

Produced by and for autistic people

# Autism Southeast United

Summer 2018

Volume 1, Issue 1



# Autism Southeast United

---

*Autism Southeast United* is a magazine run by and for autistic adults (although parents may choose to subscribe for their autistic children under the age of 16). The magazine aims to put people who have the condition in touch with each other and to share information so they lead more independent lives.

Please note that *ASU* will receive many letters each quarter. The *ASU* staff will do its best to respond to each letter. Please do not take this personally if you do not receive a response to your letter or submission. Try again the next quarter.

*ASU* is an online magazine only. Because *ASU* is volunteer-based, the magazine does not have a budget for print issues of the magazine. Donations are happily accepted. Please email The Maestro at [asumag@chattanoogaautismcenter.org](mailto:asumag@chattanoogaautismcenter.org) on how you can make a donation to this magazine.

*Autism Southeast United* was founded in 2018 by Scott Kramer, an autistic adult, in response to an inadequate amount of services for people who best classify as being autistic or with Asperger syndrome – and the potential for self-help and networking as a means of support for this group.

The provision for the Editor-In-Chief's post was to develop a publication that was truly a voice of the people it was aimed. The name, *Autism Southeast United*, was chosen as an offshoot of *Asperger United* – similar to demographics of this magazine.

Thank you for taking time to explore this magazine and to learn what it all has to offer individuals who are on the autism spectrum or who live with Asperger syndrome.

Yours, The Maestro

Please send all original correspondence (features, pictures, artwork, penpal ads, personal accounts of young adults/adults with autism/Aspergers, penpal pages, letters to the editor, poems, artwork, short stories, recipes, features, "organization of the quarter", and 25-word rants and online subscription requests to the following:

Editor-In-Chief: The Maestro

Email: [asumag@chattanoogaautismcenter.org](mailto:asumag@chattanoogaautismcenter.org)

Postal Address:

*Autism Southeast United*

c/o GCA Centre for Adult Autism

Chattanooga Autism Center

1400 McCallie Avenue, Suite 100

Chattanooga, TN 37404

Telephone number:

In the USA: (423) 531-6961 x7

All we need is your email address and name, and we will add you to the email notification list.

Thank you to *Asperger United* in the UK for inspiring The Maestro to create *Autism Southeast United*.

Please note that the views expressed in *Autism Southeast United* are not necessarily those of the Editor-In-Chief, any autism organizations or groups, or those involved in the publication of this magazine.

**Contributions for the Fall 2018 issue should reach ASU by September 30, 2018. This is a hard deadline.**

Welcome to the Summer 2018 issue of Autism Southeast United, the first-ever issue. You can write in about anything. My suggestions for themes are there to help, not to command.

ASU is an online-only magazine produced by and for autistics (adults and young adults on the autism Spectrum) and those who classify as living with Asperger syndrome.

Two digital formats are available: PDF (which you can download) or the new web format at [www.gcaspies.org/autism-southeast-united](http://www.gcaspies.org/autism-southeast-united).

If you are looking at the new format, please email and let us know what you think. I am sure it can be improved over time.

Yours, The Maestro

---

The theme for the Fall 2018 issue will be "My Favorite Things". Please read more about the theme and what the editorial staff is looking for with submissions and contributions on page 26, the back page of this magazine.

---

## Contents of the Summer 2018 Issue

Front Cover.....	Front Cover
General ASU Information.....	2
Pen Pal Ads.....	4
From the Editor’s Desk.....	5
Article: 3 Pieces of Advice for Employers from an Adult with Autism – Dylan Volk.....	6
Review: Being Autistic on TV – Robert Watkins.....	8
Personal Stories – Chris.....	10
Personal Stories – Rebecca Sharrock.....	10
Personal Stories – On The Freeway/Brandon Wooten.....	12
Personal Stories – A Bittersweet Epiphany/Dia Neighbors.....	13
Article: College Tips for Asperger’s Adults.....	15
Organization on the Rise: Autism Improvised.....	15
Original Artwork: Julianne Howell, “Strawberries in an Orange Battlefield” .....	20
Original Artwork: Leilani Copenhaver, “Layla” .....	20
Original Artwork: Krista Darrow, “Oil on Canvas” .....	21
Poetry: Melody Sokolow, “Before My Diagnosis” .....	21
Poetry: Melody Sokolow, “Queen of the Underworld” .....	22
Short Story: “The Aardwolves” – Leilani Copenhaver.....	24
Back Page.....	26

## How to Place a Pen Pal Ad

1. All you need to do is send your ad along with Your name, address, and email address to *Autism Southeast United*. You can use postal mail (snail mail) or email. The next pen pal number will be given to your ad when it arrives.
2. Please note that *ASU* does not print dating ads, as it is unable to provide suitable support and is not a focus of *ASU*
3. Those under the age of 16 must have parental permission before placing a pen pal ad in *ASU*. Records will be checked to ensure that a parent has submitted an online subscription to *ASU* for children under the age of 16. If no records are found, *ASU* will be unable to print that person's pen pal ad.
4. If you receive no replies, please do not take this personally.
5. To place a pen pal ad, please send your ad to *Autism Southeast United*, c/o GCA Centre for Adult Autism, Chattanooga Autism Center, 1409 McCallie Avenue, Suite 100, Chattanooga, TN USA 37404 or by email at [asumag@chattanoogaautismcenter.org](mailto:asumag@chattanoogaautismcenter.org) only. Pen pal ads brought into the Chattanooga Autism Center will **NOT** be included in any issue of *ASU*. Please follow this very carefully.

## How to Reply to Pen Pal Ads

1. Please remember to let us know the name and pen pal ad number of the person whom your letter is for. All pen pals are numbered by the Editor-in-Chief, not the person who sends in the ad.
2. Please remember to put your address on your letter, even if sent via email to *ASU*.
3. To respond to a pen pal ad, please send your letter to *Autism Southeast United*, c/o GCA Centre for Adult Autism, Chattanooga Autism Center, 1400 McCallie Avenue, Suite 100, Chattanooga, TN USA 37404 or by email at [asumag@chattanoogaautismcenter.org](mailto:asumag@chattanoogaautismcenter.org) only. Pen pal ads brought into the Chattanooga Autism Center will **NOT** be forwarded to the pen pal recipient. Please follow this very carefully.
4. We will pass your letter to the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee that person will reply as that is entirely their decision.
5. Please note that all snail mail letters and letters sent via email to *Autism Southeast United* are opened before being sent on to ensure that all guidelines are being followed closely.

### **\*\*IMPORTANT NOTICE – PLEASE READ\*\***

*Autism Southeast United* is happy to publish pen pal ads. **However, we must stress that we are not a pen pal or introduction organization.** We do not match people up. We cannot monitor letters (except for the first letter that is sent via to *ASU*), so please be cautious when releasing or disclosing personal details in your letters. The



Chattanooga Autism Center, GCA Centre for Adult Autism, or *Autism Southeast United* cannot intervene or be held responsible for any ensuing correspondence between letter writers.

## Pen Pal Ads – Summer 2018 Issue

Please include the pen pal number when responding to someone’s pen pal ad. Otherwise, the *Autism Southeast United* magazine staff will not know who to send your response to and such. Thanks.

Pen Pal Ad: 2018-001

Hey everyone, my name is Kelli. I am from Boyertown, Pennsylvania. I live with classic autism and am 36 years of age. I am talkative, reliable, and prompt. I enjoy meeting new people very much and can talk anyone’s ear off. I love music and celebrity gossip, with my other interests being movies and cats. Looking to share experiences with others and talking through different experiences that go along with autism. I look forward to hearing from you. Seeking to connect with pen pals anywhere in the USA, Canada, or Mexico.

Pen Pal Ad: 2018-002

Hello. My name is Leilani. I am from Helena, Montana. I best identify as being Aspergers and am 19 years old. I wish to exchange letters with a new friend. I am enjoy making and sending small crafts, such as homemade cards and homemade keychains. I would enjoy the same from my pen pal. I seek a pen pal to connect with others, and because I love to get mail. I am an animal lover, especially cute cats. I enjoy watching cartoons, especially SpongeBob. I like art, and my favorite form is sculpture. Other hobbies include going for walks, indulging in arts and crafts, chatting, and learning new trivia. I love to write stories and talk about anything. I look forward to hearing from you. Seeking to connect with pen pals anywhere in the USA or Canada.

---

## From the Editor’s Desk by The Maestro It’s Time to Express Your Voice – NOW!

For many, many years, autistic adults and young adults were not given much of an opportunity to express themselves. Often they were ignored, overlooked, or simply neglected from being given a voice to express themselves and how they felt as an autistic. After all, why should autistics be any different than the non-autistic population in the USA or elsewhere in expressing one’s self? The time is long past for autistics not to express their voice, and *Autism Southeast United* magazine gives those individuals an ideal platform to express that voice.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution is about “freedom of speech”, although much interpretation has been made about what exactly “freedom of speech” is. This editorial is not to discuss the merits of what “freedom of speech” is or is not. There are plenty of other forums outside this magazine (e.g. various social media channels, etc.) in which people can discuss the merits from a political or judicial standpoint. However, for purposes of “freedom of speech” with this magazine, I consider it to be about giving individuals who submit original features, articles, short stories, poetry, artwork, and

much more a platform to express their voice in a respectful way that allows people to agree to disagree without everyone breaking out in a fight over a written or verbal war of words with one another.

In addition to providing a voice for others, this magazine is about expressing one's self in a way that is encouraging and positive for others to read. So many of us (myself included) have seen or read enough articles, etc. that have said about how people on the spectrum are not able to do this or that for various reasons. Why? Why should autistic individuals be any less different than non-autistic individuals when it comes to ability? The word disability, when broken down, has two parts, dis- and ability. The prefix dis- comes from the Latin meaning "away" or "apart from" and said in a negative way that is non-inclusive towards others. Thus from a societal viewpoint, disability means that our society looks an aspect of individuals that is away or apart from their ability. Instead of looking at what individuals can do to the best of their abilities, society looks at the part of individuals that is away or apart from their abilities – and focuses on that very thing. A very sad situation overall.

Why do we need to focus on the negatives or the negative perceptions of what a person CANNOT do as a society? Why should it be negative in the first place? This is why *Autism Southeast United* and its editor, The Maestro, choose to celebrate the efforts and the abilities of individuals who have submitted original work as part of an issue of *ASU* in a positive, encouraging way. People need to feel good about themselves and what they are fully capable of with their abilities. Not negative. From Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, this magazine fulfills the social belonging (pen pals and being a part of this magazine) and esteem (having an original article or feature or artwork published in the magazine) needs. The feeling as if you have arrived with the

ideal platform in which you can express your voice that can be carried out to the readership of this magazine.

---

In closing, I encourage readers to consider submitting their original work to The Maestro at [asu@chattanoogaautismenter.org](mailto:asu@chattanoogaautismenter.org) to be reviewed for possible inclusion in a future edition of *ASU*. Why sit on the "sidelines" reading an issue of *ASU*, when you have an opportunity to be a part of *ASU* through your original work in a future issue of the magazine? To see the submission guidelines of all 11 categories, please go to [www.gcasapies.org/autism-southeast-united-magazine](http://www.gcasapies.org/autism-southeast-united-magazine) and click on the Submission Guidelines link on the upper hand corner of the webpage. Until the next issue, best of wishes to you.

Yours, The Maestro

---

## **Article: 3 Pieces of Advice for Employers from an Adult with Autism – Dylan Volk**

My name is Dylan Volk. I am 25 years old and I have what is known as high functioning autism. In my experience with almost 40 jobs, having been fired from every one of them, I have some advice for employers. I would like to tell you 3 things that I want employers to know about people with autism.

### **1. "High Functioning" is a misnomer for people with autism.**

The term "High Functioning" to describe my disability is one of the biggest challenges I have to deal with in the workplace. Because I present to the average person as neurotypical, what people on the autism spectrum call normal, employers underestimate the impact of my disability. And please make no mistake about it, it is a disability. Without accommodations I am less able to do the same job functions as other people. I need assistance. That is not an insult to me, it is simply a fact of life. What I find insulting is the term "differently abled." It leads employers to think that my challenges are no more of an obstacle than any other person's and, therefore, it devalues the struggles I am faced with every day. People tend to go on face value. They go by what they feel not by what they know. I have found that even when I tell people I have a disability and how it will impact my work, if they do not feel like I have a disability they assume I am "just being difficult" or "not cutting it." And that is when I get fired. Employers, please do not assume that because I am "high functioning" I am like everyone else.

### **2. Forget all the rules about privacy, PLEASE tell people about my disability!**

I have asked several employers and Human Resources managers to please disclose my disability to my co-workers. They usually tell me they prefer not to do that as it violates privacy laws. They say they don't like to talk about employee's disabilities. My response tends to blow them away, "The difference between my disability and those of many people who that rule was created for is my disability is invisible. You don't have to tell people about the guy in the wheelchair or the woman who can't see because everyone can immediately recognize their disabilities." I have found this argument is challenging even for Human Resources managers to deny. If having co-workers know about my disability means they are more "forgiving," I am perfectly fine with that. It may mean I keep my job.

### **3. Take the most specific instructions you can imagine, and make them much clearer for me.**

Whenever I get a job I tell my employer that I need extremely clear and specific instructions. And they always say the same thing: "No problem, I can do that." Issues arise later when they realize that the extremely clear and specific instructions I need are at a level they don't even comprehend. You see, neurotypical people read between each other's lines much more than they know. For example, when I was working in Utah I spilled some mop water at the pizza place I was working at and had to clean it up. I mopped and mopped but I just could not seem to get the floor dry. I went to my supervisor to ask what he thought of the wet floor. I asked, "Can I go now?" He said, "If you think that is good enough I guess you can go." As you are well aware, that is not a yes or a no. It is not clear or specific. I mopped some more. I am not an expert on evaporation. I am not a professional in the custodial arts. I had no clue what that floor would look like when the water dried. I asked him again if my work was completed. He gave me the same response. In his mind he was totally convinced he was telling me to stay by his tone, pitch and body language. But I am autistic. I take everything literally. So when he said I could go, I left. I was fired the next day. When someone with autism tells you they need clear instructions, think to yourself "literal and ridiculously clear" and you might get it right.



Dylan Volk is co-author of *Chasing the Rabbit: A Dad's Life Raising a Son on the Spectrum*. He is a nationally acclaimed public speaker for autism awareness and autism understanding and an autistic young adult. You can learn more at [www.chasingtherabbit.org](http://www.chasingtherabbit.org).

---

## **Review: Being Autistic on TV – Robert Watkins**

Deej: Inclusion Shouldn't Be a Lottery

It's a typical scenario in American culture: the adolescent child has finished high school and is leaving the nest to go off to college. The parents are often portrayed as having the most difficulty with this transition, as their child is excited to be gaining independence. But the college-bound teenager faces unexpected challenges ahead, and the whole family must deal with a significant change in their lives.

Now imagine that same scenario, where the adolescent is a non-speaking autistic, deserted by his biological mother at the age of three, and abused in foster care before being adopted by the Savarese family. This documentary is eponymously named for Deej, the favorite nickname of D.J. Savarese, a young man determined to get into Oberlin College despite challenges that many would consider insurmountable. As Deej himself says of Oberlin (using assistive technology), "The college has a long history of inclusion, having accepted both the first female student and the first female student of color. I want to be its first non-speaking autistic."

*Deej* was broadcast in the autumn of 2017 on PBS's *America Reframed*, and can still be viewed online at <http://www.pbs.org/video/deej-maekjq/>. A slightly longer DVD version is available for purchase from the producers at <https://www.deejmovie.com/>.

Throughout the film we are exposed Deej's unwavering determination to gain some independence in his life. Deej may be non-speaking, but has learned facilitated communication using a keyboard and other assistive devices. His senses can easily become overloaded, adding to his anxiety, sometimes causing him confusion about his surroundings. He frequently stims (hand flapping, jumping, vocalizing) as a way to express excitement or to regulate his sensory integration. At times he loses "track of [his] body" as his proprioceptive dysfunction becomes overwhelming. Given the impairments that accompany his autism, regardless of the degree of Independence he seeks, it won't come without hard work.

The following clip shows that Deej, still in high school, is not just resolute to achieve self-determination, but that he is also very much an activist for other autistics:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEaRdnmia6I>

His adoptive father, Ralph, is a Professor of American Literature and Disability Studies at Grinnell College in Iowa; his adoptive mother, Emily, is an autism professional. It was Emily's work that brought them into contact with Deej, and eventually they adopted him as their own. And in this D.J. was very lucky, for the support he receives from his family is tremendous. Not all autistics are as fortunate. D.J.'s family not only have the will and determination to provide whatever support he needs, they also have the means.

Fortunately, D.J.'s dream comes true when he is accepted at Oberlin — a cause for both celebration and anxiety. This combination of emotions is natural for any young adult about to leave the family home. While DeeJ is typical in feeling this way, the following clip shows the intensity with which he experiences these mixed emotions:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN4ptFgrqQ>

Instead of starting college the same year he is accepted, he and his family decide that DeeJ will take a gap year for “life learning”; getting used to the tremendous changes that will be in contrast to the comfortable and safe routine of home life. As part of this process, DeeJ is introduced to Jen, a Grinnell student with cerebral palsy. DeeJ describes Jen's mentoring as “a creative way to cease my anxiety by freely showing me that there were easy breathing students who were breaking barriers just like me.” A very sweet and touching sub-plot develops, as DeeJ and Jen form a romantic bond. When DeeJ is about to move from Grinnell, Iowa to Oberlin, Ohio, he voices his affection for Jen: “Jen hears my heartbeat, and I hear hers. I'm nuts about her. I really hope by holding her in my mind, I can free my dear self from Mom. I hope she freshly thinks the same.” There is even a declaration of love, with a beautifully emotional response:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvcKyFPOk50>

The move to Oberlin doesn't take place just before the start of the fall semester, as is typical, but six months earlier. As a continued part of the life-learning gap year, this early move also demonstrates the incredible level of support D.J.'s parent are able to offer, for his mother moves with DeeJ, leaving the father in Iowa. Eventually, they sell the house in Grinnell as DeeJ's father, Ralph, accepts a fellowship at Duke University in North Carolina. He's still about 600 miles from his wife and son, but at least they are in the same time zone. What's more, Ralph comes to Oberlin for a visit about once a month. The following clip shows the stress experienced by the whole family in anticipation of the move to Oberlin, as well as D.J.'s desire to hold onto familiarity:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWjhDTfjIUU>

DeeJ begins life in Oberlin living with his mother, but eventually, one step at a time, he does move into the dorm. It is to be noted that DeeJ is not left entirely to his own devices. His mother, who manages his support team, lives off campus in the townhouse where they first lived in Oberlin together. This team includes Dobromir and Duncan, who work as support assistants, helping DeeJ with everyday tasks, as well as Andrew, his night aide, who stays in the dorm overnight with DeeJ. The following two clips show DeeJ expressing how proud he is of the progress he has made and the independence he has gained:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93Bc\\_B2ecMQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93Bc_B2ecMQ)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVHOWJ6JQog>

(Jen: if you feel two clips is too much, just use the first, please.)

Yet, even with this phenomenal amount of support, it is clear that these monumental changes have a profound effect on the whole family:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x\\_a8wrvkqJw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_a8wrvkqJw)

The scene at the conclusion of the film takes place in the summer, with DeeJ's family and friends — including Jen — having a meal in the yard of the mother's townhouse. At one point, D.J.'s father says that DeeJ is the most stubborn person sitting at the table. Jen, aided by her mother, broadens the scope of Ralph's statement by saying, “I think you have to be stubborn to do what we do.” In a voice over, DeeJ comments, “Holding Jen in my heart is easy. We give each other assurance that justice will open eyes.”



Once again we are reminded of D.J.'s unfaltering selflessness. He has had to work so very hard to get where is, even with the kind of support many autistics can only dream of. And it is clear that Deej is aware of his good fortune. Allow me to conclude with a series of quotes; Deej's own words, which are the heart of this marvelous documentary:

"I still care so much about the kids whom poverty and false assumptions leave outside the door."

"I feel immense pride and guilt for saving myself while others get stored away and forgotten. Being included is every kid's right. It shouldn't be a lottery."

"Self-determination and compassion are my goals now, not independence."

"My family is fresh-thinking, but the world outside greets me either as a hopeful exception or as a real burden to society. I have work to do. Neurotypical people have work to do too. Hope lives on, messy, imperfect."

Here are a few links to D.J. Savarese's poetry:

<https://www.deejmovie.com/poetry/>

<http://www.unrestrictedinterest.com/store/a-doorknob-for-the-eye-by-dj-savarese> (book)

---

## Personal Stories

At 30, I was diagnosed as high-functioning autism spectrum (formerly known as Asperger's until the DSM-V manual change), when I sought counseling for depression and anxiety, common on the spectrum when trying to fit into the neurotypical world. It came as a shock. I wondered if my fiancée would stay with me. Would my supervisor think I was competent to do a social job as Program Director of a nonprofit? I began reading all of the books about the autism spectrum at the library. t explained a lot going back to childhood; in talking to my best friend's mom, I learned he was also on the spectrum. What helped a lot with self-acceptance were celebs that came out like Daryl Hannah, Dan Ackroyd, Susan Boyle, Eminem, etc. I connected with [Autism Solution Pieces](#), a nonprofit started by two autism warrior moms. Since there are not only adults with autism, but the children on the spectrum are growing up, we formed an adults group called ASPies Unite, beginning with a bowling outing.

ASP has since invited me to join their board of directors. My diagnosis gave me awareness to work on challenges and build them into strengths. Although I have quality of life with a family, a degree, and a career, I don't want to pass as normal- what's that anyways? I can be a role model and inspire hope with my story. A diagnosis helped with awareness to learn more about myself, to build weaknesses into strengths, like improving on studying body language and remembering to smile or make eye contact. Along with the challenges come gifts, and I wouldn't change if I could. I can bring hope for others to have independence and a meaningful life as they define it. As my dad told me growing up, "You can be whatever you want to be and do anything you put your mind to." I've fully come to love and accept myself, and I'm proud of who I am.

- Chris



## UNRAVELING A DREAM

My name is Rebecca Sharrock and I was born at 6:55am on December the 11th, 1989. The place where I was born, raised and currently live in is Brisbane, Australia. Up to this stage of my life it's been a very complicated and long-winded story with many dead-ends as well as unexpected openings on multiple paths.

From the moment when I very first existed I have had many characteristics of autism, and I can also remember every day of my life. Up until the age of 21 I believed that it was completely normal to do so. It was only when neuropsychologists at the University of California, Irvine (the McGaugh/Stark lab) identified me as being one of sixty people worldwide known to have HSAM (Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory) when I realised that it's extremely unusual to remember every day of one's life.

Being identified with HSAM in 2013 took years of many kinds of thorough testing and brain scans. Prior to each test (which could be anything psychologically or memory related) we are told nothing of what's going to be asked. So we can not study for them beforehand. Tests are almost always done on Skype and all of them are recorded. That makes it impossible to make up a memory without being caught out when we're asked to answer the same question years later. Due to being recorded on video it's also impossible to secretly take notes.

As a toddler my autism became more apparent to the people who knew and also met me. That was mainly because of the reason that as toddlers we begin to communicate and express ourselves much more than when we're babies.

There was a time when I was two years old (I know the age I was because it was in between my 2nd and 3rd birthday) when mum stretched out her arms to hug me. Yet I just stood on the spot looking at her in confusion. Mum then explained to me that when people held out their arms that way it meant that they wanted to hug me. I was then shown how to hug someone. But I didn't like the feeling of being smothered and compressed into another person. So I screamed and ran away from mum in fright. To this day hugging is still not a natural response for me, and every person I meet only ever attempts to hug me once, without me needing to tell them anything about my challenges. I no longer scream when a person hugs me, though my body goes very stiff with anxiety.

Something else that I would do as a toddler would be that I repeated every question mum asked me before I answered it. For example she could ask "Becky would you like some biscuits and milk"? Then I would voice those same words aloud before answering with "Yes please, I'm feeling hungry". That was due to my slower processing speed and I still do the same today. The only difference is that I no longer repeat the question to myself aloud.

There were also many times when I would answer questions months or years after I was asked them. On one occasion as a three year old I answered a question mum asked me from a time when I was in the kitchen at my father's house before my sister Jessica was born (our parents divorced a month before my third birthday). Mum said that she couldn't remember asking me the question and that made me very confused and anxious. I was then told that I must only ever answer questions from the present moment, and not from those which were asked of me a long time ago. More confusion arose when I realised that the present moment soon becomes "a long time ago". My autism makes me extremely literal.

When I was three years old mum came across a story of autism and then did some research. After doing so she strongly believed that I was autistic and expressed her feelings to a doctor. His beliefs at the time were that I wasn't autistic and that my challenges were a result of my parents' difficult divorce.

At six years old (when I began school) I briefly saw another psychiatrist for a second opinion. She believed that I was clearly autistic and also intellectually disabled. From there I was required to have my first psychological assessment. The results came up that my IQ was above average, and that I couldn't be autistic due to having a

separation anxiety issue with my mother. In truth I felt secure around mum because she was a source of routine for me, which is one characteristic of autism that I have. Yet much less was known about autism in the 1990s compared to today.

Throughout school I struggled with the work and didn't have learning support for my challenges. However I did have a few nice teachers, one of whom introduced me to the Harry Potter books. At nighttime my mind becomes overactive with thoughts. Though I found that reading Harry Potter distracted my mind and enabled me to sleep through the night. Yet I had to find a way of reading the books with my eyes closed (listening to an audiobook wasn't enough for me). So I then came to the decision of learning how to recite the Harry Potter books to myself. That worked perfectly for me.

At the age of fourteen mum met my stepdad and his three children Kylie, Brendan and Dylan, who then became my siblings. Amazingly the children of both my mum and Brent (my stepdad) all had development challenges, and that was not known of each other when they met. While Brent's children were getting psychological assessments mum felt it right for me to have a second assessment for autism.

Previously mum had been told that my social, anxiety and developmental challenges were purely due to my parents' divorce and that I would outgrow them as I matured. However as I was getting older and advancing steadily through school all three of those challenges were getting worse instead of better. At fifteen years old I was diagnosed with autism and then Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Unfortunately I hadn't been taught (in a way that I understood) my core literacy and numeracy skills earlier in school. However I didn't want to just give up with my life. So it was decided that I would use my final two years of school to be introduced to material that would enable me to continue learning the skills I had missed earlier.

I'm so happy and extremely thankful for having the motivation to continue that work into my post school years. This is because I look back at my life now with no inner feelings of regret. Any challenge that occurred (not that every part of my childhood was negative) was out of my personal control and I know inside myself that I tried my absolute best regardless. Yet as years go by more happiness and positivity comes along.

From the earliest years of my childhood I used writing as a means of calming my anxiety, and at the age of 13 I realised how much I liked public speaking. Since 2015 I've been doing regular interviews with various kinds of national and worldwide media, mainly as a result of my HSAM. This has given me opportunities to do talks about human memory, anxiety and autism at local conferences. I'm delighted that I can indeed develop a career from doing this. Being able to have a job means the absolute world to me and I previously never believed that I ever could work or be independent. So to develop my skills and connections further I began doing Toastmasters, which is an organisation that teaches public speaking.

I do self-advocacy talks whenever I'm required to. However the talks I personally prefer doing are motivational speeches. These are to encourage people with and without autism to never lose hope and faith in life. Discovering what autism is physically is indeed important. Yet providing help and support (of various kinds) to those of us with autism is perhaps even more important to conduct and research. With any talk I give I'll always include at least a few motivational messages as they leave me feeling so happy inside.

## **On the Freeway By Brandon Wooten**

Today I am on the freeway to do everything o wanna do



I can't let go of anything because I'm so attached to it and I keep adding things on my plate to fill that free minute of my time that I have I'm so busy I can't let anything stop me including my autism

I'm a married man, I'm gainfully employed, I'm in the special Olympics and I do health stuff with Kaiser Permanente and I enjoy all this because I wanna stay active all the time and I don't believe in sitting at home all day and being lazy

My mother once told me there is not enough days in the week to do everything I want to do and if there was 8 days or more in the week I would be able to but there's only 7 days or less and that's the problem I'm trying with my all to deal with

I always come all fired up rockin n Rollin Flamin hot like a ghost pepper Goal Driven and determined to win every time I go someplace including work and health and I always accept what comes my way and make the best of it and I'm making the best of life as we speak

I have been to many places in Southern California over the years and I have been doing beautiful things over the years and I have been getting a lot of recognition over the years and I can't stop until I get what I want and that's just the way I'am

The moral of the story is

I'm hyperactive I can't sit still and I can't let anything stop me including my autism

I don't stop until I get what I want

And tenacity and perseverance and second when you follow your dreams they can really come true

In conclusion

I really follow my dreams and I have so many dreams to fulfill I have lost count and Walt Disney once said all dreams come true if you have the courage to pursue them and I have the courage to pursue all my dreams and I don't let anything stop me including my autism and I always follow through no matter what

And that explains everything

THE END

## **A Bittersweet Epiphany By Dia Neighbors**

I was living in a house across the street from my parents after failing out of society and being put out of sight. I'd gone from having a full merit scholarship to college to being a loser drunk driver with no job, no friends, and no idea what to do about myself. I got sober, but that didn't improve my social skills like I'd hoped. I got my driver's license back, but I couldn't bring myself to go outside and find a job or new friends. I sat around the house desperately trying to figure out why my brain was so broken after all I'd done to root out whatever evils were ruining my character and my life. After all I'd survived, the fundamental explanation for myself was painfully absent.

So I said an awkward prayer to whatever gods and leviathans rule the Cosmos. I asked this specific question, "What information will I know later that I will wish I already knew?" And: "Can I please have that information a bit sooner?" I was profoundly stuck and knew I needed to get an accurate diagnosis for my life-long mental illnesses and challenges or I would take my life.

I took inventory of my life up to that point. I admitted that my social skills had never been good. That I'd been living my life with a brain that was lit up like fireworks and eternally on pins and needles. I regurgitated and re-chewed embarrassing mishap after confusing miscommunication after humiliating incident from my past. There were a lot. At some point, I circled back around to my long-held suspicion that I had Asperger's Syndrome. Frankly, none of the more than seven diagnoses I'd been given by over fifty health professionals over the past forty years was remotely close. Asperger's, however, seemed like it was invented to describe me.

Yet no one thought it was possible for an adult female to pop up with a "dread neurological disorder" that, at the time, was only associated with male children. I am part of a lost generation of spectrum people who simply aren't young enough or male enough or white enough for ASD to be a possible explanation for their difficulties. My suggestion to several clinicians that I might be on the autism spectrum was met with everything from guffaws to real anger. They explained I was too well-spoken, too verbally inclined, too socially motivated, too polite, too engaging and talkative. They didn't know how hard I'd worked to be able to please people by being as much like them as possible. They didn't know how exhausting and terrifying getting through a day was for me. They didn't know I was doing all this mental work to re-route the uncoordinated parts of my mind through my intellect. Most of the time, I didn't know.

My massive efforts were all to fit in - or at least be invisible - because girls know how vital it is not to be seen as weird or crazy. We understand early on that being socially adept and physically graceful is the core of female identity and the source of our safety. Unfortunately, wallflowers are easy to pluck and no matter where I went I was pushed to the edges. By the time I was twenty-one years old I had been thoroughly "plucked over" and had the anxiety disorders and drinking problem to prove it.

I lost my scholarship, went to work in restaurant kitchens, moved to Oregon for a while, got DUIs, and oscillated between dark, confusing mental states in social isolation and brief periods of enthusiastic endeavor to try to "fix" myself. I kept failing, and for a born perfectionist

this is its own particular Hell. Being able to stand at a remove inside your own head and pick apart your significant shortcomings with a superbly tuned and brutal intellect will eventually break you. I've spent years contemplating my own death, sometimes begging for it, sometimes pleading with it to spare me. The only thing that kept me alive was the fact that my curiosity and wonder outweighed my horror and disappointment. I'm lucky.

The most bittersweet moment of my life was when the surety of my diagnosis landed fully upon me. I sat in the floor with a bunch of pictures of me as a child, a child who never looked at the camera through her thick spectacles, and was simultaneously consumed by the relief that I wasn't insane and the worst shame I've ever felt. I sat there for a long time and burned. But I also exhaled for the first time in my life. I absolved myself in many ways, but was also furious that I'd had to survive terrible things and discover my true diagnosis entirely on my own. I'm still going through the grieving process for the lost decades of my life, for my cursed youth, and the opportunities that I couldn't take advantage of.

Ultimately, it wasn't I who failed out of society – it was society who failed me. To be autistic, diagnosed or undiagnosed, in America is to be often mishandled and underserved by multiple deeply broken institutions. The teachers ignored me because I was well-behaved. The clinicians laughed in my face and misdiagnosed me. The colleges told me to get my act together. The cops hassled me. The jails dehumanized me. The drug treatment center blamed me. The church judged me. My bosses bullied me. My friends and lovers abandoned me. My family shamed me.



None of them thought I had it in me to rise again, but in isolation I have grown something beautiful within myself that I can't keep a secret anymore. I have stories to tell and perspective to provide. I have answers and I can help. There will always be barriers and injustices and craven jackasses to overcome and hopefully out-smart, but I am my hero, sage, lover, coach, and supporter. I will never again abandon faith in my mind, my perceptions, and my singular character.

## **Article: College Tips for Asperger's Adults - Andrew Liebig**

College can be tough at any age or stage in life. I have been back in college a little over year now. While college is very different from traditional high school, having Asperger's can make it more difficult. I have put together some tips that I have learned to help you or your autistic young adult/adult child.

1. Do your research on the college or university your thinking of going to. A lot of colleges offer tours and you can sit in on a class and see what it is like. Read student reviews of the college and make sure consider the supports that they can provide you.
2. Look at the sizes of the classes and the overall sizes in the classes. Make sure that you have access to your professors if you need extra help.
3. Looking at the over view cost of the college is also important. So, classes will vary on price depending when you take it or how. If you are taking an on-line class or evening class your classes may be cheaper and smaller.
4. Stay organized. For me I must plan out my week every Sunday. I use a white board on my refrigerator. Things are divided up into three categories. Black is used for days of the week, and class times. Red: is used for work times. Blue: is any appointments that come in, Doctor, Teacher, etc.
5. Ask for help if you need it. College can be stressful at times. Getting extra help or asking your professor for a tutor is ok. Remember their goal is to help you achieve.
6. Take breaks and get involved at the college. You're a person just like anyone else taking classes. While we have problems socially or understanding certain social q's doesn't mean you need to stay in your room.

I hope that some of these tips make your life easier at college. Remember to push for the dreams that you have as only you can achieve them.

---

## **Organization On The Rise**

This issue's Organization on the Rise is Autism Improvised out of the Marietta, GA (Metro Atlanta area).

Recently, Autism Improvised won the GCA Organization of the Year at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Southeast Adult Autism Symposium in Chattanooga, TN. Scott Kramer, editor-in-chief of *Autism Southeast United Magazine*, sat down with Sandy Bruce, executive director of Autism Improvised.



Sandy Bruce

Sandy Bruce: "I'm Sandy Bruce, and I live in Marietta, Georgia with my husband, daughter (James's mom), and my now 23-yr-old grandson James. We share our home with three cats, an energetic puppy, and a geriatric lizard. Coming from a corporate background in marketing communications, and then operating my own business as a muralist and faux painter, I am now the President and Executive Director of Autism Improvised, Inc., a nonprofit corporation. I am also a certified health and wellness coach, with an empathetic understanding for the needs of caregivers. In my spare time, I play the piano, am teaching myself ukulele, and I like to take long nature walks with my puppy and James."

Scott Kramer: "Thank you for introducing yourself. I'll start off by asking – Why the name Autism Improvised? What convinced you to choose that name instead of another name for your organization?"

SB: "We started out in 2009 as Shenanigans, and that name came to me late one night. It seems that these names pop into my head most easily when I'm struggling with a sleepless night. I was trying to come up with something that would evoke the often mischievous fun of improv and be instantly recognizable, or brandable, to the community we were trying to reach.

**"I was trying to come up with something that would evoke the often mischievous fun of improv and be instantly recognizable, or brandable, to the community we were trying to reach." – Sandy Bruce**

"Over the years, I developed several additional programs all grounded in improv. Autism Improvised, another late night brainstorm, originally was on a list of potential names I was compiling for a new program targeted to young adults transitioning from school to adulthood.

"When I was in the process of incorporating as a nonprofit a couple years ago, I was searching for a name for the organization that would become a home to our programs. My sister and I were sitting at the kitchen table over coffee brainstorming ideas, when she glanced at the list I had been putting together. She came across Autism Improvised, and excitedly said, "THERE'S your new name!" So, rather than just naming a program, we named the whole organization Autism Improvised.

"Autism Improvised conveys to me an almost playful dichotomy of the rigid thinking patterns of autism with the free-wheeling, always-changing thinking of improv. We hoped that our organization would help marry these two opposite characteristics, helping our participants develop ways to celebrate their native and often pragmatic thinking, while encouraging more flexibility and openness to new ideas."

SK: "Totally awesome, thanks. Tell me about how Autism Improvised got started and some of the initial challenges you found with starting Autism Improvised, please."

SB: "The idea started in 2008, when my then 13-yr-old grandson James was disappointed that a stint in a local youth theater program did not work out for him. My daughter Valerie and he had moved in with us following her divorce several years earlier, and my husband and I found ourselves blessed with a second-generation parenting role - this time, as autism parents.

"James loved to perform, and he had significant social challenges. I wanted to find a program tailored to what he needed - a performance outlet that would welcome and accept him as an autistic, so that he would develop into the best, most confident version of himself possible.

“I could not find any programs locally that met my vision, so I began researching types of theater. I do not have a theater background, so this was all new territory for me. When I came across improvisational theater and read what it was all about, I immediately saw a strong juxtaposition to the challenges of autism that I was trying to address. Improv was all about being in the moment, listening, responding in context, supporting the ideas of your fellow improv players, adapting to the unexpected and to change - every one of these dovetailed with James’s challenges.

“At that time, there were no programs I could find anywhere that used improv specifically to work with autism, so I decided to create one. Over the next few months, I developed a business plan, and my daughter Valerie began exploring improv in a class taught by a local theater owner, Jstar. Valerie suggested I talk with Jstar as a prospective teacher. I did, and he performed our first summer camps that summer of 2009. Jstar remained a popular teacher with Shenanigans for several years.”

“With the success of our summer camps, we began offering after school classes and I expanded our teaching team. Jason Evans, who co-presented with me at the Chattanooga Autism Conference last year, was our second addition. We now have a core team of five, with an additional five who work with us on an as-needed basis. “Our main challenge was keeping our mission focused on helping those who fall through the cracks with the invisible disability of high-functioning autism. We heard from so many families across the spectrum who were searching for services, yet we were aware of our limits. It is so easy to get pulled off course when your heart wants to be all things to all people. We were not structured to help those who needed a great deal of support. Our purpose was to help those who are mildly to moderately affected by autism develop the understanding and social communication skills that would help them integrate successfully in their social universe and become productive, tax-paying citizens.”

SK: “It's good to hear how James has gotten help. I understand that he is involved with Autism Improvised. How has Autism Improvised helped him and what did you expect to see when James was going through your program? What were your expectations?”

SB: “Yes, James has been a part of our programs since we started nine years ago. He still comes to our young adults class occasionally, and he often accompanies me to events. While I stick around our vendor table, he acts as our ambassador, working the crowds, usually with his Bootsie (cat) puppet on his arm. He has always been a performer, and, growing up in our programs, he has gained confidence and developed long-lasting friendships. He is more open to asking questions of others and creating a back-and-forth dialogue. His patience has really improved, giving others a chance to express their ideas and listening to them before responding. This is pretty much in line with what I expected and hoped. Of course, he, like our other participants, is continually learning and growing and maturing. It's awesome to see them grow up in our programs, to remember them as youngsters of 11-12, and now see them as young adults graduating high school and moving on to college and post-secondary programs, and going to work. I know that we have played a part in their successes by helping them navigate their social arena, and that keeps me passionate about what we are doing.”

SK: “What is your background with autism and improvisation? What convinced you to go that route? “

SB: “SB: My background includes corporate communications, followed by a six-year career as a faux painting and muraling business owner. I am a good technician of the arts, but I never considered myself especially creative. The freedom of expression in theater was a new world to me. I was inspired and driven by James’s needs to discover a path for him that would nurture his sense of creativity and performance. This path should also help him develop his ability to relate in what must be to him a very confusing and nuanced world. That journey led me



to improv. Everything I learned about this art just seemed to fit perfectly with the goals I was working toward for James.”

SK: “I am glad to see things are working out for him. I sense that some parents may have asked you the following -- What do you envision the biggest challenges are for someone who is on the autism spectrum and start improv? How have you noticed people changing once they begin improv? What do you tell the parents?”

SB: “We see young folks walk in the door who are “social skills group-ed out”, convinced that this is just one more therapy to endure. They come in reluctant to participate, not sure of what we’re about at all. Once they experience our group, their whole demeanor changes. We’re fun! We’re cool! We’ve had parents report their kids mark days off their calendar until the next class. We, as parents and teachers, know they are getting a benefit. All our improv players know is that they are having a blast.”

**“All our improv players know is that they are having a blast.” – Sandy Bruce**

SK: “That sounds like a blast. Followup - Have you ever known of new participants who did not like the improv? When do you realize that improv might not be for someone who is new to your program?”

SB: “We see personalities that run the gamut, from those who are the natural performers to those who are selectively verbal and reticent to join in. For those quieter young folks, we allow them time, let them get to know and trust us, offer encouragement without ever putting them on the spot, and eventually we are able to engage them on their terms. We often see their breakthrough when an activity becomes so much fun that they spontaneously jump in. We never force participation. We want them to find our activities a safe place of acceptance, a soft landing to practice the critical communication skills, and a time when they can be around others like them and build friendships.

“With time, our improv players grow in self-confidence. It’s heartening to see the support they give each other, and the friends they make. Our families report changes at home and school, too. I remember one young man whose dad was almost in tears after a friends and family show where his son got some of the biggest laugh lines of the event. He told me that his son would always sit on the sidelines at family gatherings, not interacting at all. Now, after some months in our Shenanigans program, he was in the middle of the room leading everyone in improv games. Stories like that make my heart sing!”

SK: “I can imagine that it might be like the classic Carpenters song, "Sing", where everyone is happy and enjoying life and having fun. I think one of the myths that people might have about autism is that autistic adults and young adults don't have fun or don't know how to have fun. Hearing you say what you did certainly dispels that notion. What benefits will an autistic individual improve gain by doing improv? How do those benefits help that person in various facets of his/her life (e.g. independent living, social relationships, employment, health & wellness)?”

SB: “Self-confidence is a real biggie. Our founding improv program, Shenanigans, helps show our improv players that they are, indeed, very capable of contributing in a meaningful way to those around them. The spontaneity and unpredictability of improv proves to them that they can hold their own in a conversation, even when that conversation may not be around their area of intense interest.

“Our transitions programs Code Breakers and Bright Paths are more structured approaches. These use Improvised role play and debriefing conversations to grow self-awareness by helping our participants apply improv principles to everyday scenarios. Getting a job, and then staying on the job by understanding the culture and expectations of the workplace; the different layers of relating: bosses, co-workers, customers; handling frustration; self-advocacy; following rules when the rules may not be obvious. We also do Improvised role play in topics like bullying, social media, social cliques, dating, flirting, hygiene, and a host of other issues that our young adults deal with.”

SK: “Who do you consider your mentors to be in the area of autism and improv?”

SB: “I always enjoyed the greats like Jonathan Winters, Robin Williams, Carol Burnett, and such, even before I made the connection that their talents were rooted in improv. And I familiarized myself with the works of one of the great improv teachers Viola Spolin in my early research. But I do not consider myself an improviser in the performing sense. I have a wonderful teaching team around me. They are the face of Autism Improvised. I am just the facilitator.”

SK: “They were my favorites as well.”

SB: “Early on, I recognized that, to be effective, we had to approach our participants on their own terms. Our objective was to help them be the best version of themselves, and not to overcome their Autism. When I discovered Dr. Stanley Greenspan’s DIR/Floortime therapy model, I was gratified to see we were on the right path in our approach. So, our team does train on Floortime principles, and that is the biggest therapeutic influence we have. Our teaching team consists of improvisers and theater folks, therapists, counselors, educators, and Autism parents - many a combination of these. We learn from each other and from experts in both improv and therapies.”

SK: “Give me an example of the model. How would it apply to improv, for example?”

SB: “DIR stands for the Developmental, Individual Difference, Relationship-based model of intervention. Floortime is the manner in which the core challenges of relating and communicating is addressed. For young children, it's literally getting down on the floor and relating to them on their level. In our application of the principles of this model, irrespective of the age of the participant, we do not impose behavior modifications on them. We work with them from where they are, developmentally and emotionally. We take their individual differences and abilities into account, engage them, and by relating to them in this way, we develop their trust. This allows them to grow in a very effective and comfortable way, without having to change the essence of who they are. Autism is integral to their essence. All we want to do is help them be the very best person they can be, when it comes to relating to the world around them. “

SK: “Great. Thanks for sharing this with us.”

SB: “Thank you for interviewing us.”

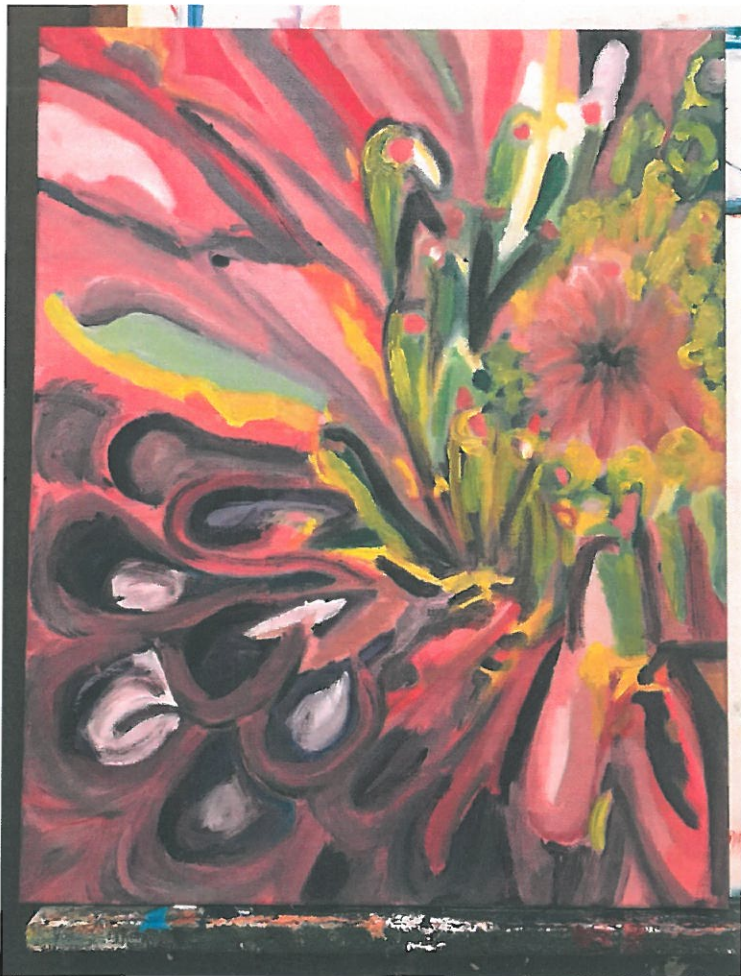




- Julianne Howell, 17, Georgia, Autism – “Strawberries in an Orange Background”



“Layla” drawing by Leilani, 19, Montana, Aspergers



Krista Darrow, 23, Indiana, Autism – “Oil on Canvas”

---

### “Before My Diagnosis”

I shiver...  
cold to my very bones  
all seems a struggle now  
judgement left me  
a long time ago  
decisions seem  
so wrong

clothing hurts  
air feels scratchy  
don't eat much  
I just want to slip  
quietly  
away.

everyone wants a piece  
and I have nothing  
to be divided

so leave me to rot

I'm not that person anymore

I am a  
hardened shell  
only thoughts left now  
or angry words

no good  
or so it seems...  
I'll admit it  
then I will dissolve  
into the flowers  
forever  
just  
become  
them

- Melody Sokolow, 58, Oregon, Aspergers

"Queen Of The Underworld"

the dark looming tree line  
draws boundaries  
as my daily life is lived  
within them  
the cedars, silver pines  
the rivers and moss  
that hold it fast,  
securely...  
for now.

but my soul knows  
no bounds

sometimes  
I live in a land  
unlike this one  
where I again  
meet my lover

most imperceptibly  
and a day at a time,  
eventually,  
this  
will  
no longer



be my daily life  
at all....  
often caught up  
in this small world,  
I forget  
there is only a sheer veil  
between us

time here  
seems to move so slowly  
as an icicle drips in the sun.....  
I am connected to the water,  
to the mountains,  
and to seasons  
yet am only a guest  
in this land

I feel myself  
change  
with every  
turn  
of the wheel  
each winter solstice  
I have deliberately  
gone down  
down  
into the darkness  
closer and closer  
to the understanding  
that this too.....  
is just  
another dance  
where the steps change  
with the rhythm  
of  
the infinite

I become weary  
yet dare to say  
.....the wiser

- Melody Sokolow, 58, Oregon, Aspergers

## Short Story - "The Aardwolves" – Leilani Copenhaver

They had finally built it. The world's first robotic aardwolf. However there was one major bug in its system. It had been capable of emotions. It could bond, and process empathy.. It also had poor balance. As the scientists debated what they could possibly do with their new creation, it dug into the trash. As it was digging, it found scraps from the annual monkey shindig. Without the scientists notice, it had scattered banana peels around the room. As the Scientist's debate got more and more heated, a loud crash was heard from the break room.

Rushing into the room, they saw banana skins everywhere and an aardwolf on the floor. Some snickered, other chuckled. A few guffawed. While the aardwolf could not understand laughter, it could understand malice. Days passed and the scientists only came to three career paths for their robotic companion. 1. Companion 2. Zoo animal and 3. Clown. They had yet to mass produce the electric hyena. Instead they spent many hours watching it slip upon more banana peel. The joke never seemed to get old. At this point, the aardwolf understood clearly. It must escape. These..humans, were incapable of love and empathy as it was.

One night, as the scientists prepared to leave. Someone let loose. "Aww gross man" One laughed, opening a window. The aardwolf knew the noise well. It had deemed it code 003. As the scientists slowly left, one by one. The aardwolf noticed the window ajar. When the lone scientist came to power it down, still making that torturous noise, Aard7 knew what it must do. It slid a banana skin over to the scientist's feet. Upon slipping, the aardwolf bolted. Leaping up the shelves, knocking over expensive elixirs. "Hey!" she called, but it was too late. The aardwolf had released itself. Freed from its torment.

After weeks of travel alone, it had found some similar to its own. They were built just like it, where they robots too? As it approached, the others froze. This aardwolf.. Whirred? Why was it so peculiar. Was it sick? They kept their distance. Aard7 failed to understand. However as the days went on the pack considered the robot a member. As the aardwolves foraged, Aard7 stood guard. Unsure when the infernal code 003 would resume. It was then the handsomest male of the group approached. "You do not eat.." He barked. Luckily pieces of real aardwolf brain in Aard7's system allowed it to understand. But how would it respond? It nodded. "Most peculiar.. Perhaps, you are not one of us?" Panicked Aard7 shook "no" and pleaded with its eyes.

Skeptical, the true aardwolf began to pad away. Aard7 merely flattened its ears. Using its advanced AI it began to teach itself the ways of the aardwolf. Learning quicker than any animal alive. As hours turned to days. It was now capable of aardwolf speech. It even began to secrete black fluid from its robo scent glands. Its advanced AI detected levels of love in the handsome aardwolf that had approached Aard7 all those days ago. Was there another? Aard7 found itself jealous. Though as it studied this phenomenon, it realized he had love for it.

A machine, and a real animal. How would it work? One day the handsome aardwolf (dubbed code 2113) brought pretty posies to Aard7. Taking a step back and flattening its ears. It did not compute. Machine X Organic life =/= compatible. "I am but a machine?" It questioned, looking deep into his brown eyes. "The most.. Stunning machine I've laid eyes upon. Marry me darlin'" He said, tucking the flowers into cracks in Aard7's mechanical shell. "You can find another.. You deserve an organic girl." Aard7 reasoned. "I've found my perfect match, and that is you." He said, reciting his words into binary. "Code 2113, I" "Please, call me Aard3.5, because together we're whole." "I agree.. Aard3.5"

The wedding startled the other aardwolves. They however, would not protest. Except for "Aard3.5's" Rabid fangirls. They hatched a plan, overhearing Aard7's tragic backstory. The wedding prep made everyone flustered. Aard7's gears were warm with excitement. As they walked down the aisle, Aard7 hardly noticed its groom's best man. Though when it did it's gears skipped a beat. It was.. A banana skin. Flashbacks came pouring in as Aard7 wished to

cry, but it didn't have the necessary hydraulics. It fled, leaving the groom at the altar. Aard3.5 saw the peel. Who would have sabotaged their wedding?

Will Aard7's AI snap? What happens next?





A Few  
of My  
Favorite  
Things

“My Favorite Things” will be the theme of the Fall 2018 issue of *Autism Southeast United Magazine*. What are a few of your favorite things? It could be what you have written or created through art or poetry or much anything else. Whatever they are, please see the guidelines for the Fall 2018 issue by going to the Autism SE United link on the GCA Centre for Adult Autism website at [www.gcaspies.org](http://www.gcaspies.org). Scroll over Autism SE United and then click on Submission Guidelines (or go to [www.gcaspies.org/submission-guidelines](http://www.gcaspies.org/submission-guidelines)).

The top priority will be given to individuals who have not submitted an original piece of writing or artwork to *Autism Southeast United* for the Summer 2018 issue. Please keep this in mind if you did submit anything for the Summer 2018 issue and it was published.

**Good luck to all submitters and the deadline for Autism Southeast United to receive your original work is Sunday, September 30, 2018.**