves to these safe, accepting people. These people will be able to understand and accept us, and demonstrate their acceptance to us in ways we can understand it. Experiencing their acceptance of who we are will make it safe for us to acknowledge their emotional needs, even if we cannot meet them. True connection and part-

nership will begin to blossom and reach fruition.

These items can pose great challenges for us. Understanding ourselves, from a psychological point of view, is not easy.

Around the age of 5 or 6 I remember realizing that I was different from others. I could recognize, often from a few seconds of observing them, people that were like me. At the time, I did not understand what "like me" meant. I desperately wanted to be like others, so set about trying to identify and overcome any differences I saw. I figured when I found and overcame the right difference, I would be the same as everyone else.

I developed interests. I tried to make friends, and succeeded after a fashion. Other people had girlfriends, and took them out to dinners and movies. I had limited success trying to find a girlfriend, going to dinners and movies. I developed hobbies, joined clubs, and talked about sports. None of this made me like others. I figured the problem was that I had not yet figured out the essential psychological difference that separated me from others. What is our difference?

In my high school and university years, people would sometimes ask me why I did certain things. I did not know. I just knew that some things, mostly in the social realm, were "safe" and I could do them. Other things were not safe, and I could not do them.

I could not understand myself, so could not accept myself or reveal myself to anyone else in any meaningful way.

After much reading, research and thinking, I came to believe the core difference I had from other people was an inability to connect with them emotionally. I came to believe that I, and others who I believed were like myself, had impaired empathy.

People often say "If you've seen one person with autism, you've seen one person with autism". This statement acknowledges that we are all different, and our behaviours are all different. However, this statement is true of many things. Men are all different from each other. So are women, people who are deaf, and people who are blind. There is a core difference between men and women, the blind and the sighted, and the deaf and those who can hear.

We are all different, yet I suspect we share a core difference, stemming in large part from a greater or lesser degree of impaired empathy.

#### 7. Challenges In Accepting This Difference

If we believe we have impaired empathy, acceptance and connecting becomes extremely difficult. We are not immune from the societal belief that people with impaired empathy are cold, uncaring, and unfeeling at best, or psychopaths or sociopaths at worst. Couple this with a poor self image generated by continual appearance coping, which leads us to believe that who we are is not acceptable, and it is not hard to see why accepting ourselves is difficult. People often feel we are cold and uncaring due to our impaired social skills, even with the question of empathy having been left out of it.

This last step of revealing myself to others, trusting that they would understand me was the hardest challenge I ever faced. I did not accept myself, so could not trust that anyone else would accept me.

Anyone on or off the spectrum who does not accept themselves usually develops a number of strong defence mechanisms to prevent others from discovering their true nature. These defences are extremely resistant to change. That was true for me.

People who have a phobia of water who move to the desert are not cured.

Some life and work situations were like "the desert" for me. They allowed me to display my strengths. They hid my limitations. Other life and work situations were like someone with a phobia of water getting a job as a life guard at

the ocean. They did not allow me to display my strengths. They magnified my limitations.

Desert situations and jobs for me were technical in nature and did not require me to give much emotional support or empathy. They involved highly task oriented work that required attention to detail and analytical problem solving.

Life guard at the ocean-type jobs for me involved dealing with people in complex social situations. I could not adequately identify, properly weigh, balance or meet various people's differing and often competing emotional and social needs.

Situations which were the most stressful for me were those which might expose the possibility I might have impaired empathy. I developed highly effective, often disruptive, defence mechanisms to prevent people from suspecting this. It was safer for me to have people think I was rude, insensitive, self-centred or worse, than to have them suspect I might lack empathy.

I believed at a conscious and unconscious level that if anyone suspected I had impaired empathy, and if that suspicion spread, that I would be shunned and deserted by everyone I knew. A person lacking empathy was not acceptable to me. I could not conceive such a person, me, would be acceptable to anyone else either.

#### 8. Can These Challenges Be Overcome?

I found that people did in fact accept me, impaired empathy and all, when I told them of my beliefs. I could perform many kind and compassionate actions even with impaired empathy. People saw and accepted my efforts, although this was a challenge as well.

Imagine two people. One has Hansen's disease and cannot feel pain. They have been trained to look at their hand, and put on a bandage if they see a cut. The other can feel pain.

You watch as they look down, see a cut on their hand, and put on a bandage. They have performed identical actions, through totally different processes. The person with Hansen's disease looked down, saw the cut, and put on a bandage as they had been trained. The other person felt pain, looked down to see the cut, and put on a bandage to relieve the pain.

Putting on a bandage does not prove a person experiences pain. Performing kind, caring, compassionate actions does not prove a person experiences empathy. It does demonstrate they have and can exercise compassion for others. I believe people often confuse the two. In my case, this led them to have expectations of me which were not realistic.

Once I experienced acceptance from others, impaired empathy and all, I was gradually able to let go of a good deal of the defence mechanisms I had designed to prevent people from suspecting I lacked empathy. This freed up a tremendous amount of time, energy and resources that I could devote to learning more functional and meaningful coping behaviours. I believe this further transformed my life, continued my psychological healing, and increased the meaning in my life. It has allowed me to develop a spiritual life that I never believed would be possible for me.

I used to believe that the path by which I achieved connection and meaning in my life was the only path there was.

The more I see of adults on the spectrum who have achieved a similar connection with others as I have, the more I believe there are many paths to this goal.

I believe this path can start at a young age by allowing children on the spectrum to be themselves and encouraging them to accept themselves as they are. This does not mean accepting inappropriate behaviours. It means not

judging children who do not seem to have feelings or emotions you think they should have. It means not judging feelings or emotions they express that seem inappropriate. Let them know that feelings and emotions are acceptable, whatever they are, but this does not mean all actions are acceptable. Try to distinguish between appearance and functional coping.

I believe this is happening today. I have been amazed at the level of interaction many children on the spectrum, some as young as 5 or 6, are able to engage in. I am amazed at the emotions they feel comfortable expressing. These are not scripted. They are genuine. I believe this is because they and their parents know and accept who they are. They are children on the spectrum with some emotional limitations. This is acceptable. These children feel comfortable expressing who they are, and being accepted for who they are. They in turn feel comfortable revealing themselves. This leads to connection that I do not believe was possible for many of us in an earlier generation, who grew up unable to know or accept who we were, leading us to believe that we were not acceptable to others.

Acceptance can come at any age. I believe it is much easier the earlier it comes. I suspect that learning social scripts may need to be done in parallel with acceptance. I believe children should be taught that social scripts are required as one aid to connecting with others. They should be taught that that is our way of meeting people off the spectrum half way. It is our way of trying to understand the non autism world. They should be taught that scripts are not a way of hiding who we are. They should be taught that those off the spectrum also need to meet us halfway by accepting our limitations and not expecting things we might not be capable of delivering. They and society should be taught the difference between empathy and compassion. That is society's way of meeting us half way, and understanding our world.

Progress may be slow, especially at first. A baby must learn to crawl, before it walks and before it runs. We need to start with small steps. We cannot stop with those small steps. I believe meaningful connection with others, seemingly the antithesis of autism, is possible, and that is what will lead to more meaningful lives for those of us on the spectrum.

I and others like me are not cured. We are still on the autism spectrum. But I believe we have experienced psychological healing, which is something I never believed I would experience.

#### 9. Next Steps

We have made very good strides in the development of social skills. The progress we have made is necessary and critical, and has allowed us to achieve things that would otherwise have been impossible for us. The progress we have made has come at a high cost in terms of our mental health. I hope I have shown that we can achieve similar or greater benefits, at a much lower cost to our mental health, with understanding and acceptance.

##### 9.1. Understanding and Accepting Others

Once we have understood and accepted ourselves, and once we have revealed ourselves to others and have been understood and accepted by them, I believe we will then have the capacity to start to understand and accept others.

I was very judgmental and critical of others. There were reasons for this, but none of those reasons changed the fact that my behaviour was hurtful to others.

I often minimized or dismissed the emotional needs of others. This was probably similar to someone with Hansen's disease minimizing or dismissing the physical pain of others, because they, themselves, did not experience or understand pain.

I was often not aware of the emotional needs of others. When I was, I was afraid of them because I did not know how to meet them. I was scared and

defensive in such situations.

This changed. I intellectually learned and accepted that my words hurt others. I was able to change my behaviour and language. I found myself able to understand and accept others in a way that was not previously possible.

## 9.2. Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity for me means inclusiveness of everyone, regardless of their neurological development. I believe it is a two way street. Others need to understand and accept us. We need to understand and accept others. We all need to work together in partnership.

Today, the neurodiversity that often gets the most attention seems to be a one way street. Some of us on the spectrum demand that others accept us, but display little acceptance of people not on the spectrum.

It is easy to get people to stop doing what you do not like. Cause enough disruption, and eventually people will stop. This is an easy way of effecting change.

It is much harder to get people to work with you, to support you, and to actively work in partnership with you towards change. There are many people on both sides of the spectrum doing this today. They often tend to work in the background and not generate or receive the attention their work and achievements deserve.

## 9.3. Partnerships and Meaningful Contributions

There are numerous examples of different groups working together to achieve meaningful change.

I suspect that blind and sighted people worked together to develop Braille. Blind people then had to work hard to learn Braille. Sighted people had to work to publish books, signs, and other materials in Braille. It was a partnership.

Those on and off the spectrum must learn how we can work together, and our respective roles, in helping those of us on the spectrum take our place alongside others in contributing in meaningful ways to society.

This is an achievable goal I see happening more and more today, and look forward to seeing more of in the future.

-- Chris McIntosh

# Acknowledge limitations to self and others



# ASPERGER IN BALTIMORE

By Patrick Dwyer

“...while Kanner’s work became famous, Asperger’s was buried when the massive 1944 Allied bombing of Vienna came crashing into the university pediatric clinic. Asperger survived. But his discoveries, his carefully run ward, and even the supremely capable governess Sister Viktorine—all perished.”

Collins, 2004, p. 68

## A Brief Introduction

Autism was first described in the 1940s. In 1943, Leo Kanner published a paper about eleven unusual children in Baltimore. Simultaneously, Hans Asperger was working with another group of children in Vienna, and he published a paper describing them in 1944. Remarkably, both scientists used the same terminology to describe the children: Kanner spoke of “autistic disturbances of affective contact” (Schreibman, 2005) or “early infantile autism” (Frith, 1991), while Asperger described “autistic psychopathy” (Asperger, 1944/ 1991).

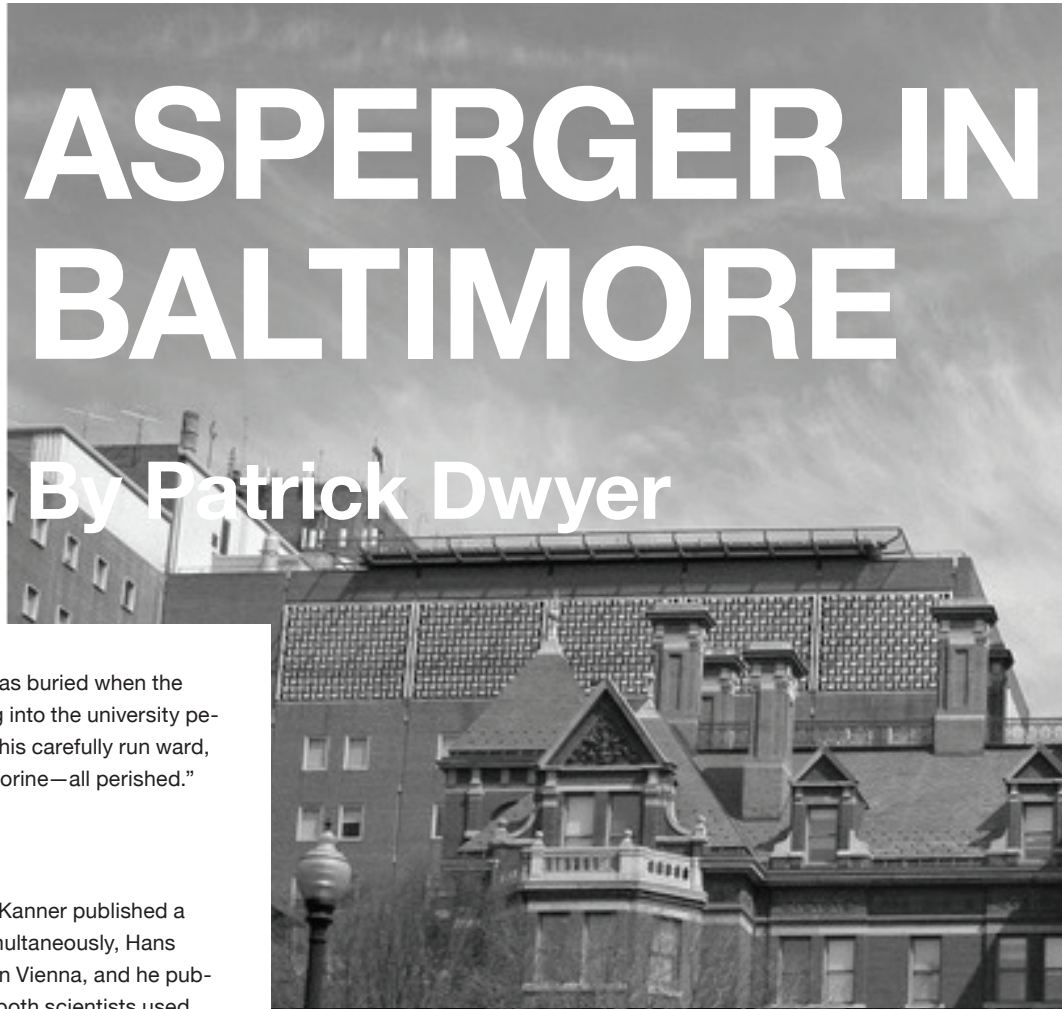
Asperger planned further studies of autism. He hoped to find the cause of autism, as well as follow autistic children into adulthood (Asperger, 1944/ 1991).

However, the Second World War was underway, so Kanner and Asperger did not learn of one another’s work. Furthermore, Asperger’s clinic was destroyed by Allied bombers in 1944. This event changed Asperger’s priorities. Asperger did visit the United States in 1950 and again in the 1970s, but he never met Kanner and there is no evidence that the latter was ever aware of Asperger’s work (Feinstein, 2010). It was 1981; the year after Asperger’s death, when Lorna Wing published a paper that kindled interest in his work (Grinker, 2007), and it was not until 1991 that Uta Frith translated Asperger’s 1944 paper into English.

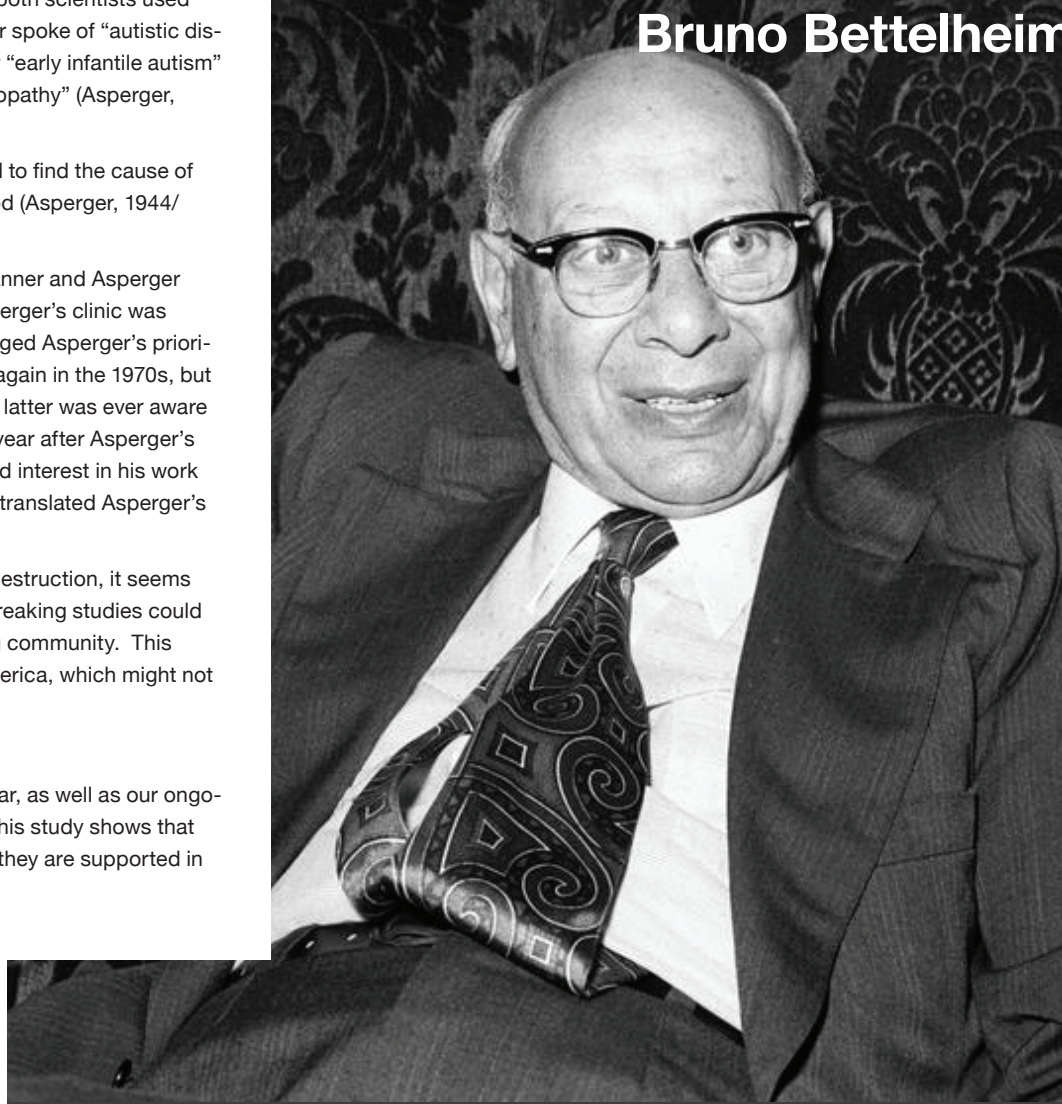
If we imagine that Asperger’s clinic had been spared destruction, it seems quite possible that the publication of further ground-breaking studies could have attracted attention outside the German-speaking community. This could have had a great effect on autism science in America, which might not have turned to the theory of the refrigerator mother.

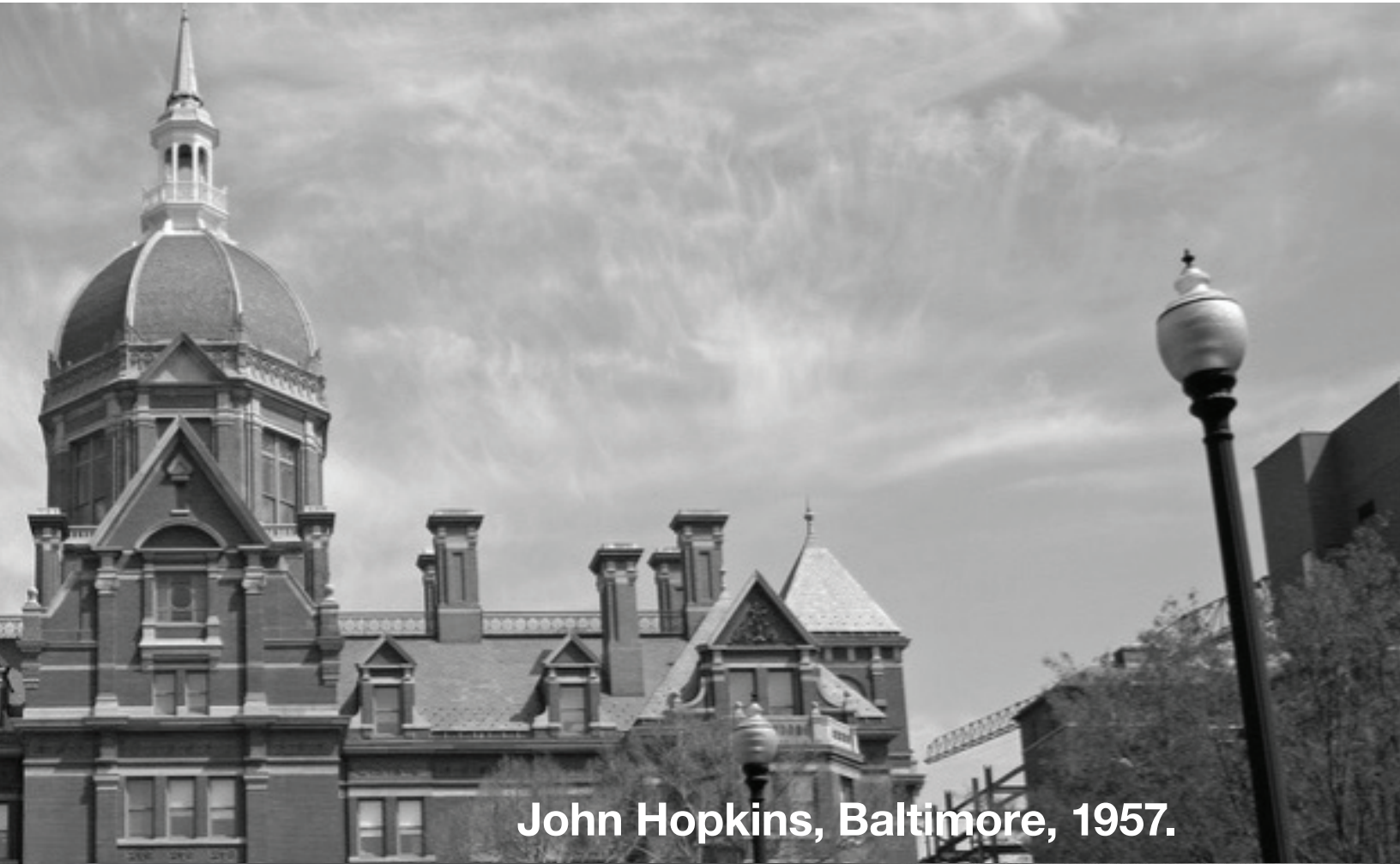
## Baltimore, 1957

“...we have endeavoured to bring our experience to bear, as well as our ongoing commitment to the well-being of these children. This study shows that if these children can overcome their difficulties, and if they are supported in their efforts, they can be of great value to society.”



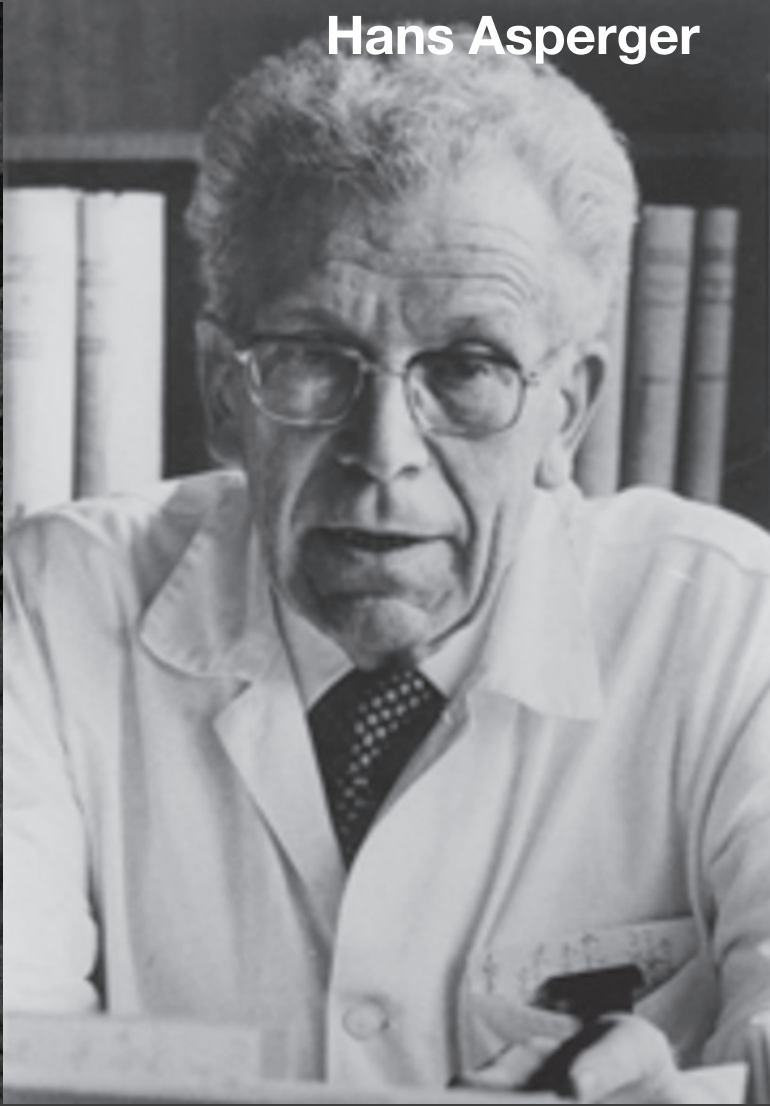
**Bruno Bettelheim**





**John Hopkins, Baltimore, 1957.**

**Hans Asperger**



**Leo Kanner**



Hans Asperger surveyed the crowd in front of him. He was at the John Hopkins University in Baltimore for a conference at which he was presenting his findings to the American scientific community. Since reading Dr. Kanner's paper he had been anxious to meet the Americans and hopefully collaborate with them more closely.

The chair was calling for questions, so Asperger shook away his thoughts and prepared. The first question came from a middle-aged, rather bulbous-eyed man. When Asperger had been talking earlier in the hallway with some conference attendees, the questioner had been introduced as one Dr. Bettelheim.

"Dr. Asperger," the man said, "you have observed the cold, distant affect of the mothers of the children--you remarked on the fact in your paper just now. Surely the children's behaviour can be best explained as the natural consequence of a lack of an emotional bond forming between the mother and child. I have seen firsthand how refrigerator mothers, cold mothers who do not love their children or refuse to show their children their love, can cause horrific damage across a child's lifespan."

Asperger frowned at him. "Those mothers also had the best understanding of their children. And," he added, "the children suffered from homesickness suffered--certainly they had an emotional bond with their parents."

Bettelheim looked impatient. "The grief you described can be better attributed to the lack of such a bond--an emptiness, which the child cannot perceive but that controls his or her actions. The diminution of that grief must surely have been due to the care shown by you and your colleagues."

"Dr. Bettelheim, I thank you for the compliment to my colleagues, but I cannot accept your conclusion. Not all of the children had emotionally distant parents, but our latest research on the biological cause of autism has shown that many autistic children had cold relatives, or even relatives we could diagnose with autism."

"Dr. Asperger, I was once an inmate in a concentration camp. The traumatized Jews there displayed much the same behaviour as my patients. Both withdraw from the world, seeking refuge inside the recesses of their minds."

Asperger furrowed his brow. Although more than a decade had passed since the war, the tone of the question made him wonder if the man was trying to paint him as some sort of enemy. "Doctor, I sympathize with your incarceration--during the German occupation of Austria my greatest fear was that the children in my clinic would..." he hesitated, trying to make his point in English, "would in the eugenics program become..." Silence. He had probably made a grammatical stumble, but Asperger thought he got his point across. He continued, "But I assure you, the numbers and pedigrees do not lie."

"Dr. Asperger, these are children, not numbers."

Several other members of the panel were now frowning. Asperger, now quite irritated, drew in a breath and expelled it. "Dr. Bettelheim, I agree, but as scientists we must try to understand the causes of this disorder. It will affect the treatment."

Bettelheim scowled, but it seemed that he was finished for the time being. The next question came from the man Asperger had most looked forward to seeing--Dr. Kanner, who had begun working with autistic children in America at the same time he had done so in Austria.

"Dr. Asperger, I must begin by expressing my admiration for your accomplishments. Your findings regarding the possible biological cause of autism seem quite promising. I must admit, however, that I am curious about the performance of your patients--they seem to be somewhat less impaired than mine."

"Dr. Kanner, I noticed that as well. However, the basic symptoms seem similar. In fact, I had a few patients who were either closer to your average patient, or at least intermediate between my original patients and yours. I have accepted more patients of the more impaired type since reading your paper, and some in between: we believe that they represent a continuum. They do require different methods with different objectives, but in remedial pedagogy we use different methods for each child anyway."

"It may well be so. Even if not, the breadth and depth of your research will certainly prove invaluable to many children in America. However, I am interested in your findings about the special interests of the children being the best possible careers for them."

"Ah yes. Obviously, it cannot work for all patients. Of the patients I have followed into adulthood the most successful ones were those who could apply their skills to a career. However, there were some with less useful interests, and as for the most impaired children we do not yet have a large enough sample of speechless children to confidently form definite conclusions."

"Mainly," continued Asperger, "I wished to stress that we were surprised to find continued support in finding a job, and holding it, seems essential. The young adults must be told how to behave in the workplace. Sometimes we find it best to ask the employer to help, but with others we prefer not to risk the employer terminating the patient's work."

"Did you not house your patients in the clinic?"

"Originally we often did. But we have recently learned that in most cases of autism it is better to provide services while keeping the children with their families. The grief we observed when they first arrived all alone seems to halt their progress; therefore, we included their families. An outpatient program also allows us to work with more patients at once."

Bettelheim spoke up again. "Dr. Asperger, I would contest that point. We have accepted twelve children with autistic schizophrenia into our clinic, the Orthogenic School, besides some other children I have worked with over the years, and we have found that when they return home for visits we regularly lose months of our painstaking work in drawing them out."

"Dr. Bettelheim, we have worked with hundreds of children over a long time. Our findings have been different. Besides, many of our patients have brothers or sisters that do not have autism."

"Then perhaps we should return to the question of whether your patients have autism, or something else entirely," said Bettelheim.

As he prepared for another round of grilling, Asperger realized that a great deal of work needed to be done in America. He would need to find a group of people who could contain people like Bettelheim and his associates. Perhaps Dr. Kanner would have some suggestions? He would have to talk with him alone afterwards.

-- Patrick Dwyer

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# Story of Aegis

By Adam Evan Christie

From as long back as he could remember, he was always an individual. At times, he was just alone with his thoughts. He would spend most of his waking life submerged in a nebulous reverie, struggling to come up to the surface and break free. Sometimes he would come to appreciate his state of mind, enveloped in his own thought processes, while at other times, when he was concurrently entrenched in a reality characterized by a perplexing shroud of dysthymia, these feelings escaped his conscious experience. At times when circumstances were hard, he had reason to fall into despondent states. It was at these times that he realized most that he had to become more consistently firm in his conviction to break free, so that he could be open to experiencing life positively, and with adventure, inquisition, and veracity.

Aegis was in solitude in his room. It was there that he found his peace to engage in his routines, even now as an adult. It was also there that he found peace from the scrutiny of others, so he may engage in his interests in peculiar and stereotyped ways. He would listen to music, as it evoked a response. Sometimes he would be sitting in a cross-legged manner, as he rocked back and forth. Sometimes he would be spinning. Although this brought him enjoyment, his repetitive behaviors tended to lack any apparent structure or purpose. Eventually, he explored further types of movement. Instead of spinning, he learned how to turn, and accomplish the goal of performing a pirouette, a term used to describe a structured technical turn in dance. While he felt safety in his reclusiveness, he realized on the inside that he yearned to discover more of his potential than would be revealed within his independent routine in the confines of his room.

This was in part, because, without ever learning about kinesthetic movement or training, it would only be just him rocking back and forth in response to the music that evoked these repetitive movements. Isolated in his room, he would have the solitude that kept him at peace, but he was burdened by unconscious feelings. He metaphorically stepped outside of himself, becoming an objective onlooker of his own behaviour, realizing he had been doing the same thing over and over again, and it seemed in ways to be purposeless. Where would he go from there? He had a great many interests; therefore, he started broadly, and worked through to specifics using a process of elimination. Among his interests, he enjoyed kinesthetic and musical pursuits. He realized that traditional sports organized around teams were outside of the realm of what he could do. Though he loved orchestrated music, the same issue might hold true for participating in an orchestra, because he, in particular, yearned to move to the 'beat of his own drum,' (or the equivalent expression for the melody of his favourite instruments). Intrigued by artistic patterning in kinesthetic pursuits, he selected dance and martial arts, and thus began his journey of experiencing movement in accord with these traditions. While he had been exposed to dance and martial arts classes before, he realized that his new attempts at them might prove harder than ever.

First, he enrolled in a dance class, choosing ballet, as it emphasized structure and function in dance, and ballet is considered to be a precursor to

other forms of dance, such as contemporary dance. He stepped into the halls, and felt feelings of displacement and unfamiliarity. He had left his former sanctum, where he could let his mind run free through his previous routines. He entered the main room, which was large, with ornate architecture, resplendent pictures, and there he immediately recognized one of the members of a class to be one of his closest friends from his childhood, all the way back when she attended elementary academy with him. Their friendship itself was schematically subserved by a salient memory representation in his mind. As he entered into the room, he interrupted the class that was just about to begin, and announced to the class in a very loud voice, with perhaps monotonous intonation, that her and him used to be best friends, as were their mothers before them. She remembered him and was surprised to see him, but his enthusiasm to see her was met only by her indifference. Class had not quite begun, so he engaged in a discussion with her, and proceeded on a tangential discussion on the topic of art history. He held his intentions silently in his mind, hoping she would reminisce with him about a time so long ago, although his intentions were only partially satisfied, or really not satisfied at all. His intention for their friendship to be rekindled remained in his heart, but he could not express it in words because he had trouble expressing himself that way. He noticed she was largely indifferent, but did not fully discern her cues that conveyed disinterest nor did he realize the implications of what she non-verbally expressed. He continues to rely on his memory representation of so long ago all the while he is conversing, and it concurrently activated his mind. But he let all of this go, as for now his mindset turned its attention upon the impending demands of the class, which was just about to begin.

They began with barre exercises, those that involved the use of a stationary handrail and formed a routine set of exercises that is considered a warm-up to the class itself. Learning the various combinations proved too overwhelming, and even with repeated tries, he needed to rely on observation rather than his own memory. Regulating his attention according to his task demands proved to be exceedingly challenging. As he held onto the barre, he was leaning against it as if it was a support, and although it was not meant to be used as such, he seemed to require it. By the time the class had finished the barre exercises and subsequent to the warm-up exercises, he felt that most of his cognitive resources had already been allocated and were thus diminished. However, by this time, only half of class time had passed. Since he had already given most of what he could, he lacked the wherewithal to continue strongly, and the process became all the more arduous. The class proceeded to choreography, the portion of the class where sequences of steps and movements were designed. Although the process itself could be considered rudimentary, he could not fully assimilate it into a fluid movement. His challenges continued for the next few classes, and he began to have doubts relating to his own self-efficacy, although he remembered the importance of being positive about the long-term outcome. Thus, he remained steadfast in his resolve and continued in his classes. His childhood friend noticed some improvement in his technique, as he performed a technical turn for her, and although she conveyed approval, she remained largely ambivalent in her attitude towards him. It appeared over time that she was a very proud person, that first impressions were highly important to her, and that she could be very unforgiving of others who did not conform to her expectations.

A few weeks had gone by, with struggles of a similar nature. One particular time when class had started and he was late, but he attempted to enter without bringing undue notice. The door had been left open, and as he walked towards it, and before actually entering the class he saw the large mirror wall that the class was facing as they practiced their warm-up routine. Among the class, he saw the reflection of his childhood friend's face as she simultaneously noticed him and observed his impending entry. Just like mirrors reflect

beams, and do so without diminishing their force, her gaze was askance through the reflection of the mirror and conveyed something of the same effect. Was she merely angry with him for being tardy or did she hold him in contempt for his character, as someone she perceived through a stigmatizing lens? Just before reaching the doorway, through which he would have entered the class, he stopped, turned around, and walked out of the building, never to return again. This ordeal involved an experience of cognitive dissonance, as he was in disbelief that she could not remember the friendship they had, for he believed it existed for her to the same extent that it existed for him, when in reality, this experience was confined to his own mind. Moreover, she had placed the value of their friendship in the past as subordinate to the contemptible judgments she had made about him in the present. Knowing all he had been through in his life, this ordeal, in comparison, was rather insignificant.

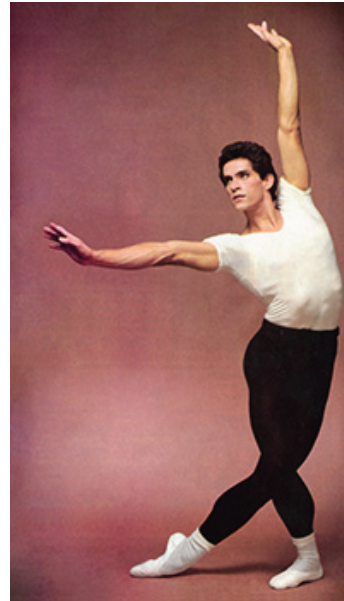
A few months had passed since he had left behind his former experiences with ballet classes, and not much had happened since except he was ready to attempt to enrol himself in martial arts classes. He convinced a friend, with whom he had similar interests, and whom he could relate to, to go to classes with him. He immediately met with the martial arts grandmaster and he had a conversation with him about his goals and expectations. Aegis revealed to the grandmaster that he wanted to learn various martial arts so that he may have a grasp of their details and think up creative ways of suffusing them with one another. The grandmaster did not think much of this idea, as he explained that most martial arts were derived from technical practices that were largely mutually exclusive from one another, as he explained the differences between separate martial arts disciplines. However, the grandmaster appreciated his fervour, and admitted him and his friend to the class, allowing them to participate free of financial obligation for a month's time.

The class was long, and once again, the experience itself could be described as arduous. Technical patterning and sequencing of the martial arts were hard to assimilate. Moreover, he had trouble adhering to the many protocols of the environment, including addressing the grandmaster and students of higher rank according to their proper titles, which also involved constant bowing and the making and holding of eye contact as a sign of respect. However, he still wanted to continue. The grandmaster asked him and his friend if they were ready to commit to a financial obligation required for long-term practice. He readily responded yes, while his companion was hesitant to commit. Aegis's enthusiasm could not elevate him to such a level, and it was hard for him to comprehend his friend's decision outside all of the hope and excitement that he had been envisioning as he anticipated his exploration of martial arts. They tried the classes for a while, and his friend had no trouble picking up the patterning, including its rudimentary aspects, but he took this ability for granted and remained unenthused about the class. Aegis, however, continued to have trouble with the speed at which he processed his learning, and as certain patterns reached ten steps and beyond, he began to realize he had to concede to his limitations. He did not have the drive or persistence to continue, as if his foundation was not firm, it would only get more difficult over time. He also was impeded by his lack of strength when it came to issues involving motor control. Finally, he could not acquire the musical skills that were also part of his former dance class. Reflecting on these circumstances, he finally made his decision. He bid the grandmaster and his fellow students farewell.

What he found common between his experiences in these two types of classes, as he had found from similar experiences in the past, were they were demanding, such that they required vigilance and sustained attention for nearly an hour and a half, and were interspersed with periods of novel learning that proved highly demanding upon his working memory. All this was added with the fact that each successive class gauged past learning, which had occurred neither fast nor efficiently enough for him. It was

time for him to try something more creative, individualized to his own unique affordances, and far less dependent on external and environmental circumstances and factors.

He reflected upon his myriad strengths. They included particular traits that characterized his cognitive mechanisms. His memory, particularly its capacity, seemed at times to run a tangent that approached infinity, and his attention would follow this tangent with precision, to such a degree, that he could



be hyper focused, yet not always on the present task at hand. He was ambivalent to the experience of his attentional nature itself. He realized his attention is a gift, and yet it could be such a burden, in reference to the issues he experienced with the regulation and the willful control of his attention. It tended to be the case that multiple and distinct thought patterns and trajectories could be taking place simultaneously, and thus he could alternate and cycle between several thought patterns at once. Aegis felt it would be helpful if these thought patterns would respond more in accordance

with his intentions, and he could only imagine what would be possible if this was the case. In terms of motivational patterns, his fervour would have an inertia-like effect, which in the very best case scenarios would provide the impetus needed for his endeavours, and in the worst-case scenarios cause him to persevere or be very tangential in his behaviour and thinking, which could also affect him socially.

If his issues were confined to what might be anticipated from an individual like himself, with executive dysfunction and motor clumsiness, then these might satisfactorily explain his difficulties. However, some of the cognitive and motor control issues he experienced represented a sequelae of trauma experienced when he endured hardship during tumultuous times. And these issues had taken its toll on him. Just as a joint could fracture under too much stress, so could the mind, yet in a very different way. He had a chance to observe how he would be affected by adversity and vulnerability through the most trying past circumstances in his life, to say the very least. Through learning more about the processes through which motor skills may be retrained, he became motivated to increase the acuity of his fine and gross motor skills. As an important skill, he would evoke motor strength through his invoked patterns of motor control similar to an athlete visualizing aspects of her or his performance in her or his own mind. This would facilitate an overcoming of barriers, although he still had to consider his issues with vigilance and sustained attention, among other challenges with processing.

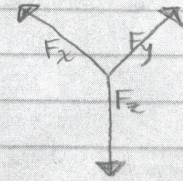
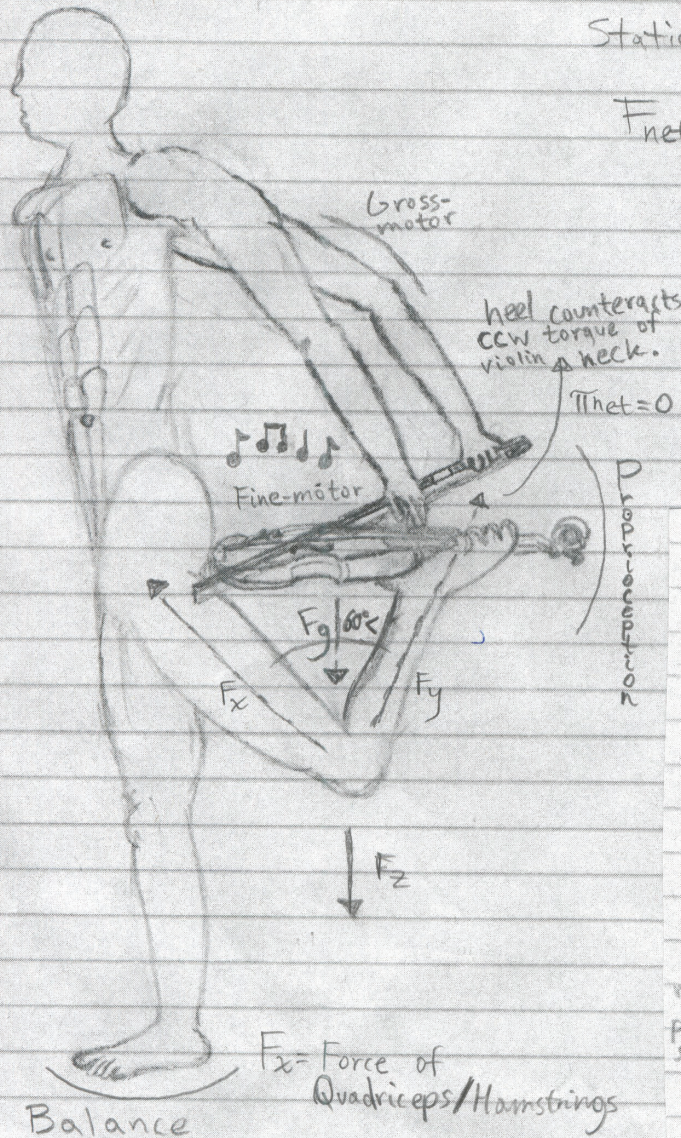
After all, his issues were not exclusive to those that pertained to cognitive and motor coordination and control, as there were times where he frequently found himself suspended in states of absence. When he first became aware of these states, he would try assiduously to snap out of them, hoping this would result in an improvement over time. However, these patterns largely remained consistent throughout time, and he eventually realized he had to stop resisting them and allow himself to flow in the harmony with these waves, as they were now a part of who he was. It helped to reflect

**“It was time for him to draw out one of his first novel ideas. It involved a violin suspended by the end of a foot, while his body was in a modified arabesque position. From there, we could attempt to play it, by hyperextending his arms back. He learned about the various muscles involved in such an action, including the abductor hallucis, which pulled the great toe away from the others so that the neck of the violin could fit in between his first and second toe.”**

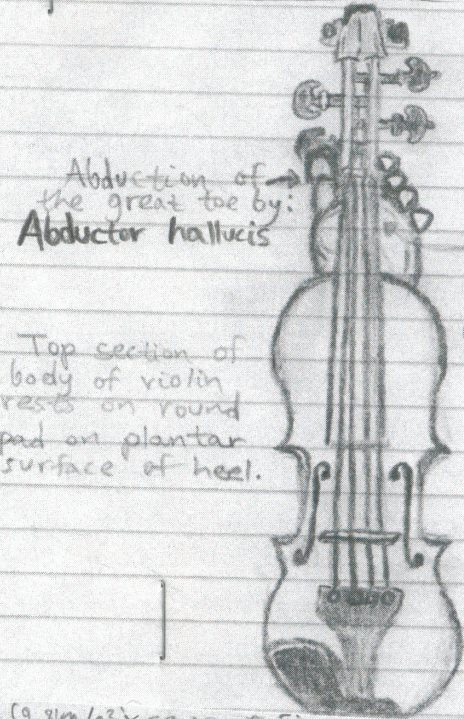
# Playing a violin suspended on top of a foot in a modified arabesque position:

Static Equilibrium:

$$F_{net} = 0 \quad \text{Torque}_{net} = 0$$



## Helicopter View:



$F_x$  = Force of Quadriceps/Hamstrings

$F_y$  = Force of Gastrocnemius Soleus through to heel.

$F_z$  = Force of gravity of earth ( $9.81 \text{ m/s}^2 \times \text{center of mass(es) of violin, foot, and limb involved (in kg)}$ )

A.E.C

“Through specific ways of learning how to play musical instruments, he would have the opportunity to train or retrain fine and gross motor skills that reflected developmental or acquired deficits in movement functioning. Thus, he would guide himself through the process of regaining functioning that had been compromised through the past trauma he had endured.”



contemplatively to himself, while remembering that energy is neither created nor destroyed, only transformed; and within time he realized, through analogy, that his thought patterns would be suspended in time, so that analysis would be extended, allowing more chance for creativity, when it was indeed creative thought processes that were concurrently taking place.

Fortunately, he was not precluded from using an integrative cognitive and executive process through which he could apply concepts, realize insights, and think in patterns that could be used in a creative, generative process. And thus he attempted to rely on all he had been exposed to in the past as sources of inspiration. His method to his artistic and kinesthetic endeavours would most certainly be a multifaceted one, while having the chance to suffuse different aspects in a creative way. He would rely on concepts he had learned from the intersection between the disciplines of physics, biomechanics and kinesiology. He would also recall his salient memories where he had observed truly prolific presentations of trick artistry from circus performers. He had some understanding of choreography from the aspects of dance to which he had been exposed. He also had a similar sense of understanding of patterning and sequential elements from his martial arts class. It was time to bring much of this together.

It was time for him to draw out one of his first novel ideas. It involved a violin suspended by the end of a foot, while his body was in a modified arabesque position. From there, we could attempt to play it, by hyperextending his arms back. He learned about the various muscles involved in such an action, including the abductor hallucis, which pulled the great toe away from the others so that the neck of the violin could fit in between his first and second toe. He also realized that other muscles were designed to counteract the force of gravity, pulling the arabesque and the held up violin towards the earth, while it was suspended in air. Together, as a system, these actions would be represented by the concept of static equilibrium, where the internal and external forces and torques pulled the arabesque position in different directions and ended up balancing each other out.

Once he had achieved this understanding, he decided to figure out ways to make it more dynamic. He was impaired in relating information about his body's action capabilities to visual information specifying the environment, but he relied upon his knowledge of the laws of physics to understand how movement would take place. Learning about the principle of conservation of angular momentum, he could perform a horizontal 360-degree rotation, and while in such a position it was easy to envision the rotation of the figure. Another type of rotation, which would involve an upside down forward roll, was much harder, as the position of the foot, violin, legs, arms, and torso would all be shifting in his mind's eye, though he could largely only process one aspect at a time. He would try to invoke the rotations of all of the subcomponents of the image in his mind, all at once, but was unable to do so. It reflected a deficit with spatial working memory, an executive function, which caused him to understand this as an aspect of his general executive dysfunction.

However, what about all that had led up to the creativity that went into his artwork, the free body diagram, the biomechanics analysis, modifying an arabesque to suspend the violin in air, and the neck of the violin being held between the great toe and the second toe by the motion of the abductor hallucis? All of the creativity that went into it could be explained by the broader concept of generative thinking, which was also an executive function. It described one's ability to generate solutions to problems and think in a flexible manner. He also relied on alternative ways to solve problems when a barrier was present, such as when he used his understanding of the concepts of biomechanics and laws of motion to compensate for his issues in relating his body movement in accordance to his visual information of the environment. Surely, he could apply such an approach to devise an alternative solution to

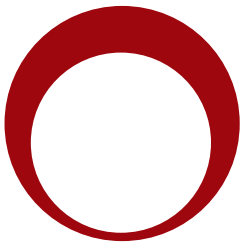
solving the problem at hand. Instead of using a central approach (an analysis that was heavily contingent on visuospatial working memory skills), he aimed for a peripheral approach, honing in on specific relevant details. During the enactment of this movement, he would learn to pay attention to the position of his foot at the end of the arabesque, initially in specific aspects of its midphase, and later at the end of its motion. From there, he could qualitatively estimate the trajectory of the violin, as its neck was grasped in between the toes of his foot, the violin travelled with the foot during the whole motion sequence. Knowing how important it was to keep his violin intact, and not leaving things to chance, he initially practiced with a toy sword, with one in particular that had a hilt and wide blade that resembled the neck and body of his violin. Through generating all the aforementioned aspects of this approach, he realized how important context was in terms of the involvement of executive functioning in problem solving, as well as goal directed behaviours and adaptation to one's environment in unique ways.

The concept of equilibrium that he had previously learned about proved to be thought provoking, although not exclusively how it was applied to physics. Specifically, it caused him to think about the significance of balance and equalization. This could allow him to find the balance between working within the confines of his affordances and overexerting his mind in order to surmount limitations and make progress. From the concepts of static equilibrium in his designs that preceded dynamic motion, he realized the importance of awareness and self-regulation as necessary precursors to action, and from there, verification could take place. As the effect of these self-regulatory patterns became more highly engrained, they would generalize to his ability to be receptive to others in social situations. Furthermore, he also realized the importance of having the discernment in life to apply the right force or torque in the right place at the right time.

His love of music, particularly string and bow instruments, was renewed and he began to learn how to play these instruments in dynamic ways as time went on. Through specific ways of learning how to play musical instruments, he would have the opportunity to train or retrain fine and gross motor skills that reflected developmental or acquired deficits in movement functioning. Thus, he would guide himself through the process of regaining functioning that had been compromised through the past trauma he had endured. Aegis's resolve was all the more strengthened, and he proceeded in his understanding of his independent, self-directed learning, encountering barriers and finding ways to surmount these barriers, in his unyielding endeavour to become a kinesthetic virtuoso.

-- Adam Evan Christie

“Doing something ‘under one’s aegis’: under the protection of a powerful, knowledgeable, strong force.”  
— Adam Evan Christie



Adam’s godfather Desmond Christie inspired this story by overcoming his brain injury and transforming himself into a renewed person.

# First Contact with Autism Mind

YES

by Joseph Z. Sheppard

Deep simmering frustration lies silent behind my blunted communication. In full view of my interlocker, I fidget, eyes gazing away ... stammering for words, my arms close as defense. I know absolutely that my breath's vibration does not reach meaningfully the ear of to whom I speak.

I dwell in this. I walk quietly through our externally shared narrative manifold, this rough terrain of social constructions woven into opaque fabric called the house of identities and differences. There is violence in this narrative matrix. Structural violence is the cruelest of constructed machines. Embroidered into our social narrative's quilted fabric are rigid systemic inequalities and readymade tragedies. Yet I hear, around me, smoothed down words, euphemisms, drawn overtop hasty statements that attempt to outrun our contaminant past—protecting

eyes from the vast public language and what it truly describes.

I draw ever closer to the epicenter of public language's gravitational center, more proximal to the dense heart of the collective unconscious, pulled evermore into the conformity of the middle. Then courageously I break free. I join the liberation from the mean. I describe with words this

symbolic layer in which I dwell and the collective unconscious becomes the collective conscious.

Sentences pour over me like a revealing cloak, removing my invisibility. Language is indivisible from the world. Yet there are many uses of language. There is a mode of language that mirrors nature, which for every object there are words to describe that object. There are words that also designate inner states. Emotional states are bound to object recognitions; each reference object carries a sense. Therefore, there is a terrain of feelings parallel to the terrain of objects. The terrain of objects can be described as the sum of facts referring to space-time and the terrain of feelings can be described through metaphors. One can also use language to recognize a symbolic terrain wherein a shared human mythological world materializes, claiming us as actors upon its theatrical stage. It is within this human symbolic space of myth that we can most meaningfully connect through language as a place of deep social sharing. It is regrettable that so many have lost the ability to tune into this form of language. There is a growing void in which blank mirrors reflect historical memories signifying a feud-battered testament to solipsistic loneliness. Yet when persons tune into the deepest frequencies of language, the deep down, and awaken to the ritual realms of serendipity, there ripens a world of meaningful and loving connections, wherein eternally shining stars locate home. It is in such a place where our mythical characteristics become manifest through co-creative artful sharing, such that our manners with each other increase in refinement, and true love and dignified community become everywhere visible.

The realm of words is seamlessly and indivisibly bound to the realm of objects of space-time. Myself as a social construction is just as much myself

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as my creature of evolution. Yet, I seek to rewrite my social construction. My words push out at escape velocity, pushing the boundaries of my stigma environment. I claim the role of author and uphold the freedom to write my own life-script. I conceal a hidden rebelliousness, non-childlike in its expression. Discourse-prisons shatter before me. The diminished roles that awaited me as forms of early retirement recede from view. My writing hand conducts skyward music and spins roped bridges unlocking new passages across metaphorical spaces—vast fiction-conjured horizons yet to be glimpsed suddenly arrive as real.

I walk among the entirety of pre-established social constructions that are embedded in the polis of language--rampant against the structural violence of the old story. I burst apart dualities of love and hate and leave false divides as carrion in wastelands forgotten. I ladle from my heart a light-sphere of golden sap and hold it high, dripping star-beams, and give it name; I call it

“I dwell in this. I walk quiet through our externally shared narrative manifold, this rough terrain of social constructions woven into opaque fabric called the house of identities and differences.”

# “I risk going too far into my autism details”

the greater inclusive love. I am relentless of purpose, careful in my communications. In my autism monologues I carefully prepare each forward step. I share my secrets with gentle intonations to all those awakened to the scripted world. The narrative world is editable and my edits are my repairs.

It was odd enough to discover myself embedded in a biological world as a creature, my body, speaking a complex grammar, my external world being only a qualia reflection. But now as an older writer, upon my solitude hill, the universe opens before me as a greater bristling vastness. And I catch myself, over-describing that limit I once struck, a place of complete discouragement where I witnessed the full disconnect from the old script. There I felt nihilism pour out vacuum spaces into my heart, leaden weight, and I still remember as if to heal. There is a blemished spot within all love, and fixation upon it threatens the whole. Hence, I gather strength to glide past my continued complaints for they could stall me altogether. Like scissors to paper I cut out sentences within my writings on which were drawn harsh judgments--rendering them into confetti, multicolored, I toss them away.

I conjure long-ago philosophers and sages and borrow from their bookish coffins—from what life they left here. I take solace in them that showed our grammar to be external to us, a social dwelling place rather than a mere grouping of referent knowledge. The spaceship of my mind is no longer merely a perceptual simulation swirling with action potentials. The communiqués I hear from other persons are most real and meaningful to me and I listen as if from the origin of my beloved. The “other” is centrally what captures my attention. Each person is as inalienably free as I am and through a greater democratic process we share roles as free voices coming together to build and repair. And among this garden of human happenings I find my dear friendships and deep connections and this affords me a more personal love.

I am humbled in my understanding; that which I have assembled as my own social construction is also what others have granted to me. What I am, as written in the narrative terrain, is continually a co-creation. It is always the community that accepts my “be it resolved motion” to manufacture my own identity, the negotiation of which is so pure a pathos, never ending a plot.

However, I risk going too far into my autism details, falling back into my depths, and failing to reach surface and exhale the breath of my core message. I have learned to pause for a moment, with eyes closed, drawing in my sustained breath, attending to a feeling of grounding, again steadfast with

my true voice.

It is here again that I remember the eternity in this moment, a feeling of surrounding immediacy. Yet I still fret as one who cares deeply too much. What is this urgent message that I attempt to describe?

I am true to my autism literary style. I draft together seemingly discordant themes and invite the reader to mentally gestalt a manner of viewing the world not easily expressed verbally within the limits of language. My attention draws near to a multilayered peace at the foot of serendipity’s pathway, as if music played there, reminding me, important work needs to be done, and I have already rewritten much in the deep underneath not visible. Peace is a deeper reality than any concept can capture.

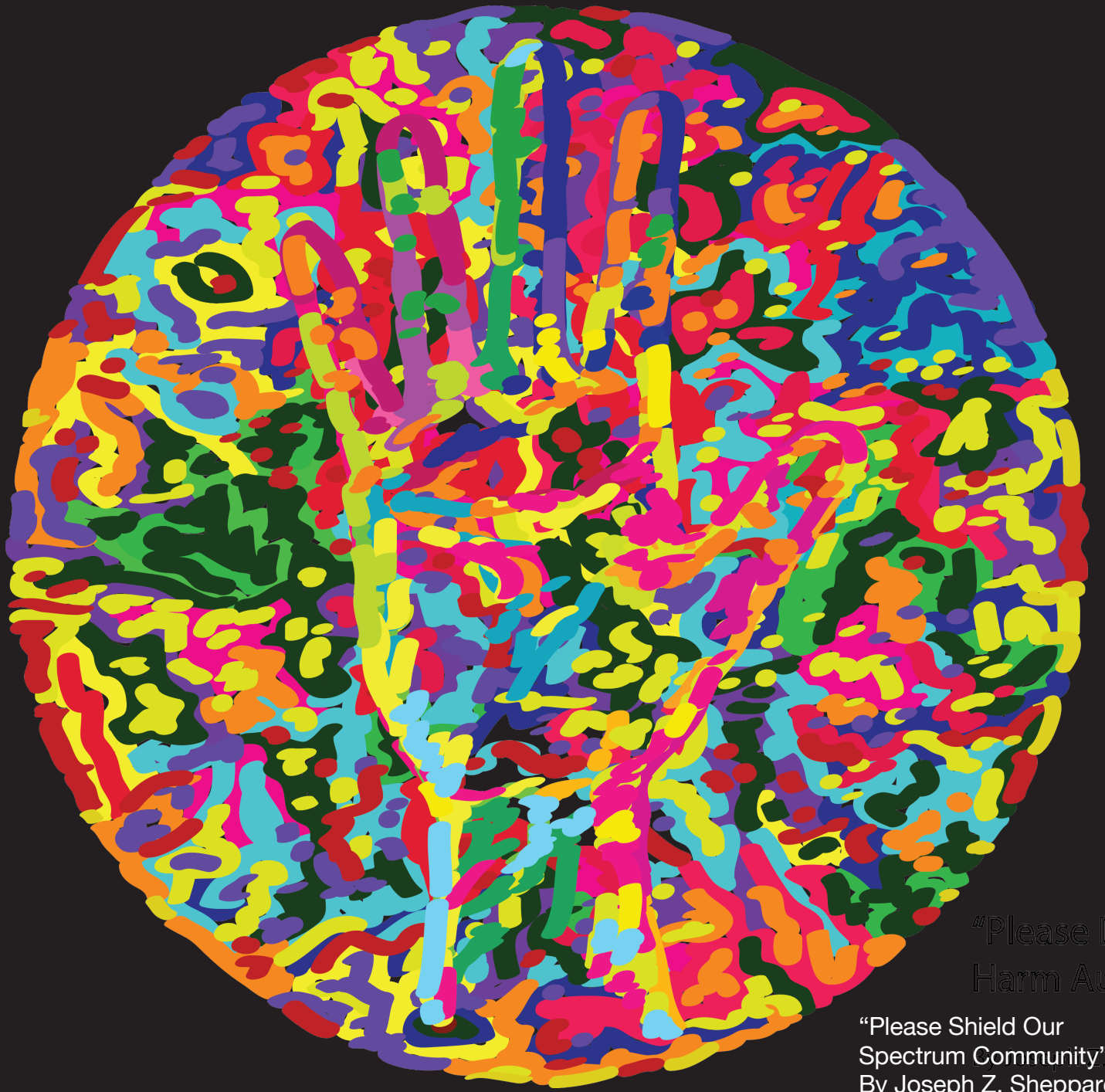
So much is unfolding to my senses, revealing its hidden heart, from the concealed within the concealed, secrets are surrendered to me—and it is my sweet reward to celebrate a new knowing amongst friends.

I have long claimed that my autism has its own intelligence; my atypical fixations continually guide me to glorious unfathomable purposes, proving to me time and again that they are wiser than the sum of my rationalizations. I dance over unseen stones that protrude up from life’s flow of water. The world drifts past in flux. I offer the world my contributions in the time I am allowed. And it is again time for me to contribute, to share with my readers something from myself. Upon the face of the inward sun I glanced, toward from what streams semiosis, and I received from the origin, uplifted upon startling waves, and there thoughts occurred to me most unexpected, my writing style shifted, no longer was I speaking from the terrain of the heart, I shifted to describing the terrain of objects through my autism context:

Suddenly I notice a headline in my writing, “Theory of Encapsulated Space-Time within an Impenetrable Singular Extensive Infinity.” According to Einstein space and time are not separate, rather, they are always indivisibly knitted together as space-time.

My thoughts flow free in the imaginative space of my mental imagery, and there a picture emerges from my joyful inspiration--space does not endure

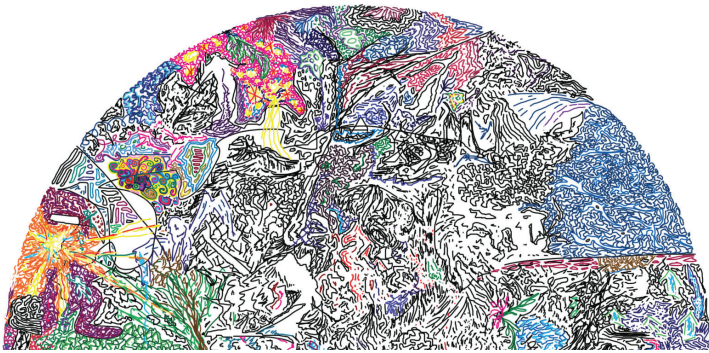
## Theory of Encapsulated Space-Time



“Please D  
Harm Au

“Please Shield Our  
Spectrum Community”  
By Joseph Z. Sheppard

“I prefer my philosophies to be closer to science fiction so they may serve my thoughts in bringing them to a greater experience of immediacy, health, and higher appreciation of life as it is in reality. I use fiction to locate and express my truth.”



Autism's Original Face depicts the silence that constitutes the central identity of the autistic artist.

through time, rather different locations on the space-time fabric, together as the sum of space-time events, exist statically encased in an impenetrable container that has neither the properties of space nor time. Long run-on sentences first appear as a stream of consciousness. Outside the horizon of the Big Bang there was neither extension nor duration and that same wall contains all space-time events as a singular shaped finite quantity frozen in timelessness.

An infinity of attributes requires a series of quantities; however all quantities in the universe are finite and even the imagination is finite in the time it has in which to imagine. If there were such a thing as infinite mass there would be infinite gravity and, therefore, the universe would have collapsed in on itself. However, something infinite could persist outside the limits of the sum of all space-time events as extensively infinite.

Cantor measured infinities alongside infinities on continuums to claim which infinities were larger infinities. Wittgenstein argued that infinite attributes couldn't exist in the material universe because all materiality is finite in every measure of attribute. Moreover, Wittgenstein claimed that infinite attributes could not be in the mind, or as Cantor might suggest, in the space of freedom, because the capacity to imagine continuing attributes is limited by time. My repetitive speech is an aspect of my writing style. I sometimes repeat statements as a way to punctuate them with respect.

Spinoza postulated a single infinite substantive that possessed infinite attributes. I disagree with Spinoza and Cantor and agree with Wittgenstein. I

postulate a singular extensive infinity that includes all infinities much like all zeros sum into a single zero. That which is infinite in extent and surrounds all finite quantities such as the totality of space-time events does not possess infinite attributes.

I borrow Cantor's continuum and match each space-time event with the same eternal moment within the singular non-dimensional extensive infinity. As one moment passes, that moment is paired with that which is outside all temporal moments—the same singular timeless moment. This continuum leaves me with the view that the entirety of space-time events is encapsulated in a container that cannot change or allow anything to pass through it, and that, therefore, seals all of space-time immovably forever inside itself.

Sometimes I daydream and imagine that Spinoza and Wittgenstein, as well as many other philosophers that I conjure were autistic. I feel a deep familiarity with how they communicate. But there is no way to go back and test them for autism. We cannot know if they had autism. I, however, feel privileged to have been diagnosed with autism. I know that I have autism.

I am concerned for those who have autism but are not diagnosed. I envision a new type of neurological testing that does not offer definitive diagnoses; rather they are miniature versions that are developed to test large groups at one time, at much cheaper cost, and function to identify candidates needing further neurological testing.

As an author and innovator of social constructions, I attempt to override stigma environments and dissipate systematic inequalities. There is no “me” without a community to accept me as “me.” I am thankful for the contributive place I have been given.

My model of encapsulated space-time suggests a form of eternal reoccurrence of the same; much like Nietzsche formulated it, wherein life is perpetually lived, again and again, as a type of immortality for a short duration. In this model no question remains of whether the universe came out of nothing or came out of something; rather the universe is a fixed quantity of space-time that is forever frozen in an impenetrable container of the singular extensive infinity. Therefore, there is no escape from this life. Erasable time is an illusion. Hence, I take seriously what happens here in this material capsule. I call this dwelling my spaceship. I interpret the materiality of this world as a manifold of information and the mechanics at play here as executable computations arising from a vast array of informational code. My brain translates information into perceptual worlds that occur within me, rather than external to me. The content of my perception appears like a scalar Higgs field formed into a bubble within a bath of pure superposition of information. This sea of massless change, pure superposition, quantum environment, shekhinah, in

# “There is an emotional terrain of the heart, just like there is a material terrain of space-time.”

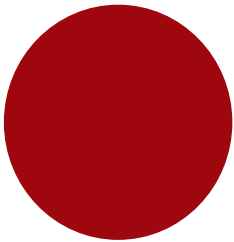
which bubble universes dwell, is the true stimulus that echoes our percept simulations. Within this bubble manifests the actual from a vast array of quantum potentiality.

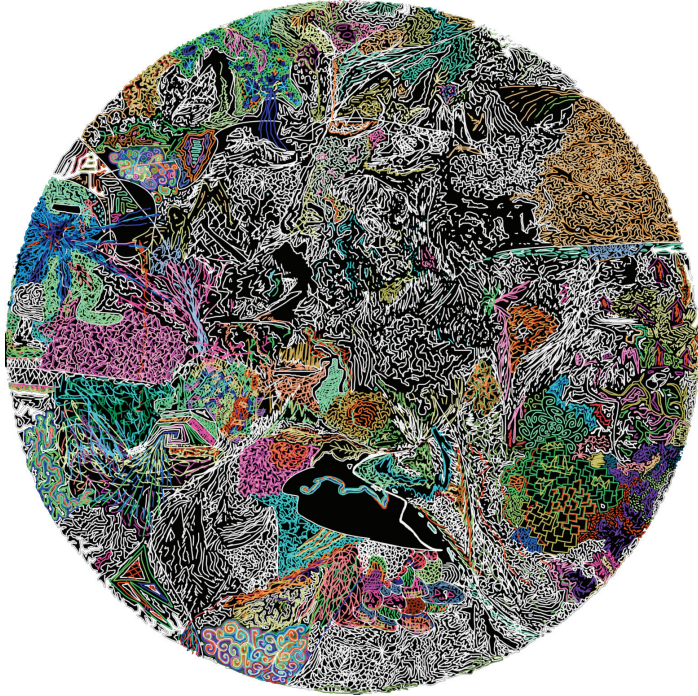
I use twelve names associated with Jewish mystical sefirot to name what Wittgenstein called riverbed or hinge propositions. Each riverbed proposition asserts a class of substantive that is ontologically prior to any proposition that attempts to support the existence of that class of substantive. My arguments supporting the existence of an external world make no sense if the external world is not assumed in the first place. My claim that there is an external world is more evident upon experiencing what that claim points to as self-evident than arguments attempting to convince another as to its validity as a conclusion based on premises or through the edition of sound inferences. Propositions about the existence of communicable language make no sense if language is not already fully existent.

In my autism way of seeing, born from long atypical fixations on a constellation of knowledge subjects, language is external to my perceptual world. Language is more real to me than objects. I am a natural language materialist. Percepts are transmuted sensory signals in my brain that produce a perceived simulation of what triggered those sensory responses. However, language is the great bridge to the “other” outside my body. I am not alone as long as the human conversation continues in a way I recognize as expressive of humanity.

I have entrained myself to a tradition of ritual connection to the external structural symbolic manifold in which we are all scripted characters. I make my existential choice and self-generate categorical imperatives from this choice. I give gifts to philosophers. For Nietzsche, I place eternal reoccurrence upon a surer footing and without eons passing between each reoccurrence. For Spinoza, I give the single extensive infinity rather than the infinity of infinite attributes. For Cantor, I give the continuum of encapsulated space-time and do so within a delimited freedom. For Wittgenstein, I give twelve sefirot hinge propositions to add to his one. For Kant, I give an existential choice that produces categorical imperatives as replacement for his postulation of a problematic metaphysical moral will. To Schrodinger, I offer the final singular observation triggering the single waveform collapse that initiated all preceding observations and apparent earlier waveform collapses.

For myself I have found peace with the world's facts. To my readers, I give my autistic honesty. The world is a neutral set of facts and it is my choice to be at peace with what is the case. This I believe to be the highest form of realism. I love reality as it is. I am at peace with the world and do not seek to convince the beings within it to think like me, or convert them to my form of





life, or save them from themselves, or bring them to a greater understanding. I merely communicate overtop my silence and seek conversational companionship that I recognize as refined and human, as belonging to me. I seek friends with which to voyage. I gather together those moments that are truly mine.

I point with my little finger past the manifold of existence and call myself a monotheist as I ponder the “isness” of the singular extensive infinity and orient myself to the ineffable by practice of mitzvot through sacred narrative. I withdraw from dogmatizing and allow the narrative in which I dwell to be freely democratic and larger than me. I acknowledge the inalienable freedom of all others and trust them to live their lives discerningly. I am reconciled to the equality of all persons. I do not support beliefs that propose others as being inferior or superior to myself. My monotheism never clouds my understanding that others are truly free, valid, and have their own ways of thinking. The world is a stimulus. The mature response to what expresses itself through this stimulus is most fittingly generated through meaningful empathic behaviors and truthful empathic voice. When I am trespassed by others who take from my well of ideas, “my mission,” and pretend or portend that these ideas are their original material—I allow them to fall asunder outside eternity by their own calamitous choice. This I do by merely looking away from them with my full heart. I carry no grudge, no bitterness, and I practice no feud or art of vengeance. I move forward at lightning pace revealing my autism world—this olam haba. Always the higher heath, the mature response, resonates to the greater.

I know nothing of what is outside the world because all facts pertain to the contents of the world. Language is limited in describing what is the case. All inductive statements rely on worldly states of affairs for their content. All inductive statements are never certain for they remain in a probabilistic superposition of states, being both true and false simultaneously, although with different probabilities. We share of facts what is reasonably true. Ordinary language relates to the ordinary world and I am an ordinary scientist and a simple human being. I do not need certainty to act with certainty. I take off my costume to show my real costume. I have earned my spectrum ataraxia and have grown into it well.

There is an emotional terrain of the heart, there is an objective world of perception, and there is a connective tissue of language which connect the objects of the world with the feelings of the heart, attaching outer phenomena with what one cares about most. Heart and mind remain in a duality until the cloth of narrative binds sensations to objects and turns a world of neutral facts into a series of meaningful felt experiences. It is meaningful for me to locate what my heart truly claims.

Sometimes I talk about my autism as if it were an additive intelligence—like some form of active intellect. My “pathological” fixations have continually revealed that they happen for an intricate instrumental purpose. They have at many times kept me safe and brought me fine opportunities. It has taken me much time to find peace with my autism, to greet it as a noble ally. I have learned to love my autism, trust, and respect my autism. I now call my fixations “atypical” rather than “pathological” out of kindness to myself. I sometimes monologue in my discussions but these monologues have important rationales as to why I say them. Autism is clinically measured as a list of deficits, and for good reason, because that is a central purpose to clinical diagnostics. Yet, autism is other things also—there is something about my autism that guides me to an unexpected self-actualization and a greater feeling of empowerment.

This article is my way of emphasizing my view that when we impact each other's lives, we impact each other's inescapable eternity. The moments of this life and my contributions are impeccably important to me. I am eternally in gratitude to those who benefit and touch my life meaningfully. Not only am I a writer of myself, a sovereign over how I interpret my story, I am also an active reader who reads meaning into my life. Narrative intervention is key to sowing us closer together as a functioning quilt within a broader learning community. Our narrative ground is as substantive as our quantum ground. The story of us all is as eternally encapsulated as space-time.

Non-local quantum mechanics is centered on waveform collapse theory, local quantum mechanics is centered on decoherence theory, and classical physics is centered on relativity theory. My worldview includes a combination of these theories rather than a preference for one of them. I accept a superposition of theories arisen only from facts. I imagine a vast array of static space-time fabrics, Higgs fields, frozen in everlasting timelessness, within an ocean of pure flux and superposition of becoming. This quantum environment of pure potentiality exists within the walls of the singular extensive infinity. Each actuated universe is a bubble containing a scalar field within a perceiving body wherein the content of perception is collapsed by the perceiver. Each person is, therefore, her or his own universe. The world of perception I name hokhimah. The world of quantum superposition outside my body in which universes dwell I call shekhinah. The horizon of information surrounding hokhimah that corresponds to the information within hokhimah, which contains the facts of the world, I call binah. The external narrative that holds social constructions and functions as a symbolic terrain in which one participates in human stories I call tifferet. The language used to comprehend the data of the world I call daat. The topography or felt landscape of landmarked feelings that parallel the topography of percepts as bound

together as the salience network, I call hesed. Reason bound to logic and desire from which discernment and want arise I call gevurah. My personal human autonomic behaviors I call netsah. My personal voluntary behaviors animated by my own executive functions I call yesod. The world of my imagination, memory, and mental imagery I call hod. The singular extensive infinity I call ein sof. The connective thread to the musicality originating from the limit of finitude where vibrates the singular extensive infinity that calls out to the collective of humanity, encountered as received “will” or “inspiration” or “openness to truth” or “the star-shine that crowns me” or “gnosis” I call keter. These are my contributed riverbed propositions that serve to classify all forms of existent substantives within the bundle of life.

Empirical space-time arises mechanistically from computational executable operators embedded within its surrounding informational horizon. The objects of my desire are, therefore, symbolic and attached to concepts rather than percepts. This is another way of saying gevurah operates computationally upon binah information rather than hokhimah objects. If I act in accordance with the dictates of my desires than my behaviors are in full accord with the predetermined static space-time in which I was first made self-aware. If I somehow freely act outside those operational parameters than my body is no longer consistent with the mechanics of the space-time fabric in which I was embedded and so I decohere from my current quantum system and establish myself into a new, yet similar, quantum system. When I decohere, I eject into another space-time fabric that is coherent with the mechanical trajectory of my alternative choice. Within my body-universe there happened a non-local waveform collapse of actualities entangled with the outer perimeter of my body. These actualities, in turn, serve as a conserved summed quantity that behaves classically. I shed my body when I act outside my greater body’s predetermined mechanics. I decohere from my old life and become a new greater body holding within it a qualia universe by process much like multiple worlds theory except parallel universes are not created with each choice at every moment. I am only able to make free choices at specific intervals within predetermined sequences of behavior I call predetermined episodic cut scenes. And I call a rebirth into a new parallel body-universe a “bounce.”

I prefer my philosophies to be closer to science fiction so they may serve to guide my thoughts to a greater experience of immediacy, health, and higher appreciation of life as it is in reality. I practice deep acceptance of the cut scenes of my life. I have little control over many of these cut scenes and, therefore, grieve the continual loss experienced within them. Death’s taking begins at birth; however, these moments we share are eternal. I do not wish to rationalize my life or even justify myself. I find my own meaning in my suffering, I own my suffering, and sometimes my suffering stands with no meaning due to this broken fable and our shattered world. My story belongs to me. I wish to uplift my freedom and give myself every opportunity to grow and change and take full responsibility over myself—to become a completely new person through continual lifelong learning. My autism brings me to greater moments if I trust in my autistic processes and give them time. Therefore, I tend to trust only what compliments my autism timing. I recognize truth within timing.

Within these fixed quantities of space-time events I see sightings of my manifesting self, skipping like a stone backward through the pond of my memories. One’s final observation includes the entire history that birthed one to become what one was to become. In my science fiction dreams, all of the universe’s formation and the history of evolution were both instantaneous as a singular waveform collapse and long lasting over billions of years as the natural history of Earth, each according to differing reference points, either from the horizon of the universe or from within its center. My canvass of conjectures serves to illuminate my journey to this immediate moment, a radically unfamiliar state of now, where I freely bounce through worlds within

worlds. I have travelled far. I return with a newly loving heart.

But this is not what I have called you here to encounter. This is my introduction in macrocosm, a guided tour through the first chamber of my narrative house resident within my autism mind. Sometimes the background is the true foreground. Zen is an emptiness framed by a foreground figure. My silence expresses itself in the spaces between my sounds and words. I rest peacefully, detached from the oceanic quantum environment surrounding me that bestows all collapsing and decohering information with the property of change. I require no fixed knowledge and enjoy what in language conserves its superposition of states, its blur and abstraction, which signifies that which exists but is beholden to no objective referent. The purest and most elegant substantives, love, wisdom, and justice, have this quality. I do not need certainties and axioms to be fully at peace and at home here. I have always enacted my freedom within the cut scenes of this abode. I am an experienced cosmic nomad in the central narrative terrain and my words merely provide foreground fragments needed to piece together its full background message.

Here I have introduced myself to speak about autism. I identify as having three classifications of autism. I have an autistic body. It has symptoms that can be clinically measured. It also has abilities and capacities that autism culture celebrates. I have environmental sensitivities as if the world is nudging constantly in on me. I am a submarine too deep for its hulls. I have language differences. I speak bluntly about a differently experienced world in which I dwell. I have impairments that block access to activities in which I wish to participate. I constantly seek helpers and technology to make due in this world. Yet my autism is much more than the sum of clinical symptoms that get construed as the sum of “me.”

Autism literature is often intricately detailed, apparently fragmented, seemingly alien like an unknown discordant music, it monologues, expects the reader to gestalt the whole, decode its hidden meanings, full of pregnant pauses, and invites readers to lookup complicated words in order to navigate its oddly chosen grammar. Autism literature transmits through frequencies not typically received. Autism literature co-opts ordinary language to describe the world in an unfamiliar autism language—it initiates first contact with an unrevealed intelligence!

Beyond my autism body, I have autism agency. My autism informs the core being of who I am. I speak as an autistic person. I describe having autism as having a coat of many colours. My autism agency does not fear in the same way I see so many others fear. My autism agency loves from the depth of by being, pouring out gifts in celebration--playfulness is the quintessential nature of my identity.

When people speak as though the stigma environment and the structural violence in which I am so very familiar, in which I immediately encounter face to face as a daily challenge, does not exist ... as I watch it grin and eye me as prey, and am assured moment to moment that it is no figment of my imagination, watching as it stalks behind my community of autistics, then I write long run-on sentences expressing my remembered traumas, through memory circuits claiming me, swaying me back and forth, jarring me with shaking stereotypy.

There are many forms of bullying besides schoolyard bullying. Bullying is embedded in language and autistics have too long been the designated victim of such inclination.

There is much bullying in intellectual discourse. Even concepts that seem solidly defined are fought for as to their meaning in the great arena of power politics. There is excess “will to dominate” in humans and safe places often seem sparse. It took years for me to learn eye contact, but it was shortly after that I learned that eye contact is what conveys inclusion and exclusion—and so it brought sadness to me also. I became aware of my exclusion until I

# “My body is my Space-ship.”

found my university refuge and my many learning sanctuaries and travel companions therein.

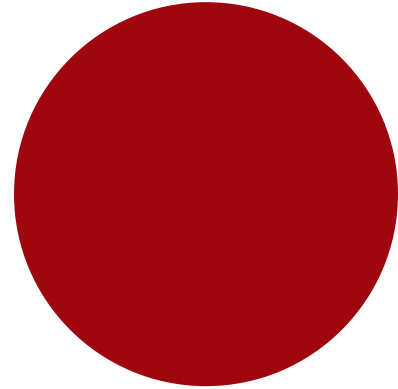
Now a new sunshine glows upon me. My autism agency writes the next chapters of my life and here I submit my thoughts for my community to peer-reviewer and accept or reject. I have learned to gravitate only to those places of inclusion and have happily found myself here at the University of Victoria. Something amazing is happening here in the abode of our language. At long last, I have learned that I can direct my atypical fixations to either a positive or negative subject—I am that free. Although I will always have fixations, life as a series of meaningful positive fixations is fuller and richer and more magnificent than the flipside.

I learned from a wise person that community love is a different kind of love than is most often discussed, but community love is crucially important to me. When persons with autism have exponentially higher rates of abandonment, bullying, loss of friendships, loss of work situations, loss of intimate partners, what is left is strong community. I believe in autism community and what we can do together as connected people that share in a sense of belonging. So I place my past pain into a containing ball and kick it far into a forgotten field. My will does not turn backward. My past falls away like last night's dream at morning rise. I see many friends waiting for me, already moving as if in dance, joyous, embracing one another, at inner peace—all sharing in their works. They populate my community and my agency does not have to contort itself to reside there with them.

And lastly, I am autism as a social construction. I exist in the externalized public narrative and I am an “other” to other people. If my autism agency is not coherent with the social constructions afforded me by society than I am isolated and termed delusional. And so it is with great carefulness that I have become more aware of in which ways I am the “other” of those who surround me, and my autism is also somewhat foreign to others, abstract and unknown, occupying a strange place in the fabric of public discourse.

I am responsible for my work and it is upon the quality of my work on which I actively build a human life for myself—it is through my work and how I ethically and supportively interact with others that I am able to claim my role. I reject those who write me into their life-scripts as the villain. I make mistakes but I am here to do the best I can do for the betterment of all people.

In my autism mind I see the narrative matrix opening wide and expanding like a semiotic Big Bang—I see a vibrant new world of language that is forming into being and, therefore, I am fully confident in my role as co-author. I am autism body, autism agency, and autism as a social construction. I am also a writer who is able to edit the externalized script in which we are eternally embedded. And I have said it before; a master of memes is greater than an army of nations. New ideas can rapidly spread through the human population and suddenly the world can appear completely different. New ideas can bring true change. There are beautiful and wondrous things ahead for those with



autism spectrum coats of many colours. Out of a great poverty I believe we shall find lasting peace and true wealth. Autistics make tremendous leaders and I esteem to always respect other autistics as honoured persons.

I believe persons with autism need a new relationship with university organizations. And the University of Victoria is an example of what glorious innovations can happen through the exceptional support of a campus community. Our student autism community is building many autism support initiatives as part of our Autism Skyward leadership and transition program for students with autism. Authors with Autism is a university-based peer-support group for students and lifelong learners that centers on individual self-actualization through lifelong learning within a learning community. It emphasizes writing as a profound breakout method of communication, enabling one to script one's own life, and more meaningfully share everyday experiences with others. Autism's Own journal and conference provides a venue for autistic cultural expression. Co-op and mentorship programs are a useful way to address the incremental needs of persons with autism as they work their ways to job placement. The co-op program centers upon job scouting for specific jobs that suit the client's atypical fixated interests and unique abilities. Mentorship programs are needed that offer support pairings with students involved in the same program, and maybe even in the same classes, as the students with autism. Universities would do well to hire a facilitator of autism services to help connect spectrum students to university services by physically going with them to service locations and help with the setting up of appointments, acquiring the knowledge they seek, and filling out forms.

Transition year credit programs are helpful in supporting autistic students' capacity to navigate university for the first time. Specialized workshops are needed to help students with autism become more familiar with the science of autism and what is known about their condition. Often a person with autism requires a period of coming to accept her or his autism. Likewise, autism awareness training workshops are needed for the public, especially service providers, in order to help societal members better understand the

peculiarities of autism. Time and project management workshops are needed to provide support in using technology and coping skills in order to use time more efficiently to succeed in projects. Empowering autistic students as political entities is also important. Student disability societies and student unions can be a great starting place for political involvement. University autism cultural journals and special events are needed to make social spaces for the voices of those with autism. The university can, indeed, become a fully transformative institution that fosters academic excellence, greater self-advocacy, community integration, and career building in preparation for a life of meaningful societal contributions.

University-based rehabilitation and self-growth interventions provide a strong foundation of support for students with autism, however, the university also offers research opportunities that can help all persons with autism lead more participatory and multi-dimensional lives. Areas that I have been exploring for this possibility are: 1) “Eye Contact Coaching” as a way of training persons with autism, if they choose, to increasingly perform typical eye contact with a trainer. 2) “Facial Response Training” focuses on generating facial responses that communicate the affective expressions that the person with autism intends to exhibit. A component to this is non-verbal training to help students become more aware of messages being communicated through non-verbal means. 3) “Memory Assistive Technology Education” provides a hands-on setup of technological solutions using a variety of technological options to help students setup digital calendars, task lists, reminders, notes, and other memory assistive programs in one solution on a smart phone or tablet computer. 4) “Affective Self-Regulation Techniques” may help provide an autistic student with scientific knowledge about their affective states, what triggers or influences them, coping skills, and what assists autonomic responses rise to return to baseline. 5) “Attention-Shifting Prompts” are needed for persons with autism to set-shift out of fixated interests into other tasks when appropriate. Setting up an external prompt system to cue students to conclude other tasks, and move onto new tasks, is an important enabler of their success. This may also include building ritualized activity programs to help students with autism generate consistency around changing work demands. 6) “Non-Victimization Training” can help persons with autism protect themselves better against bullying and victimization.

Many pieces of autism gestalt together, they become emergent as a manifest consciousness, breaking surface and becoming free and fluid. Many with autism have a different neurological tract arrangement in their brains. We may be wired differently, yet where there are impairments there are opportunities for compensation to occur through use of other faculties to restore what is missing.

I began this article in my depth, in the terrain of my core heart, where my feelings connect with what I immediately experience in order to discern what is most meaningful to me. From my depth I journeyed as an autistic voice into my scientific activity as an autism advocate at the University of Victoria. I am a socialist with needs and a capitalist with wants. My spaceship communicates to other intergalactic vessels through many spectrum frequencies. I need persons with autism to have the support they need in order to be fully valued members of our society. I believe in the capacity for autistics to reshape and repair our world and offer a new hope to all peoples. My article is an opportunity to encounter autism mind in the first person—as a first contact.



# BEAUTIFUL SPECTRUM

Joseph Z. Sheppard's Autism Mandala series evokes roiling scenes of raw experience as a metaphor of how he encounters the world through the filter of autism. Each has a unique message.

# AUTISM MANDA- LAS



# THANK YOU

We greatly appreciate all who have sponsored our events and made our journal so special. Our readers have made our effort worthwhile.

We hope even more authors with autism submit journal entries for next year's Autism's Own journal.

This journal truly belongs to us, the autism community, as our own.

