

# Letter From An Adult Male With Asperger Syndrome

Richard Rowe

I am a 45 year old male with Asperger Syndrome. As I sit to write this I realise that I am trying to explain myself to myself, as much as I am trying to explain my thoughts and feelings to you the reader. I will try to keep on the track, not be indulgent, and make an attempt to explain "self" from the perspective of one who has ASD and to keep it as short and eloquent as I am able. Please bear with me as I realise that "self" is quite different between individuals and that ASD encompasses a very wide spectrum, no two cases being exactly the same. That being as it may. I will now attempt to share with you, my feelings, in the hope that it may in turn help you to understand the feelings of another who may be close to you. Please understand that I am not trying to offer any solutions or to appear as to be offering either a positive or negative perspective here. I am simply trying to explain how I feel, how I have always felt and how another close to you may possibly be feeling.

Ever since I was a young child, in fact, as far back as I can remember, I have felt myself to be totally alone, different and somehow unique. Not in an egotistical way but just unusual. As a child I felt very strongly that I didn't belong here in this world.

By the age of five I had told myself many times that my "real" parents were in fact Time Travellers that had somehow lost me here. I felt so out of place in the world that I was certain it must be so. I remember commenting to my mother as a child that I was really a time traveller, she thought it was cute and her and a friend had a giggle over morning tea. When I was six years old I realised and believed that no one ever really loves anyone else, not really and that no-one ever really cared about anyone else, (well it made sense when I was six) I found out differently when I was 38, but always believed it until then. I was a very quiet and solitary child and found it hard to make friends.

By Adolescence I had realised that I was somewhat "emotionally retarded" and would at times respond poorly or inappropriately to a situation and regret but still fail to understand my actions upon later reflection.

My social skills were and still are, reasonably poor. I have never been able to like myself. I have never cared about my appearance, having long ago decided that I was ugly and unattractive anyway and that grooming and clothes would make no difference to the obvious. Even though I was able to marry a very beautiful woman who loved me deeply and many have assured me that this is not the case at all, inside I have always felt it to be the truth.

I find putting on nice clothes pretentious and embarrassing. I cannot remember any time in my life that I have ever felt truly happy and carefree. I have always felt that people regard me as strange or eccentric and as a result I live usually alone and have no genuinely close friends. I have not seen or spoken to any members of my immediate family since my mother's funeral seven and a half years ago but then, my sisters never did like me.

I have always been prone to mood swings. Ranging from severe depression, resulting in up to 3 to 4 days of uncontrollable crying and sobbing, to short bursts of Absolute and quite irrational anger. Not anger in a violent sense, I don't have a violent bone in my body, and have never broken anything, hurt myself or attacked anyone, but I can become very verbally aggressive if I am not aware, or made aware that my mood is changing. Yet at the same time, many consider me to be articulate and intelligent and often seek my advice on a wide range of topics, and I enjoy being able to help them. I think I have called "please help me" alone in the dark in tears at least a million times in my life. I never knew I had ASD or indeed even knew of its existence until my son was diagnosed with ASD five years ago. He is now nine years old, living with my ex-wife and (reasonably) well adjusted for a child dealing with Aspergers Syndrome. As with many ASD kids, he is extremely intelligent, he could read at two years old and had read all his grade school required reading right up through all the grade 7 books by the time he was half way through grade 3, with excellent comprehension. He is capable of being at the top of any subject.

Totally the opposite of me - he looks forward to school exams because he sees them as puzzles and thinks they're fun and better than lessons. But, by the same token, he gets teased at school because his peers perceive him to be

"different" somehow. He can also alienate his friends through his actions, he can be silly, irrational, incredibly defiant and a big strain on his mother, much the same as I was I imagine.

His mother and I get along quite well and I am able to see him whenever I like. Though when she left, nearly eight years ago, it affected me so deeply that I have remained celibate ever since and I sincerely doubt that it will ever change. I still look at attractive women and wish I could talk with them, I am in fact human after all, but I feel too self conscious to even make eye contact and also find the whole idea of being touched by someone, even my ex-wife, to be embarrassing and even quite scary now, which complicates things considerably, and the longer it takes, the worse it becomes. So now, at 45, thoughts of a companion don't often even enter into my head at all any more as I feel, what's the point?

When my son was diagnosed as having Asperger's Syndrome, I was able to read some of the literature regarding his condition. Upon reading a couple of books it soon became apparent where the root source of my own problems lay and subsequent investigation proved these suspicions to be well founded. At first my reaction in regard to myself was one of relief at finally having some kind of tangible definition for what I had been feeling all these years.

The relief was soon replaced by mixed feelings of remorse, frustration and helplessness. For a while I felt "ripped off". I felt that 40 years of my life had been stolen from me and that, had I known about ASD from the beginning, my life could have been vastly different. Maybe I could have understood myself a little before now and maybe others could have too. I can, at least, find solace in the fact that my son now has that support from childhood. I am a professional musician, in fact many of my peers consider me to be quite a talented one, though I do not particularly share their opinion and have always been my own worst critic.

I find music and other artistic pursuits to be easy and obvious. Computer skills were a breeze to pick up, requiring virtually no effort. Still playing rock 'n' roll at 45, I even rap a few eminem numbers. I feel quite relaxed and comfortable performing on stage in front of hundreds or even thousands of people; doing some intricate drawing or nutting out some computer problem.

Yet I find it difficult to sit in a room with more than 3 or 4 other people, and even then, unless I know those 3 or 4 quite well, I feel tense and nervous. I find it hard to make eye contact with other people, even those I know well. Filling out a form or talking to a stranger can be fine or it can reduce me to tears. I find light conversation nearly impossible. Working with other people makes me feel self-conscious and inadequate but I can excel working on my own at the same task. I've put on a brave face but Parties, Shopping, Supermarkets and Laundromats are a nightmare. Go figure.

When I try to explain my condition to people I feel like they either think I'm making up excuses for myself or look on me as a freak or as some kind of nut case. Sometimes I feel that by telling them I have ASD I'm alienating myself, but then, if I don't tell them I will probably mess up at some stage and they will think I'm strange anyway so I figure its better to tell them on the whole, especially if I intend to try and pursue any type of friendship.

But then at times I feel quite fine about myself, I feel like it's the rest of humanity that has the problem, not me. Sometimes I too, look on myself as a freak and a nut case. But then, I'm sure I'm not, because they always say that if your nuts you don't know it, and I'm sure I am, so I guess I'm not..... Make sense?

I don't know if I will ever come to terms with myself or with Asperger Syndrome. I try, but it gets very difficult on your own at times without the support of another. Just a shoulder or an ear or even a hug sometimes would do wonders. Plus I do believe that everyone needs to feel loved or needed in some way. I still cry every day and must go to some lengths to convince myself I am a worthwhile member of the human race so I can put on my mask and face the world each morning, just as I have always done.

But I think I'm getting better at it. And, in the end, ultimately I believe that I AM worthwhile. Though I seem to mess up so much that I sometimes wonder whether its worth leaving the house any more than is absolutely necessary, so I tend to stay home and be reclusive and may seem almost shy to some.

I know there is no cure for Asperger Syndrome, no drugs than can be prescribed, no diet or exercise routine that can be undertaken. I know that my life will always remain a struggle and that I will never be one who will be considered as being "Neurologically Typical". I will always be an "Aspie" and to me, being an Aspie is in many ways to be alone in the world and I am so very tired of being alone. And I'm altogether tired of feeling alone and isolated, even in a crowd, but I go on, and I try to find something positive in each day, what other choice do I have?

I think that, all in all, Life is good, especially if you consider the options. But oh how I ache to my bones to be "normal" and just talk about the weather or something.

I hope this letter has helped or provided some insight to someone who has ASD or perhaps to someone who may be dealing with a loved one or friend who has ASD. I hope that by sharing my feelings you may in turn be helped to understand theirs.

I still believe I have goodness and can help some one's life. I still believe through it all that I am worth something.

Yours sincerely,  
Richard Rowe