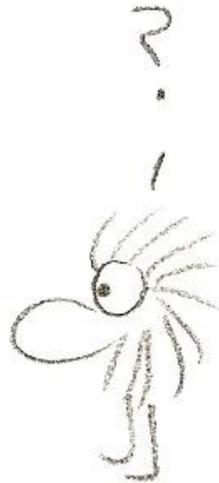
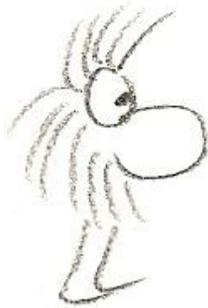


DUDE, I'M AN ASPIE!



Dude, I'm An Aspie! Thoughts and Illustrations on Living with Asperger's Syndrome
Matt Friedman

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Thoughts and illustrations on
living with Asperger's Syndrome



Matt Friedman

Intro

“Dude, I’m An Aspie!” is as a project I put together to disclose my Asperger’s to my friends. It was just an attempt to say, “This is who I am,” in an informative but fun way. I got such a good response that I decided to share it with a wider audience. The response from fellow Aspies was overwhelmingly positive and touching. They urged me to publish it, so that’s what I’ve done.

You might be surprised to know I’ve barely picked up a pencil to draw in 20 years or so, though it was something I did quite a lot as a kid. When I learned about special interests and thought about what mine could possibly be, my cartoons were the first thing that came to mind. It just made sense to do my disclosure in cartoon form. When you learn something about yourself as important as Asperger’s, you start to see yourself and your interests in a whole new light.

I am not formally diagnosed. I am self-identified, and am not seeking a diagnosis at this time. In my mind, I already have my answer, and I believe it’s each individual’s personal choice to seek a diagnosis or not.

It's unfortunate that some meet the word "self-diagnosed" with skepticism or ridicule, not understanding the difficult choices we face and why we choose to remain that way. A positive outlook and self-image is important for any person on the autism spectrum or who suspects they may be. I believe all deserve to be treated with dignity and compassion.

I also want to say this: Anyone could, and should, do what I did. That is, to tell your story, your way. My talent is doodling, maybe yours is songwriting, or painting, or whatever. (If it's washing machines, I don't know what to tell you.) But whatever you can do to educate others about Asperger's with your own voice, you will help break down barriers and promote understanding. We can all be advocates.

Now on to the cartoons!

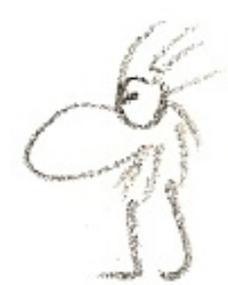
Matt Friedman

My name is Matt and I have Asperger's syndrome.
What's that mean, you ask? Well, you're in luck,
cause I've made this helpful guide!

Dude.
I'm an
Aspie!



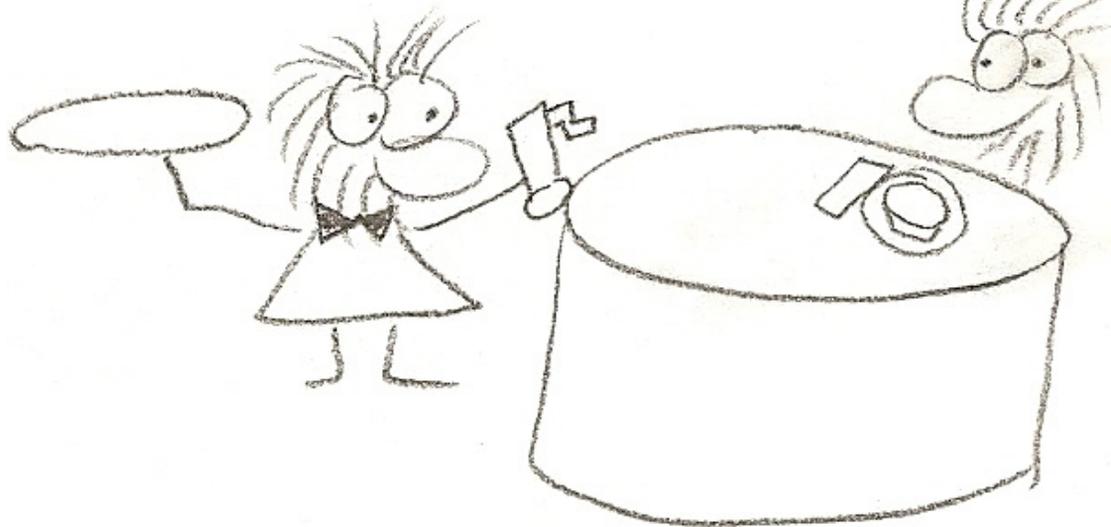
You're a
what now?
/



Asperger's is part of the autism spectrum. It has many characteristics, but generally we have difficulty knowing what someone is thinking, explaining our thoughts verbally, and interacting socially with our peers. It is sometimes described as having "a dash of autism."

Freshly ground
autism, sir?

Just a
dash,
thanks.



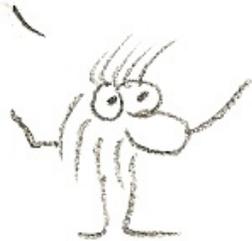
Asperger's is not a disease, it is a genetic variation and a neurological condition. Though I've just recently discovered I have it, I always have and always will. Some say it is a gift, and even vital to human evolution.



I'm
not

weird...

I'm
just **wired** differently!



Asperger's is sometimes called Wrong Planet syndrome. This is because we feel like we come from a different culture and have a different way of perceiving the world. ¹

¹ Attwood 2007, p. 77

Take me
to your
leader.

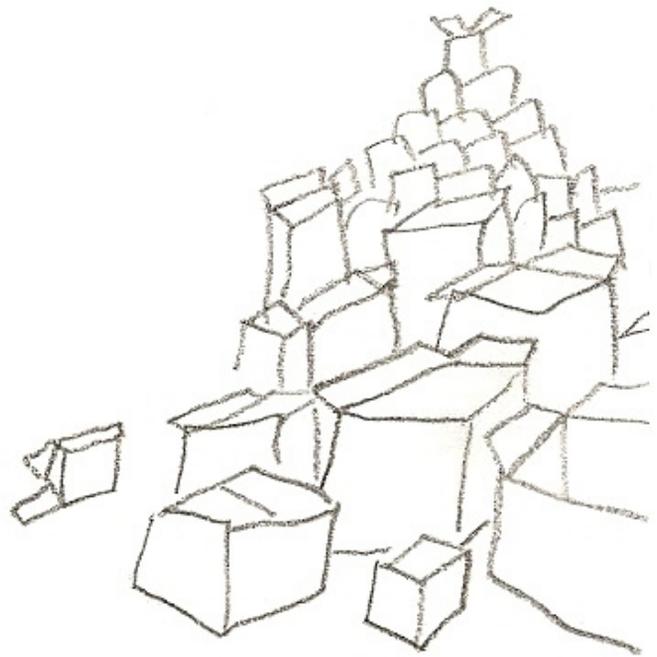


?



Once I learned what Asperger's is, I knew it described me. It answered a lot of questions and explained why I am the way I am. So it was kind of good news! Like finding a box I fit in.

IT
FITS!!



Now for some myths and facts: First, I will not look you in the eye for long periods or when I'm talking to you. This is not to be rude. It's because it is the only way I can concentrate on what you're saying.

Lookit me
when I'm
talkin' to you!



Oh yeh?
well, don't
interrupt me
when I'm
listenin' to you!



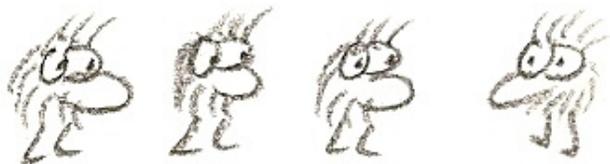
In social situations, I don't process information as fast as you. Facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice all convey subtle information to our brain. The more people who are present, the more info there is to process.



Company.



A crowd.



Crowd-ed.



Get
me out
of here!

Likewise, I don't like crowds and noisy places. This is too much information to take in and causes sensory overload.

Shoppers,
10% off on
strawberries!

Waaaah!



Ring
Ring!

...takin'
care
o'
Biz-
ness...

And then
I says to
her...

Sometimes we have super-senses. This makes us easily distractable to background noise, a sudden loud noise, or unpleasant odors.

Now, I have
something very
important to tell
you, so listen
carefully...



He smells
like
pepperoni.



If I run into you somewhere I don't expect to, I probably won't recognize you right away. This is called faceblindness. Even though I know what you look like, my mental picture of you is strongly tied to context, your voice, and how other people interact with you.

Yoo-hoo!!

|



Do I know you?
Oh, hi Mom.

|



Sometimes I interpret things literally, or I can't tell when you're being sarcastic. This is a neurological delay in reading your tone of voice.

Matt, I told everyone
you're in charge.



WTF?

That was
a joke.



Oh.

For neurotypical people (that's you), socializing with others relieves your stress or makes you feel energized. We Aspies are the opposite way. Conversation can wear us out, and we often need alone time to "recharge our batteries."

LIFE 100%
[Progress bar with 10 full squares]



That was
an awesome
meeting!

100%
[Progress bar with 9 full squares and 1 empty square]



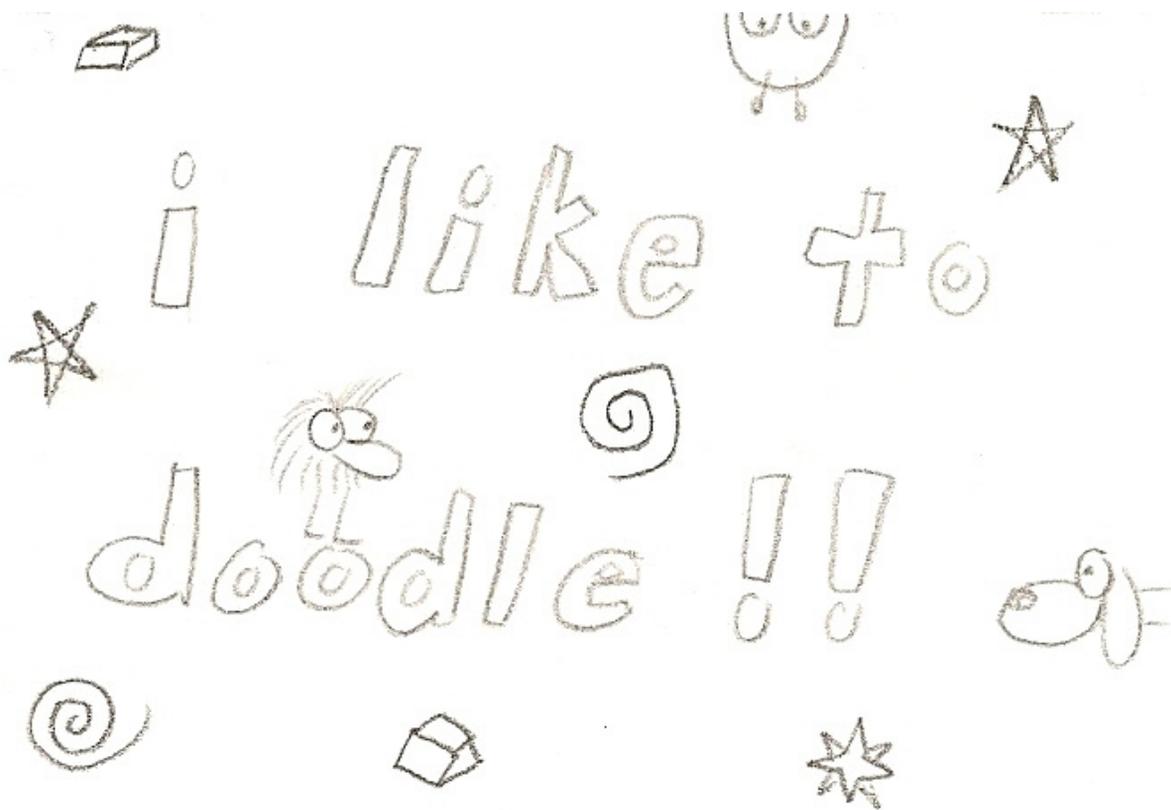
Yeh,
we got
so much
done!

10%
[Progress bar with 1 empty square]



I need
a JUP!

We usually have special topics or hobbies that we like to pursue with intense concentration and on our own. Examples include trains, foreign cultures, and washing machines.



(SO glad mine isn't washing machines.)



Are there advantages to being as Aspie? Yes! We are honest, detail-oriented, good listeners, and have a unique view of things. Often, we achieve high levels of success in our special interest area.

Me...
me...
oh, that is so me!
I rock!

!



So that is a glimpse into my world. I hope it has helped you better understand me and others like me. We are all different, and with all differences, knowledge brings understanding. If we understand each other, then there won't be any need for a right planet or a wrong planet. 😊

I come in
peace!

|



Yeah yeah yeah,
C'mon, "ET,"
let's get some
lunch.



Further Information

Books

Attwood, Tony. The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007.

Carley, Michael John. Asperger's from the Inside Out. New York: Penguin Group, 2008.

Grandin, Temple. Thinking In Pictures: My Life with Autism. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Web Sites

GRASP: The Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership.

grasp.org

OASIS: Online Asperger Syndrome Information and Support.

www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/

Wrong Planet autism community. wrongplanet.net

For more thoughts and illustrations, please visit dudeimanaspie.blogspot.com.

About the Author

Matt Friedman is a writer, non-profit professional, and self-identified Aspie. As Assistant to the Executive Director at Brandywine Counseling, Inc. in Wilmington, Delaware, he is responsible for fundraising and communications. He is a strong believer in advocacy through storytelling. Matt received his B.S. in Chemical Engineering in 1997 from Johns Hopkins University, moving to the non-profit field in 2001 in search of greater satisfaction. Since learning he had Asperger's in his mid-thirties, he has begun exploring how to put his personal and professional background to use for autism spectrum advocacy. Matt was an avid cartoonist in elementary school but essentially abandoned his hobby before "Dude, I'm An Aspie!" In his spare time, Matt tries his best to live in the moment and remain a perpetual kid. He is a board game nut, a barefoot hiker, and a regular at his local open mic night.

