

from Aotearoa

I'M 16 NOW - ANONYMOUS	2
MY AUTISTIC LENS - SARAH BETTIN	4
MY WAY OF SEEING MY LIFE WITH AUTISM - JONTY CARROLL	6

I'm 16 now

- Anonymous

You can publish what I've written here on NZ media if you wish. If you want me to talk about it further, I'll do it but not in a video call or anything like that. I'd rather remain anonymous.

My parents put me into ABA when I was 3 years old and it ended when I was 7. I'm 16 now. I have very little memory about it except for two things. One of them is that one of the tutors was coercing me into doing something which I felt uncomfortable doing so I could play a game that I wanted to play (I think I was 5 or 6 at the time). The other is that I remember hating it towards the end, the worst part is that I have no idea why because I don't remember a thing about it.

As for how ABA affected me, I don't really know since it started and ended so early in my life. However, one thing which has happened more recently and I do remember is my parents' attitude to autism, which was and still is entirely negative. This, in my opinion, is just as if not more important to address than ABA because if a parent doesn't have a negative prejudice about autism, they won't seek to put their child into ABA in the first place. When they told me that I was autistic when I was 11, they didn't do much to help me be at ease with it. Quite the opposite, in fact. Here are some of the things that they've said and done to me over the past 5 years:

- They openly admitted that they grieved and cried after my diagnosis because they felt like the "normal" child they thought they had, had died.
- They were noticeably disapproving and taken aback when I said that even if I could, I wouldn't cure my autism, which shows that they view it with nothing but complete disdain.
- My mum said that I needed to "outgrow" autism, to "not let the autism control me", and that "I unlearned most of the autism with the ABA, but there are still some things I need to unlearn" and other stuff like that. These things she wants me to "unlearn" now aren't detrimental whatsoever so I don't get what her deal is. And I didn't "learn" anything in the first place, I was born this way!
- They've treated autism as a thing to be dealt with all my life, and now I'm "working" against dealing with it now that I'm aware of what autism is when in reality, that's just how I am and I can't change that. When I say that to them, they guilt-trip me into believing that I'm just being lazy about it.
- Blamed me for doing poorly at school when their views on autism being a wholly negative thing and them constantly pushing me to strive to look and act as "normal" as possible made a lasting impression on me, which led me to refusing specialised help at school out of fear of looking different compared to everyone else. They then further blamed me for refusing the specialised help. Coincidentally, wanting your child to look

and act as "normal" as possible is the overarching theme of ABA so technically it never really stopped, there's just different people doing it to me now.

- About that lasting impression from my parents about autism earlier, when my pastoral manager in school brought up me being autistic when I was in Year 8, I broke down crying in front of her. To this day I still have a lot of difficulty talking about autism and even researching anything about autism by myself without me being mentally uncomfortable or even crying sometimes. As well as that, I have a overarching fear of being judged for any little thing about me, whether it be my interests, opinions, the mere fact that I'm autistic or the music I listen to because of the aforementioned constantly pushing me to strive to look and act as "normal" as possible thing. I've been trying to work on this but I've still got a long way to go.

A combination of my parents' attitude to me being autistic and autism itself along with the ABA has led to me suffering a great deal of self-hatred, depression, self-doubt and low self-esteem, all of which I still suffer from to one degree or another. None of this would have happened if my parents didn't have a negative prejudice about autism, which is why I think educating people about autism as well as banning ABA are equally important.

My autistic lens

- Sarah Bettin

If I am interested in learning something, I have unlimited energy and devotion. I am motivated from within, I am an independent learner. Meeting another person who is knowledgeable gives me immense delight. One-on-one tuition is best. I am in a state of flow when I am focused.

Almost everything I do, I do with devotion. I find it hard to switch from one thing to another and I often don't stop until I have reached some sense of completion.

I am acutely aware of the shortcomings of verbal and written communication as a means to pass on information. I tend to mull over past exchanges and analyse them, anxious about any misunderstandings or ambiguity.

When meeting new people, I perceive a stream of simultaneous sensory inputs, such as the tone of the voice, the rhythm of the speech, the way of moving, the pauses in the speech, etc, and this captures my attention so much that I will carry within myself a sensory imprint of each person, an impression that takes many hours to fade.

A person's ways of expressing themselves (physically and in words) is a fascinating window for me into yet another way of standing in the world, of seeing the world.

The flip side is that I have to manage how many encounters I have so as to allow for downtime and not be overwhelmed. New social situations can be quite scary and I experience them intensely.

On the other hand, being surrounded by my family is soothing.

When with people I don't know well, I oscillate between being reserved and conforming, versus being lively and speaking my mind. I prefer the second option, but the first one is safer if you have to fit into a corporate job for example.

I cannot adeptly move in and out of groupings and keep going with the small talk. A loud setting with lots of voices sends me into despair, I cannot easily filter out any of the voices.

I prefer engaging one-on-one with someone who goes straight into deep conversation, without noisy clatter and banging in the background. In order to focus on ideas, I prefer not to stare in the other person's eyes.

I don't believe that people should fit into models of when what should be achieved in terms of growing up. I am a late developer, and that's perfectly ok.

Discovering who my child is and by doing so discovering who I am is fascinating. My child is my best teacher.

In my desire to understand a system, I try to discover all facets and details, and the more I know the more I understand how little I know, and the harder it becomes to explain something quickly to someone else without confusing them. It is hard to dumb something down.

My emotional self talk is not good at relativising things, and I am not a master of being laid-back. Little things are just as important as big things, and I tend to worry. I need time to retreat and reflect. The best method is go out on my bicycle to “let the horse run”!

The well being of a person is very much dependent on the environment around that person, and sometimes it is possible to change the environment, or move into a new environment. Knowing what environments are beneficial is the first step to personal well being. For example I know I would not be happy in a big open plan office.

My strength is inventing my own systems for quality control, especially for recurring activities. This is relevant to part of my work.

Perceiving the beauty of nature is food for my soul. I don't even have to create to feel alive, just perceiving fills me with joy. The flip side of this sensitivity is that I am overwhelmed in noisy and hard environments such as shopping centres or if surrounded by urban ugliness. Presence of plants, the soil and birds gives immediate relief, as well as being able to see the horizon.

Social rules are often based on unspoken rules, such as not saying what one really wants, or not disclosing what one does not know. Luckily I have an inbuilt bullshit detector. I hate persuasive writing, PR-talk and hidden agendas.

At any point in time, whatever is deemed to be a “developmental condition or dysfunction, low-functioning or high functioning etc.” is the result of the prevailing cultural lens.

Applying pathologising jargon to describe Autistic people or other minorities is discriminatory and counter-productive. Applying pathologising language to a neurodivergent person is similar to putting a seed in the shade and dampening its potential for reaching the sun.

The result is that Autistic adults are forced to mask and hide, and Autistic children miss out on growing up with positive Autistic role models.

Sarah Bettin

23 September 2018

Discover other lenses in the mosaic of Autistic Lenses:

<https://autcollab.org/projects/a-mosaic-of-autistic-lenses/>

My way of seeing my life with autism

- Jonty Carroll

Kia ora, my name is Jonty Carroll and I have Autism. I am writing this to help people understand me, something which I believe is often very difficult even if my actions make perfect sense to me. The main reason I'm doing this is because the world outside my head can feel very lonely in a way that goes beyond physical loneliness and instead comes from a lack of understanding.

The hardest part of life with Autism is when I'm socializing with people. It feels like a social labyrinth of which everyone knows their way around but me. I'm so busy trying to follow every sentence to notice where we are going, that I'm stuck wondering where our supposed destination is and why we need to get there. The conversation quickly becomes overly confusing and impossible for me to manage. My instinct is to be completely quiet and hope no one notices how much I'm struggling with what they see as a normal conversation.

What hasn't helped is that I have always been reluctant to talk about my thoughts and feelings, partly because I'm not the most articulate speaker, especially in stressful conversations, which are almost all of them to me. My mind and way of seeing has always worked differently to other people. One of my favourite teachers once asked me to explain why if a lion could speak English an English speaking human could not understand it. I was the only student who answered that because of their different experiences a human and a lion would see the world so differently that there was no way one could understand the others' way of seeing and therefore understand it.

Not wanting to compare myself to a lion, I think it is similar between an autistic and a neurotypical. All we can do is theories on what it would be like to be what we are not. However, in a world dominated by neurotypicals, thinking being autistic can be a disadvantage or even a disability. It is important for everyone to at least try to understand each other. This is my attempt to write a firsthand account of what it's like to live with autism, both the good and bad, trying to be as honest as possible. Of course, I don't speak for all autistics but am just writing about my experience

I'm not sure exactly what my first memory is. I think it might be the first time I saw a kangaroo in Australia; random as that is, I think I can remember when my first brother, Mac, was born. But I know I have loved animals from a very young age. So my first memories are all of animals, mostly my cats. And later, spending my days at crèche trying to explain animal behaviour to other kids and teachers, not understanding why they did not seem as interested as I was.

In my early days, all I understood or wanted was about was the environment; all my best friends were trees. My best friend was a tree in my back garden that was so high I thought it must be the tallest tree in all New Zealand, and the house I lived in was full of the most beautiful trees in the world. They would continuously flower bright

pink flowers exactly on my birthday. I thought how lucky I was to be born on such an amazing planet. The only thing I didn't like about it was too many humans.

In my view, humans were the most boring species on the planet, so I could see no reason to socialize with other people. Instead, I would tell stories in my mind, usually about animals, making everything a lot easier. I was in complete control over what was happening and going on and could focus on what interested me. I would create a mini tv screen within my head and, in effect, play a video in my mind. Sometimes, this would be a repeat of something I had seen on tv; for example, when I was at creche. I would replay the tv shows working with dinosaurs and Prehistoric Beasts, my favourite at the time. To make sure I could do this, I would need to remember the documentary word for word and image by an image with me. I had to watch them multiple times to make sure I heard every detail right. However, well, I was watching the video in my mind. In Reality, I was often sitting on my own, looking into space. Weith confused the crèche staff and my parents, who I imagine did not know what I was doing, but you need to understand this was what made me happy. And I didn't see or think about how other people acted differently. I could see that they spent more time with each other than I did, but I didn't see any significance in this from my perspective, different people just did different things, and unlike some, I was happy on my own most of the time.

When I was young, I could not see any reason to socialize with other people. So instead, I would tell stories in my mind. It made everything a lot easier as I was in complete control over what was happening and what was going on and could focus on what interested me. I would create a mini tv screen within my head and, in effect, play a video in my mind; sometimes, this would be a repeat of something I had seen on tv. When I was at creche, I would replay the tv shows working with dinosaurs and Prehistoric Beasts, my favourite at the time. To ensure I could do this, I would need to remember the documentary word for word and image by an image, with me watching it multiple times to make sure I heard everything right well. I was watching the video in my mind; in Reality, I was often sitting on my own looking into space; this confused the crèche staff and my parents, who I imagine had no idea what I was doing. Still, you need to understand this was what made me happy.

Before going further, I should explain what a special interest is. A special interest is a fascination with one subject becoming an obsession and a desire to know everything there is to know about that subject; my first special interest was dinosaurs started by watching the Jurassic Park movies with then expanded to include all parasitic animals

This would mean spending all my free time at crèche thinking about them and replaying things I had seen on TV in my head. That's why humans are not interesting to me. My special interest was animals, so humans were to be ignored. So the only way people could be helpful was if they somehow helped with my interest in animals.

One of the first people who did was one of the creche staff named Jane, who understood my interest in animals and could connect with me through it. The best thing she did was ask me questions about the environment because if I knew the answer, it gave me a chance to talk about it, but if not with I saw it as better I could find more information that interested me. So, for example, one day, she asked me if I had heard of the Beluga whale. I hadn't, but whales were one of my favourite species, so the idea that there was one I hadn't even heard of was a bit Like hearing about a new season of your favourite show. So when mom came after creche, I ran to her asking if she had ever heard of the beluga whale, and when she said no insistent, we went to the video shop on the way home to get any video that might have information about them.

I think it was June who introduced me to the works of David Attenborough, unknowingly certain of a new special interest. Attenborough became the first person I really respected, as he was the only person I saw who seemed to see the world as similarly as I did. And one of two people I wanted to be like when I grew up. The other was a fictional character Dr Alan Grant from the Jurassic Park movies. I liked because he loved dinosaurs and did not seem interested in humans or anything else with I related. He made me want to be a Paleontologist when I gave up something that did not last until adulthood but did give me some purpose in early life.

But the more I learned, the more time I spent in my head, and not spending time with the other children again looked very odd at the time. My favourite thing to do was climb a tree at the back of the crèche. The tee was one of my favourite things as a child, and I would think of it more like a friend than an object, perhaps more so than the other children; it upset me when it had to be cut down to make room for a new University maybe this contributed to my dislike of the uni authorities as an adult, but then again I have always had a dislike for authorities

Sometimes, the stories in my head became inseparable from Reality. For example, I had a dog, a golden retriever, in my mind. I would spend my days at home pretending this dog was real both my parents and brother knew about it, and I would have been offended at the suggestion that it wasn't real. This was a problem when one of the crèche staff asked me if I had a dog. I know deep down that the correct answer from her point of view would be no, but I could not make myself say that and said yes. Ok, so far, but over the coming weeks, she would often ask me for updates on the dog, and I would do my best to provide them, but increasingly believed I was doing something wrong when she found out I didn't have a dog she was pretty confused. I had the same issue with games like I spy when I would imagine what I was asking them to find without understanding why this was so hard for them.

I was more ordinary at home and close to my parents and Brother Mac. I enjoyed playing up trees and saw the trees more like friends, and we had a big one in our grading with a saw as one of my best friends. I also loved cats' marbles and blackpess. And we had a treehouse that I would play in for most of the afternoon, most impertinently my day's hard certainty. In the morning I word watch one of my

nature documentaries before playing outside and on weekends go to see grandparents or my parent's friends and my friends for a while. But I eventually stopped having any. What would make me uncomfortable was if my day was distracted. I would have a different understanding way. For example, one day, when my favourite documentaries working with Prehistoric Beasts, an episode focused on early humans (remember, humans are the least interesting thing on the planet) made me angry because I didn't see the animals. I was expecting. To and hard, my dad turn it off. Another part of the day I would always look forward to was the evening; my mom always read me a story. The first one I can remember was The Adventures of the Little Wooden Horse, about a Wooden Horse trying to find his maker, Uncle Peter. I remember finding the story scary at the time and spent a lot of the day desperately hoping the horse would find uncle's paper. The story that was perhaps one of my favourites of all time was the fairy tale Peter and the Wolf. This was a story I would repeatedly repeat in my head, and it became one of my special interests.

I don't know when exactly my parents realized I was different from other kids, but I know when they started, nothing some unusual behaviour. For example, my mom has talked to me about how I could repeat my favourite documentaries word for word. For me, this was second nature. I had done it multiple times in my head but hearing it aloud obviously surprised her. It happened again when my crèche had a storytime and I repeated Peter and the Wolf word for word. I remember the crèche staff seemed impressed at the time. But later, when my mom came to pick me up for the day, the boss Lynda came to explain what had happened, and how it seemed strange that a 3-year-old could tell a story like a musical composition with words like And now, this is how things stood:

I think it was also about age four that I carried around what I called my ribbon with was actually a piece of plastic in the shape of a long string. I would do this because it felt nice in my hand. It's hard to explain why but moving a string around in my hand seemed natural and right. The only explanation that you might understand is it helped me think, and for me thinking stories in my head was my primary form of entertainment, so I guess my ribbon was a strange form of entertainment. Autism self-advocate Temple Grandin invented what she has called a hug machine, that looks like two wooden planks with someone clamps in between, and the wells vibrate. I'm worried I'm not expecting this very well, so here's a picture.

Well, I have never been in one of these. I think it's likely that having my ribbon in my hand was having a similar effect as Grandin's machine in that it's just a feeling, but one that makes me calmer and more comfortable. Remember, the world others see as normal is strange and scary for me, so it makes sense that parts of mine would look the same for a neurotypical (our world for people not on the spectrum). Still, my ribbon made me look different, so it definitely made fitting in more challenging. It was basically like a sign saying I'm odd. What's more, even I struggled to explain its purpose, so when asked would usually answer like it helps me think with made little sense to anyone else, and well, I understood that at the time, I saw my ribbon as part of my world and didn't want to have to explain it to others.

When I was informed, I remember that I had to go somewhere called school I felt confused. I didn't want to leave crèche or Jane and, most impatiently, the tree, but it was more the uncertainty of going somewhere I didn't understand. The one thing I knew about school was that I would have to be there a lot longer than crèche with I didn't like. So on my first day, I tried to hide in my room, hoping my parents would not notice. But, unfortunately, this didn't work, and I remember being talking to some big cats outside balmoral school to my year 0 class.

I didn't enjoy my first years at school. Everything seemed pointless, and most subjects did not interest me. There were some exceptions like Science and anything involving animals. I remember enjoying learning about the planets in year one. My favourite was Pluto, with was a planet at the time. I liked Pluto because it seemed different out there all on its own, but being difficult made it interesting; for the same reason, at school, my favourite number was 0 because it was the one everyone else forgot. I can't remember why this was important to me, but it was.

It was also about this time that I became very arrogant and got angry when people did not understand me or what I was saying. I have always had a speech impediment, but I didn't understand what that meant at a young age and would become angry when people didn't understand me. In year one, my teacher aid was helping me write a story, and I wrote about a sloth, my favourite Animal at the time, because of a David Attenborough documentary I saw. My teacher aid did not understand the word sloth. It's not impossible that she did not know what a sloth was, but I didn't have the nuance to understand this and became confused and angry and blamed the teacher aid. However, I think mom hard to talk to her about what a sloth was in the end.

Another thing I had a problem with and still do was change. With meant anything, even that would have been insignificant to others. For example, I would hate it when there was a relief teacher to the point I would sometimes have to say home. However, there were ways to avoid this by finding the right relief teacher. In year 3, my class had a relief teacher who, on his first day, told us a story about how he had come to school early and found it overrun by pirates and how he had to scare them away. As an adult, I find this somewhat strange, but it was enough to make this relief teacher ok with me as an imaginative child.

For most of the years 1 to 4, the only subject I enjoyed was art, primarily painting animals. I did this at school and home, but mostly at school; one of my proudest achievements as a child was a paper mache butterfly wing I made in year one, which is still on my bedroom wall.

What I enjoyed about the act was not usually making it but the result of seeing the animals. It was the same reason I watched the documentaries. I was interested in seeing and thinking about the pictures and not what was behind them, and with art, I got what was in my hand into the real world, in which others could see it, and I helped appreciate it. Art also met. I could get along better with my first babysitter f who was excellent at drawing, and I would often watch her and try to recreate her

drawings, mostly unsuccessfully. But my most significant success with art was when I entered a school homemade hat competition with a hat based on Antarctica with fish and seals at the bottom and Penguins in the middle which birds at the top. It might have been too abstract for most viewers, but the fact that I had the confidence even to enter the competition shows a level of confidence I lost after intermediate school and deeply miss.

I think it was year 3 when I finally enjoyed school. With was primarily thanks to my teacher Fabien. On our first day, she introduced us to her Puppets, a frog named Grenouille, a toad called crapaud, and a possum just named possum. The Puppets made me feel more confident than I had in my previous class. And it helped connect the real world with my imaginary one. Other things in the classroom helped as well. For example, when we would sit on the mat, we referred to the mat as a boat and were told if we didn't sit on it, we would get eaten by crocodiles. With was not intended To scare us; we know there were no crocodiles, but it gave me a reason to follow the rule that we had to sit on the mat with I had not previously had.

Following the rules was always something I Struggled with because most of the rules make little sense to me. If a rule had an obvious reason for it, I had no problem following it. For example, I had no trouble following the road rules. However, I would completely ignore rules that I did not understand or see a need for; an at school example of this was a school rule that everyone had to wear a hat. With didn't make any sense to me, so I ignored it. I was able to be persuaded to wear one if I saw no reason not to, but this meant that even though I would wear one most days. But I didn't understand why this was necessary, and if I couldn't find my hat, it didn't bother me. I would forget about it. I couldn't understand why it would bother anyone whether or not I was wearing a hat when they told me sometimes forcefully to do so. I would see them as bossy idiots and ignore them. With was problematic. The only person who could convince me to wear a hat every day was Fabien because I trusted her, and she privately told me she behaved the rule was stupid as well and kept spare caps in her room for when people forgot so there was no reason not to wear one.

In year 3, I remember my first positive experience with a teacher aid, a woman named C. I don't remember when she started working with me, but my earliest memory was when she took me gardening, and we found a baby kowhai tree. I still remember the sound of her voice when we found it; her excitement made it clear we had found something extraordinary.

A Kōwhai is a tree with yellow flowers native to NZ. We kept the tree in our classroom until it was big enough to plant it back in the garden, where we found more baby kowhai and started looking after them again. The Kowhai became the main reason I would go to school, and I thought looking after the trees were more impatient than any of the school work. It was an ongoing job because Kōwhai are in danger from a race-type caterpillar called the Kowhai caterpillar. As our Kowhai was still young, I had to make sure the caterpillar did not get to them and, if it did, make sure it didn't do too much damage. With usually meet killing the caterpillar,

something I did not enjoy but saw as necessary to protect my Kowhai. Sometimes I would move the caterpillar to another tree where it would not do as much damage, Starting a long-standing problem with me not wanting to Hurt other animals, even if it was necessary for protecting the environment. That is why I could never be a conservationist despite my love for animals.

At the time, the school staff and my parents were happy with my work with the Kowhai and could see that it gave me an obvious reason to go to school for the first time. The two years in class Fabien's with C as my teacher aid were by far my best at school maybe ever, but there were problems, most notably me not having any friends my age on the outside it might have looked like I had some. Still, I did not understand the need for friends who did not share my interest and my need for alone time to think. So I did not have time to socialize during morning tea and lunchtime with only left classes activities. Or after school, my Favorite of these two options was class activities like PE class and class games. I enjoyed this Format because it had clear rules, and I didn't have to make small talk, but I knew there was something different between the other children and me and found a lot of them boring, too, to be completely honest.

Small talk and how to socialize are always tricky for me as an autistic, but a critical distinction must be made here. As an adult, I have trouble socializing and understanding how to be a friend but still want and need friends. But as a kid, I didn't see any need for friends. There were several reasons for this, but one that has to be understood was other children were boring me. Of course, that was not true. They were different from me, which made them boring from my perspective. When you have a TV screen in your mind, you feel you can go anywhere and talk to anyone, then why should it be the other kid on the playground if they have different interests and you are not very good at talking to them?. I could think about animals instead or if I want to do something exciting, have a look at my Kowhai. If I wanted Company, I could see Fabien, who was much easier to talk to adults always are what I am saying is there was no reason to play with other children, and from my perspective, a lot of reasons not to it was simple way would I want to.

The answer for a while was because everyone else did for my classmates to my Brother Mac to tv characters everyone had a best friend, so in my early years at school I had friends I remember three of them a girl called Maya and boys David and Felix. Still, today I am ashamed to say that I have very few memories of any of them looking back at the time. I know I would go to their houses and have them around to mine almost like a normal kid, but I don't have any memories of what we did and how it went. My mind was just not ready for that kind of socializing at the time, and by about year 5, I had lost all contact with them. Looking back, that was a big mistake, but it just seemed natural, definitely not something to feel sad about. It doesn't feel good writing that now.

I was a lot more social at home and often played with Mac and my parents. I would enjoy it when we had visitors like my auntie Anne who we would play games with us when mom and dad were busy. I remember being excited when my 2ed Brother

Nate was born and getting angry that I could not see him the night he was born. So human contact was still impatient to me; it was just hard to be the right person. My grandparents were my favourite people to see as they appeared non-judgemental and kind. I briefly disliked one of them who told me as a child that God made animals so we could eat with for me was one of the worst things anyone could say, but I forgave them. Growing up, my grandparents on my dad's side lived on the Northshore and my moms on Waiheke Island. I would visit them whenever I could and enjoyed long walks with dad's mom Margaret. I would always go on long walks and usually talk about animals, my favourite subject. Margaret was excellent at making people feel at ease and that whatever you wanted to talk about was OK with her, something that is very useful when you don't have good conversation skills. Granddad Bill was a lot quieter but would appear very kid and play games like chess whenever we wanted to. He would also get any move we wanted, making days at Bill and Margaret's as close to perfection as possible.

The relationship with my cousins on dad's side was somewhat less song, mainly because, unlike Bill and Margaret, they would come across as condescending and sometimes talk about us like we want there and mock us a bit. But there were some pleasant experiences. For example, my cousin Sebastian would come around when we were at Bill and Margaret's and show us how to play video games, with the most common being Alex, the kid. Somehow Seb knew all the ways to play and could win every time. But there were also times when I would feel used by my cousins. For example, one time, my cousins Romeo and Eden went on a long walk on Waiheke to a rook they had named camel hump. They told us stories about how on the tip, they found a man who told them how to kill possums, seeing a great white stack and meant an elf. Of course, I didn't exactly believe any of these stories. However, I was still living in a half imaginary world, and this seemed like unnecessary encouragement intended to give them a laugh at my expense. Another somewhat negative experience was on the way home from a day at runbowsend. I heard another cousin Sacha say that she cared about Climate change but not enough to risk her life for it. Well, this might seem reasonable now. Unfortunately, it did not at the time, and I instead that, to help prevent Climate change, we had to stop the car and work home. This would have taken several hours. Unsurprisingly no one else in the vehicle was happy about this, and after a long argument, we argued that if we won't home by 6, we would get out and walk. I can't remember exactly what time it was, but I imagine they made sure we were black by 6. Despite these agreements with, I want to be clear were mostly just nominal conflicts between young adults and children. I still have very positive memories of my cousins and can't blame them for most of what I did at the time.

It was at this point that I became angrier that the world did not work as I wanted it too with was made more complicated by the fact I did not see the world in ways anyone else did or understood; for example, as mentioned above, I saw trees as living things that needed protection individually this seemed so obvious to me at the time but made scenes to no one else who saw tee protection as a collective this was sowing by a guava tree growing at home when I was about eight the tree was Beautiful but would rain guavas right across the garden making it challenging to

work across for me this was a nonissue because the tree was alive there was nothing we could do about it and besides it did have its usefulness I could climb it, but my parents decided to have the tree cut down this made me furious, but I could not see the situation from their perspective and just got more and more angry and upset, and I don't think anyone understand why

I also hated anything that damaged the environment or reminded me of environmental damage. For example, I would hate the school hall because it was made of wood and you could see the dead trees. It also meant that I could not bear to see any animal in pain for any reason. One time, my mom showed me a video of an African Antelope running into the only tree in the field. The video was supposed to be funny, but I found it sad. This rule also introduced when the animal was the badly. For example, one of my Favorite relief teachers read the class a story about some boys who got lost on an island. In one part of the book, a shark attacks them, and I was nervous that they would have to kill the shark, and I asked to leave the room. I could only see an animal in pain in my nature documentaries. That didn't bother me as much if it was happening in the wild without humans involved.

In year 4, my parents rewarded my love for animals by getting me my first proper pet, a white rabbit with the creative name rabbit in fairness, before buying him, mom had said that before we could, we had to think of a name so that name was made on the spot. But rabbit was one of the best parts of my childhood. He was a pure White rabbit with red eyes, he was not exotic exactly, but White had always been my Favourite colour, so to me, he was perfect. We keep him in a hutch outside, and I would let him out twice a day and sometimes bring him into the house for a pat. Rabbit was one of the few things that could calm me down, making him useful in later years, but he was also a friend in every scene and running him after school was always something to look forward to.

I have always been both Fascinated and uncomfortable with the concept of mysteries. They had been my special interest for a while, and I got mom to get me many liberty books on the Loch Ness monster and the abominable snowman. And enjoyed weighing up the evidence for their existence. I decided that the Loch Ness monster probably did, but the abominable snowman probably didn't.

Anyway, the idea of ghosts was less interesting to me because everyone knew what they were, the spirits of the dead. They were less of a mystery and just an uncomfortable idea. However, it got my attention when a rumour started going around my class that one of the houses that looked onto the school field might be hunted. As far as I can remember, this rumour had started when one boy claimed to have seen the owner working around with a bag on their head. Later, a group of students had visited the house on Halloween night and had the door open by itself and candy filtered out. Well, this story seemed unlikely to most of the class even at the time the house became Folklore, and more and more stories were told about this house, for example, one girl had seen the car driving itself, and there had been a sign in the garden saying you're next in your pot with obviously meant they

hard put someone in a pot the stories got scarier and scarier with one student saying a year one and gone into the house to get a ball and never came out

The house was a major social opportunity for one my class mats had come into the make behave world in my head and were playing by my rules. The class put a group of students in charge of watching the house at lunchtime and mooing tea. I was not an official member of the group but would often talk to them about what they were seeing. From memory, the house was both a game and a story simultaneously. Well, most of us didn't really believe the most insane stories. We thought the rumours must be based on something real. Eventually, Fabien found out about the stories and rightly concerned that this was a game gone too far. She responded by reading us a storybook about some Children who were scared of an older woman who lived next door to them .by the end of the book. They had discovered that the woman was actually a very nice but isolated lady. The children became the woman's only friends until she died unexpectedly. The story's model is that being difficult doesn't mean something or someone has to be scary, a message that the world will have to embrace if it is to become more autistic friendly.

The more I think about the houses, the more I see it as a metaphor for how society is run and what will need to change .humans have made a world where social rules have become more like a test of how well someone will fit in. we have unwritten rules about everything that you can and can't do. Someone that doesn't follow them is wrong. It seems to me some of our social rules are unwritten because to write what they are, the word exposes that they are entirely pointless. The house was, of course, just a nominal house, but with just a few stories, it became something to be afraid of, and the old woman in the story was only scared of it because she did not follow unwritten rules that no one could understand enough to write down.

As a child, one of my favourite places was Waiheke island, an island in the Hauraki Gulf. I liked the island because it seemed more environmentally friendly than the central city and parts of the island seemed a bit like a forest. My family had a house on top of a hill at palm beach, and from our balcony, we could see the whole valley where there were some unseal homes. For example, one was bright blue, and another one was pink. Our house was green, and when I was young, I would enjoy looking at every home and deciding which was my favourite. I would also enjoy watching the trees and finding new kinds. After looking after the baby Kowhai at school, I became more interested in native trees, and my grandparents got me a book about all of them. I would enjoy going for walks with it and trying to find all of them.

But the two things that I most enjoyed watching at Waiheke were birds and the rooks as a child. Waiheke was the only place I ever saw birds like tui and kereru, and I would look for them in the valley for most of the day. Then, every afternoon we would go down to the beach for a swim and then go for ice cream at the dairy by the beach. But the most exciting thing at the beach from my perspective was the rook

pools with I would enjoy looking for underwater life, most of them hard, only small things like sea snails and crabs. Still, sometimes they would have small fish which were more interesting or even starfish one time, I found an octopus, but I'll write about that later.

Another advantage of being at Waiheke was it was where I would most often see my uncle Paul and my grandparents on my mom's side. Grandma and grandpa are two of the nicest people I know. They lived in a mud-brick house on Waiheke when I was growing up and would always be happy to see us. They would usually give up a treasure hunt by hiding chocolate around the house for us to find. They also held a giant penguin statue by their door, which I liked. Sometimes when they were in the city, they would take us to movies like Garfield and Shrek giving me an understanding of movies I would not have otherwise have seen.

Uncle Paul sometimes could the hello hello hello man because of his signature greeting is one of the funniest people I have ever met. He could make almost any conversation he's in hilarious. He also disregarded the rules with which I related to when he was babysitting us. He promised our parents he would make us a healthy salad but instead made what he called a chocolate salad, which was made entirely of chocolate. He insisted it was still a salad because it had different kinds of chocolate.

Paul also had a boat named Days and Days, which I saw as a way to have a better chance to see more exciting sea life, especially after he told us he had seen dolphins and orcas, and even one a whale shark. All of this made me want to go out and have a look with him one day. So my parents decided I should stay a night on the boat first and I could come home if I didn't like it with I argued to do. I think I enjoyed the night on the boat. Paul told me his favourite stories by Hilaire Belloc named Jim, Who Ran Away from His Nurse and Was Eaten by a Lion and Matilda, who told lies and burned to death. Well, they might sound like scary stories. But they are actually hilarious, and I highly recommend everyone reads them. But anyway, I enjoyed my first night on the boat. Paul was happy to take me to look for sea life.

We would then go out on Paul's boat. Most times, we were on Waiheke, and it was something else to look forward to. However, at some point, we used the opportunity to go fishing. At the start, I was ok with this because we would always throw the fish back. I thought this would allow me to see the fish but not do it any harm. However, I realized the problem with this logic when we caught a fish with the hook in its eye one time. After that, I stopped going fishing. I can only remember one time I went fishing after that, and that was when we spent a day on Paul's boat with my cousin Romeo this time, I was not fishing myself but would go for a swim well, the rest of them did. However, when they caught a fish and put it in a Bucket, I had the strong desire to throw it back. I didn't do that but later wished I had. I became increasingly unhappy with my lack of action. Romeo was supposed to bring the dead fish for our dinner that night, but the idea of seeing it dead was unbearable to me.

I got so angry at my parents, who didn't understand why, but I said I would cream down if Romeo didn't bring the fish. Now, this seems like a terrible overreacting, but

at the time, my only regret was not saving the fish when I had the chance. What was worse, the anger I directed towards my parents was more focused on myself for letting the fish die. Looking back, I still struggle to think of how I could have expected this to my parents. Why I was so upset because, despite their best efforts, they did not see the situation any where close to the way I did. I looked like a spoilt brat telling them what to have for dinner from their perspective. To them, a dead fish was not a big deal and difficulty, not something to have amount down about, but I really fault like I was in part responsible for the death of a living thing and could not forgive myself and the fact no one else could see a problem made it so much worse.

It wasn't a disagreement, but two completely different ways of seeing the world so different they could not even understand one another. after all this time, looking back, I still feel bad about getting angry at my parents, but I also still feel bad about not saving the fish

At the same time, at home, I was seen by my parents as a very fussy eater who would not try new things. With was true, but there was a reason behind it. Autistic children often don't like a lot of foods, with some studies showing we taste food by focusing more on thickener than what most people see as taste; this means we prefer more bland foods than most people and also don't like food mixed together as that can confuse the thickener this often means things we like Pasta with as little ingredients as possible one of my favourite dinners as a child was Pasta with pesto and nothing else. At the same time, I didn't like new food because of my fear of uncertainty. When trying something for the first time, you do not know what it will taste like and if you will like it or not, so the idea of trying something was scary and something I preferred not to have to do.

In my first year at school, I found the three subjects seen as the most important extremely difficult because of their abstract nature and my not understanding of their point. The subjects were, of course, reading, writing and math. Math was my favourite of the three in my first years, but not for the right reasons. It was just the most simple putting numbers together is a lot easier and less abstract than sounding out a word. Thankfully, from a young age, my parents realized that the best way to make me interested in it was to contact it with my special interest.

For example, asking me how many bones there were in a dinosaur skeleton. Sometimes I could get it right. But usually, by imagining the skeleton and counting the bones, this worked when you started with a number like three, but it just became too complicated as the numbers got bigger. So I would give up. I would see math as a quick lesson, with every question standing on its own and not part of a collective. That meant I would spend all my time on the one math question, not looking for patterns that would be useful for the next question. Not because I could not see patterns but because I couldn't see how numbers, something that was not real and very abstract, could have a pattern to follow. I would be more interested in the stories that came with the questions.

With reading, I could see the advantages. I always enjoyed being read to; however, reading by myself wasn't that important because I could recreate stories in my mind. All I needed to do was have a story read to me, and if no one would, I could watch a movie, and I would have enough to think about for hours. At least this was true when I was fascinated by movies like Jurassic Park and Star Wars, but when I became more interested in books like Harry Potter, the idea of learning to read became more appealing. When I was in class, reading was much the same as math. If I was given the word, I would try to read it but again spend my time just trying to read that one word. When I was done with it moved on without learning from how the word was spelt correctly or looking for patterns in other words. Every word was an individual, and in my mind, how it was spelt had no bearing on the spelling of other words. Therefore, teaching me by asking me to read a word sheet was not helpful and confused me. The one exception was if I could see a word I knew within another word; this gave me the ability to focus on that word and make an educated guess on the surrounding sounds.

My earliest memory of learning to read at school goes back to your one, reading in a group with the teacher. The students would take turns reading a small part of the book, and later, we would all take the book home to read it to our parents as homework. As you can probably guess from the above paragraph, I was not good at this and could only read the beginnings and endings of words; however, my good memory made repetition of the books to my parents every night easy. I was doing everything by memory and probably made them think I was a better reader than I was.

Despite this, my reading was soon moved from class and done in a small room with a teacher's aid. I can't remember if I made progress, I think a little and slowly. One issue was they would give me kids picture books. So instead of reading the words, I would look at the pictures, see what's happening in the story, guess what the words were based on the pictures. The only time I couldn't do this was with names. So the teacher aid would often talk to mom about how I had a problem just with reading names.

I think I had been put back to reading with the other children by Fabien's class but was sometimes given books different from the rest of the class, usually based on my special interest in animals. I think I told Fabien that I would be more interested in the books if they had animals, so she found all the books with animals and would read them with me. Other times I heard a computer program that would read the books to me. I would listen with headphones. The computer told me to listen to the voice and follow along with my eyes. Unfortunately, I would usually listen and look at the page so everyone would think I was reading. It's probably fair to say I would never learn to read until I wanted to and when that would be was not up to the school.

When I learned to read, it was a slow process, but I think at the beginning of year 5 when my teacher aid Liz, started reading books that I found interesting to me. The first one was my family and my Family and Other Animals by Gerald Durrell. Liz would read most of it, but I would read the dialogue of one character, the family's friend

Spiro because, in the book, he would add an S to the end of every word with I found funny with somehow made reading essay

Other things helped. One book the school had me read was more interesting than the others. It was called *Teacher's Pet* and was supposedly about a girl named Amanda, who would infuriate the main character by singing in class and breaking every rule. We'll still be the teacher's favourite student. At the end of the book, in what I thought was a fantastic plot twist, Amanda is revealed to be the teacher's pet, Budgerigar. What made this book enjoyable for me was that at first, it seemed to be about class rules, something I was utterly uninterested in until the end when it became about animal rights, one of my favourite subjects. I was also able to take some pride because some of my classmates and even my teacher didn't understand the ending allowing me to explain to them that Amanda was a Budgerigar. This made me feel I knew and understood something others didn't, something I had not expected before

My learning to read also happened as I started to want to tell the stories in my head to others, usually my Brother Nate, who every night would be happy to listen to whatever story I wanted to tell him. I think the first one was a book called *Lion Boy* that was first read to me by Liz at school, and every day, I would go home and repeat it to Nate. My favourite part of mine and Nate was when the main character joins a Circus after the first book. Unfortunately, the Circus doesn't often appear, so I would try to add it.

All these moments, I believe, did slowly help me learn to read, but when I did learn, it seemed to others that it had happened overnight. For example, my dad started reading me the *Percy Jackson* book series at about year seven. I enjoyed all five books and was disappointed when you got to the end but was phased when a new one came out. However, dad had started reading us a different book, so I could either wait to he finished it or try to read the new *Percy Jackson* on my own I tried the latter. I found it hard at first, but it became more and more easy, and it wasn't long to I could read books like *Lion Boy*, so after years of being unable to learn to read, it seemed to everyone that it somehow happened overnight.

Writing was by far the most challenging subject for me, both for the same reasons as math and reading. Still, unlike with them, when I was trying to write, my mind would go into a state of confusion in which I could not remember what I had just learned. It was like my mind was overflowing, and everything I needed was not available, meaning all I could do was guess. For example, when practising writing in year 3, I would try desperately to sound out the middle of every word. If I got one sound right would move on to the next word forgetting to sound out the rest of the word sometimes, I would even get a letter confused with a whole word and spell you're with just a y. I would also get letters the wrong way around and forget to include words. My mind was just not meant for writing, and I just wanted the world to accept that as I had. This meant that, unlike with reading, I never tried to learn how to write on my own and when I did, quickly gave up, making writing the only subject I never improved at

Because I was behind in some subjects and was not interested in others, they often gave me special assignments to do well. The other children did things like writing. Most often meant making posters and booklets usually involving animals. My first special assignment was creating a world map, with each country represented by one of its native animals. And to go with it, a map of Jrr Tolkien's middle earth with characters from the lord of the rings in the area they first appear in the book. The educational basis of there're assignments was that I was hoping to learn cartography and sometimes writing because I would have to write the names of the countries in myself. Still, I think the main reason was just that I enjoyed it.

One of the special assignments I did in year 3 was on the octopus, my favourite animal. I saw this assignment not so much as school work but more like a personal project and would spend a lot of my free time planning it. I saw it as a bit like writing my own book. Well, working on the assignment, I would make my parents take me Kelly Tarltons to see a real octopus, and when we were at Waiheke, I would look in every rook pool for a wild one. To my amazement, one time, I found one. A medium-sized octopus in one of the rock pools. What surprised me was at one point, it moved from one rook pool to another, meaning it was for a moment on land. This fascinated me, so I read about how long octopuses could stay on land

With brought me to an internet hoax named the Pacific Northwest tree octopus, a joke about an octopus that lives in a tee. At first, I believed this octopus really existed, but after some more reading was disappointed to find out it did not, but the idea still fascinated me. My teacher aid still believed it was a real octopus, and so did everyone I had already told about it, including my parents. Hence, I decided to put it in my booklet and present it to the class no one found out it wasn't real. Still, I did feel bad afterwards, feeling I had misled them. Still, I think I did it partly for their benefit in my mind. It hard disappointed me to learn the octopus wasn't real. But, as I had already told people about it, I didn't want them to feel the same disappointment, don't get me wrong, I didn't want to admit I made a mistake and never do, but I think it was a bit of both. Also, I still saw the world inside my head as at last party real, so if the tree octopus existed there, it was at least a little real from my perspective.

One of my more traumatizing experiences at school was in year three. A woman came into my class, and I heard her say she had come to watch me. With was, of course, confusing and terrifying, so I asked C if I could go look at my kowhai tree, and she agreed. The woman was gone when we got back, and I told everyone what I had overheard. They told me they did not know who she was. I think this is one of the few times my school made a big mistake. I know now that the woman was there to assassinate whether I needed special assistance, so the school probably had no choice but to let her come, but they needed to give me some explanation about why she was there. I think this is an issue where adults can't look at a problem from a kid's point of view. We are constantly told not to trust strangers, so having someone come in asking questions about us is worrying. Then when the school says they don't know who, that makes everyone who comes in to watch the class suspicious; even if

the school says they were there for another reason, that might be because they don't know about them. I know there are some benefits to observing kids without them knowing but understand that is not what you are doing. Whenever there was someone I didn't know in the room after that, I would think they were watching me and behave like they were. And anyway, spying on kids is always wrong.

We had asked our Parents for a cat for a while. Still, they disagreed until we had a surprise visitor, a Birman cat who just wandered into our house and stayed for a whole day. She was very friendly. We hoped we might be able to keep her, but it was not to be, and the next day she left, I hope, back to her original owners. But I guess our parents must have liked her too because soon after, we started to look for Birman cats online and found one of the country's only breeders and got two sisters. Looking back, I realize how grateful we should be to that visiting cat. Without her, we might not have ever got Tonks and Luna.

When we first got Tonks and Luna, they were only about six weeks old and so small they made rabbits look big. On their first day, we brought them to Bill and Margaret's so they could meet the whole family. My aunts Annie and Mary were also there, and the cats were immediately popular. But in the next few weeks, they seemed to have trouble fitting in and sometimes not eaten. The worst day was when Tonks went missing for a whole day. I was terrified that we would never see her again, but she was found on the other side of the neighbour's fence. After that, both cats seemed to become happier in our house. I would often sit on the fence to be admired by passers-by. I think they were popular across the entire street.

I have always had a unique sense of humour that has been both an asset and a problem. As a kid, I found jokes about my special interest funny by default. For example, jokes like what do you call a dinosaur with no eye? A: Doyouthinkysaraus, a deer with no eyes, a noeyedeer or What do you call a deer with no eyes and no legs? Still no eye deer. I think you get the idea anyway. I would repeatedly tell the same jokes, which could become somewhat annoying to everyone.

But my sense of humour changed when my parents introduced me to old British comedies like *Allo Allo*, *Hogan's Heroes* and *Dad's Army*. One of my favourite moments in TV was a scene in *Dad's Army*, where the main character Captain Mainwaring asked Private Frazer, to tell him the story of the old, empty barn. Frazer speaks in a creepy voice, (Would you like to hear the story of the old, empty barn (and honestly, I was a little uncomfortable thinking the story sounded scary, but it turned out to be just five words (There was nothing in it). I would try to recreate this scene with friends and family as much as possible and start to laugh whenever I think about it. I still find the scene funny. I have just watched it again on YouTube, but it needs a bit of context that I did not always give.

My favourite ever comedy was *The Vicar of Dibley*. I liked the show's ridiculous characters and what they represented. Jim who began every sentence with no, no, no, no, yes. Frank, who would tell the main characters stories like how one time the postman we loved like it was the most exciting thing that ever happened. Alice and

Hugo, who seemed to take things too literally, have no idea how the real world works, Owen who said what he meant no matter who it offended and David who would get angry for no apparent reason. I am trying to say that every character on the show, except the vicar herself, showed somewhat exaggerated but clear signs of autism. This show was as close as I would ever see to a world where everyone was autistic.

Meaning these characters made more sense to me than real people. They were predictable, and you don't have to guess what they were thinking or any hidden motivations. Nothing anyone said was ever held against them, no matter how ridiculous or offensive. Dibley seemed like an autistic paradise because there was no such thing as normal, and all the characters were unusual, but because everyone else was as well, it didn't matter. I sometimes felt that I could have done well in Dibley.

Another experience like this was when Bill and Margaret took me to see the play Pippi Longstocking. The play is about a girl with a unique way of seeing the world who shows signs of autism. Of course, I didn't know this at the time, and I was quite reluctant to go to the play. Margaret had to explain that it had a monkey in it; Pippi's pet Mr Nelson convinced me. She had to ask one of the theatre workers to make sure Mr Nelson was in it. At the start of the play, I was disappointed to find out that Mr Nelson was just a puppet, but I became more and more interested in Pippi's character as I kept watching. She reminded me of myself. Pippi is an orphan whose dad died in a plane crash, although she believes correctly, as it turns out, that he survived and became a cannibal king. But well waiting for him to return, she lives in a big house with Mr Nelson and a horse and didn't need many friends but had two Tommy and Annika for when she needed company. But there was one scene in the play that I've always remembered and idealized for better or worse.

Tommy and Annika convince Pippi to come to school for a day. Pippi is uncomfortable most of the day, but it does not go well when the teacher arrives and starts teaching. Firstly, the teacher asked Pippi what seven past 11 is. Pippi responds in a confident voice. I think you know why you are asking me. The scene then turns into a musical where the teacher asks a philosophical question, and Pippi gives a logical response. teacher asks (why is the mouth of a cave so silent?" Pippi answers because a cave doesn't talk. Teacher (where would you find the tail of a rattle sake) Pippi (probably where you left it last)

This scene inspired me to point out to teachers what I saw as contradictions in the way they acted. The first example of this was with the hat rule of with I've already expanded that I didn't like, so when a relief teacher asked why I wasn't wearing a hat, I responded by asking her the same question (she wasn't wearing one either) I think I got away with it at the time. However, It was rude and ineffective, although I still think it is better if teachers follow their own rules to set an example and help children understand their necessity. This action was not hopeful. But despite that, I think it was at least somewhat good intentioned or at least in general society, but

not in a school environment in putting out the injections around being asked to follow needles rules that people in power won't

But in the real world, I just didn't fit any with over people my age or at least in unstructured situations like paying, but if there were a structure I could do well in year one, our teacher Trish would have been the class crosswords for us, and I think I was good at them with made me feel more like part of the class. But the best opportunities for more class investment were special class productions. I can remember the first one when our class performed the song 'yellow polka dot bikini' in year one. In hindsight, it seems like a strange song choice for a year one class, but we enjoyed it at the time. During the year there, the class did a song about many animals getting in an elevator. This was the only production where I got to act. I paid a monkey all hard to get in an imaginary elevator, but I got to wear quite an impressive mask, and I was proud to get to do it.

But the most significant performance I ever was a part of in primary school was in year four; an entire year group play named a forest tale. In the play, a group of hunters led by a man named Jodro try to cut down the forest but cut down too many trees causing a landslide. When the spirits of the forest save the hunters, Jodro sees the area of his ways and has the forest replanted. This was a message I could get behind, so I helped with the play in two ways. The first one, with was my main job, was working on the backdrop picture of a tree with many birds on it. I would help pant the birds, and it became the highlight of the week. My other job was similar but, to me, quite important. I hard to sing one song with began the trees are alive with a forest tale because we're a happy family together. Future depends listen well I word practice this line every night and saw the play as the most important thing I had ever done and started a love of performance, and it made me feel closer to the other students.

By this time, I was getting to the end-of-year three, which meant I would leave Fabens class. With was hard Fabien hard been the first teacher who really inspired me, and I could not imagine a school without her to say goodbye I got her a puppet Turtle with was named tortures, and I think she kept it for many years. Also leaving was the school principal Mr O. I did not know him that well but always liked him, and my first meeting with the new principal did not go well. I first met Malcolm outside the school gates with mom. Someone must have told him I liked Native birds because he told me he had recently been Kiwi hurting. I still associated hurting with killing and was utterly horrified, and mom had to explain what he meant. Despite this unfortunate mistake, I am grateful for Malcolm and don't think I would have made it to University without him.

By about year four, I often began taking places I didn't understand or want to go to, and I became more and more unhappy with this development. One of the worse was Runbow house, which specializes in autistic children. When I was first told that I would have to go by mom, I was adamantly against it and had spent the day trying to convince my new teacher, Julie, to let me say after school so I wouldn't have to go. And then, when the day ended tried to hide under a table so no one would make me

and only came out after my babysitter told me I wouldn't have to go somewhere. I didn't want to. So when Mom got back and confirmed I had to go, I thought somewhat betrayed, a feeling that only got worse when, after mom had tried to try to work out why it might be could Runbow house, it turned out there were no Rainbows meant I was unhappy by the time I arrived.

However, the specialist seemed nice enough when we arrived, but the first lesson was terrible. They offered some games but not ones I enjoyed, and the worst part was when the specialist asked me what my biggest fear was, and I said Gorillas going extinct. She looked unhappy with this answer, so I asked if it would make her sad. She gave a cold maybe and said it wasn't something I should worry about. That meant I was probably never going to like her even a little, but I also didn't want her teaching strategies, for example, giving me a word and asking me to remember it and then getting angry when I didn't. My time at Runbow house ended when I hit her with a Pillow from memory. It was part of a game, but maybe I had gone too far. Mom seemed upset with upset me, but I was happy not to be going back.

I also remember the appointment where I believe I was officially diagnosed autistic. It was in a small house near school, and I felt a bit like a doctor when a man came and took me into a room. I was nervous, but the appointment was straightforward. All he did was ask me some questions like why I didn't play with other kids, all of which I answered to the best of my ability with probably wasn't brilliantly. However, as I had gotten used to the fact that adults didn't understand me, one thing I liked about the man was when he asked me to do some writing. After about two sentences, he stopped me and said it looks to me like you find writing quite hard. I can't remember a time when someone said it so plainly before, and it was a relief that someone understood what I had been trying to make people understand. Of course, they knew I had trouble with writing, but I don't think they understood the problem.

After my mom and dad returned from an overseas trip in year four, my mom asked me into her room to read me a book. She had gotten well away, and she wanted me to hear it before my Brothers. Before she read it, I noticed that she began to cry a bit. The book was all cats have Aspergers, a picture book about what was then called Asperger's syndrome with pictures of cats to explain what they mean. I think I realized quickly why she was reading this to me. When she asked at the end if I might know anyone with asparagus, I think I said me immediately. I was glad I had a name for what made me different, but I still didn't realize a lot of what that meant, and I still had a lot to learn and unfortunately, the so-called asparagus experts could not help