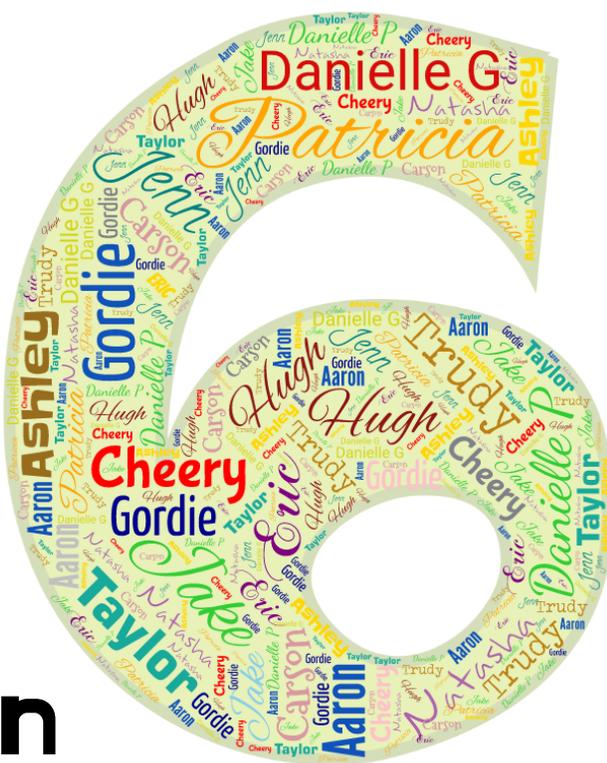


Autistics Aloud LifeSpans



1 in



Volume 11

Edition 1



Autistics Aloud LifeSpans

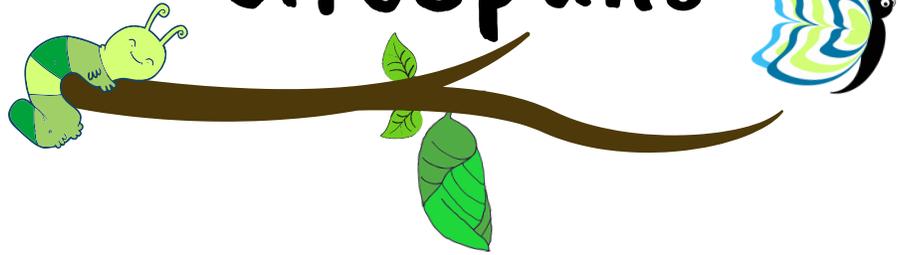


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1 in 66 statistic on the front cover retrieved from:

www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/infographic-autism-spectrum-disorder-children-youth-canada-2018.html

AUTISTICS ALOUD LIFESPANS



Inside the pages that follow are stories, poems, and art that share the hopes, fears, dreams, wants and needs of Autistic Canadians. Together, we will explore themes and around the central question:

"What is the Autistic Canadian identity?"

LifeSpans was born on August 29, 2018 when a group of Canadian Autistic activists met to discuss where to go next with Autistics Aloud, a publication that has existed since 2005.

Sitting on the roof-top on one of the hottest days of the summer, a seminal conversation began the next phase of Autistics Aloud.

Over the next 3 years, we will publish 10 Editions of autistic content while upholding the disability rights mantra,

"Nothing About Us, Without Us".

Edition 1: What is Autism, from Autistic/ASD people's point of view?

Edition 2: Mind, Body, & Spirit: mental health & physical health

Edition 3: Diagnosis: formal, self-diagnosis and the spaces in between

Edition 4: Neurodiversity & Intersectionality

Edition 5: Pride: gender, sexuality, dating & relationships

Edition 6: Siblings, cousins, mentors & best friends

Edition 7: Education, Housing, & Employment

Edition 8: TBD! Autistic contributors will choose the theme!

Edition 9: Also TBD! We are building our themes as a collective :)

Edition 10: Lifespans: advice to younger/older autistics and the world



By Autistics for Everyone!



about autism

My name is Hugh Barber

I am nine years old

and I'm in grade 3.

I have autism. ~~autism~~

~~Means you~~ smart.

It means to me that my

brain works differently.

its ok to have autism

autism makes me odd.

maybe when I grow up

I could do talks

about autism on a stage.

about autism

I wish people would be
patient with people that
have autism. I love
that everybody's
different! the end
Hugh Garber



ABOUT AUTISM

My name is Hugh Garber
I am nine years old
and I'm in Grade 3.
I have Autism. Autism
means your smart.
It means to me that my
brain works differently.
It's okay to have Autism.
Autism makes me good.
Maybe when I grow up
I could do talks
about Autism on a stage.
I wish people would be
patient with people that
have autism. I love
that everybody's
different! the end

THE AUTISM LIFE

DANIELLE GRIFFIN



Completely losing track of the conversation, then saying something completely unrelated and confusing everyone else.

Learning at a young age that 'smile and nod' makes people stop bothering you, even if you don't understand anything they just said. It's 15 years later, and this is still the best method.



Refusal to try new things. No point changing an already perfect routine, right?



Talking about your favourite topic with someone, only to realise they left 5 minutes ago.



Awkward eye contact (how much is too much or too little?).



Not understanding or caring about current trends or fashion. Like, what is up with cropped sweaters?



Going significantly out of the way to avoid human interaction.



Attempting to comfort another person, only to somehow make it worse.



MY TAKE ON AUTISM

BY JAKE LEWIS

For me as a individual with autism, I feel misunderstood a good amount of the time, like my normal crashes into other people's normal. For me, autism is a thing that puts you ahead of others, since so many people nowadays want to be different, to stand out, therefore putting me like, three steps ahead of them.

Some people may think autism is a curse. I used to think it was as well, and while it is difficult sometimes, it has given me the ability to look at problems differently. It has given me the ability to tell people who struggle socially like I do that I do get what they may be going through.

Having autism has also given me the awesome opportunity to go around my old school, educating students and staff on it, and talking to people about it is one of my favorite things to do aside from Fine Arts, playing Assassin's Creed, and annoying my dad ?



I want to end off by saying that people with autism are just that, people. We deserve to be treated with the same respect that everyone else deserves. People with autism tend to be great people.

Taylor
Linloff

Think about autism. What do you see?

**Think about autism.
You probably see
your little brother,
older cousin,
and various classmates,
You probably see
nursing home residents,
computer programmers,
Sheldon Cooper,
and of course ... Rain Man.**

**Think about autism.
You probably see
planes,
trains,
and automobiles
(oh my)!**
**You probably see
Pokemon games,
Fortnite merchandise
and fixated app glances
replacing eye contact.**

**Think about autism.
You probably see
temper tantrums,
meltdowns,
and lost opportunities
for autistic children.
You probably see
prayers for a cure,
special education classes,
and years of bullying
at multiple hands**



aspirationalautistic



AspirationalAutistic/

(Aspirational Autistic)

Think about autism.
You probably don't see
the older sister,
mothers,
and aunts
You probably don't see
lgbt people,
people of colour,
activists,
and lovers.

Think about autism.
You probably don't see
the underrepresentation,
the "you don't look autistic",
the six month mental health waits,
and overcoming stigma
You probably don't see
the struggles of "high functioning"
the strengths of the "lower end of the spectrum"
and the value we all have as human beings.

Think about autism.
You probably don't see
social justice,
first person voices,
and community
You probably don't see
our empathy,
our creativity,
our strength,
and our resilience..

**We often think about autism
but many of us are still waiting to be seen.**

Ashley Henneberry

I began school in the early 1990's and from then on I always knew that I wasn't like anyone else and that I was different. I would talk to other kids in my class and i'd find myself wondering away from the conversation even though they'd be standing right across from me.

They seemed to be on a much higher level than me.



As the years went on I noticed more and more how socially awkward I was and others started to notice too. I was often made fun of and spoken to like I was stupid if I didn't understand something. I certainly knew that I definitely wasn't stupid. I just saw things and understood things differently than others.



I also knew that I seemed to be hypersensitive to touch and various sounds at times. As the years went on my sensitivities to touch and sounds and lack of understanding in social situations became even more frequent but I couldn't figure out why. There were a few times that it even got me into trouble at work.

Over the years I tried to explain that something about me was different but nobody ever seemed to listen to me and it was extremely frustrating.



I graduated successfully from High School and went off to Business School and Graduated with honours. I got married at age 24 and had my first child at age 28. My son is almost 5 years old and he was diagnosed with ASD when he was 2 years old. I left the clinic afterward feeling scared and confused because I didn't know very much about Autism and when I was in school there weren't many kids who were diagnosed with it.



One day about a year or so ago I went into a full blown panic attack after hearing some coins clinking which is a sound that is very much a strong trigger for me. It was at that moment that I had enough and needed to figure this out.



After speaking to another woman at a parent support meeting and learning about her diagnosis the thought crossed my mind that maybe I was too. So I arranged an assessment with a Psychologist and sure enough I had the results within 6 weeks.

I never dreamed that I'd be diagnosed with ASD at 32 years old. One of the questions that the Psychologist asked me was why now.

Why at 32 years old did I want to explore this?



I needed to know. I needed to know why I had difficulties. I needed to know why I was bullied as bad as I was. I know that I can't go back and change history. It is what it is. I can however be an advocate for my son by sharing awareness and making sure that he gets the support he needs and deserves so that he can live a happy, confident, and successful life.



Ashley
Henneberry

A Perspective Most Can't Bring

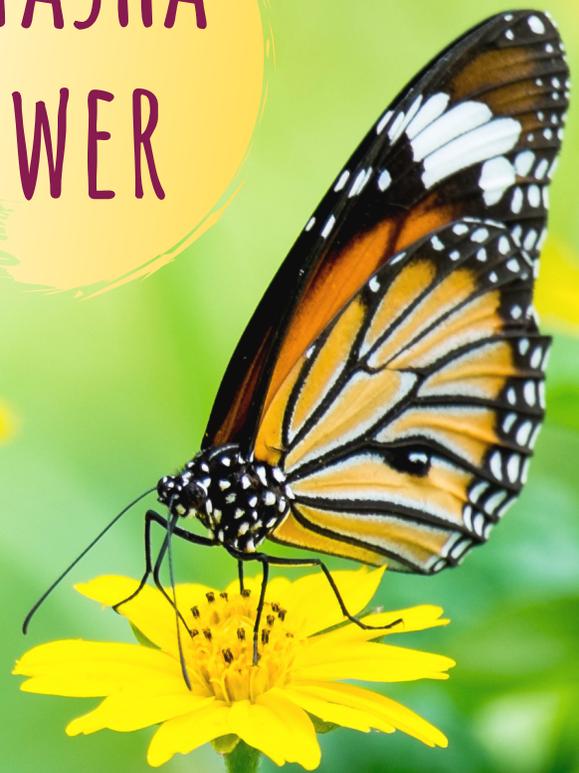
**My whole life I've felt unnoticeably broken.
I spent my young life hoping,
That this phase would end and my life would begin.
Each day that passed by, felt more and more like a lost cause.
I was tired of hiding all of my flaws.**

**I grew up misdiagnosed,
I grew up coming so close,
To giving up and giving in.
I grew up misdiagnosed,
I grew up different then most,
But I just wanted to fit in**

**I'm living with a blessing and a curse.
Society has no hold on me.
Yet sometimes that's worse.**

**I'm a dreamer to the core,
I'm always searching for more.
Not caught up in what holds most back.
My Creativity, Empathy, Compassion, Adventure, Dreams,
overshadow the social skills I lack.**

**NATASHA
POWER**



A Perspective Most Can't Bring

I stutter, I stammer, I talk too fast.

I say the wrong thing and often come across crass.

Inside I'm a speedway of knowledge and ideas.

Not knowing how to hold back, I tell everyone who is willing to see it.

Education failed me,

I was told I could not achieve.

Every dream I had, I was told was not for me.

So eventually, that is what I believed.

Today I am strong, a Mother, a Teacher.

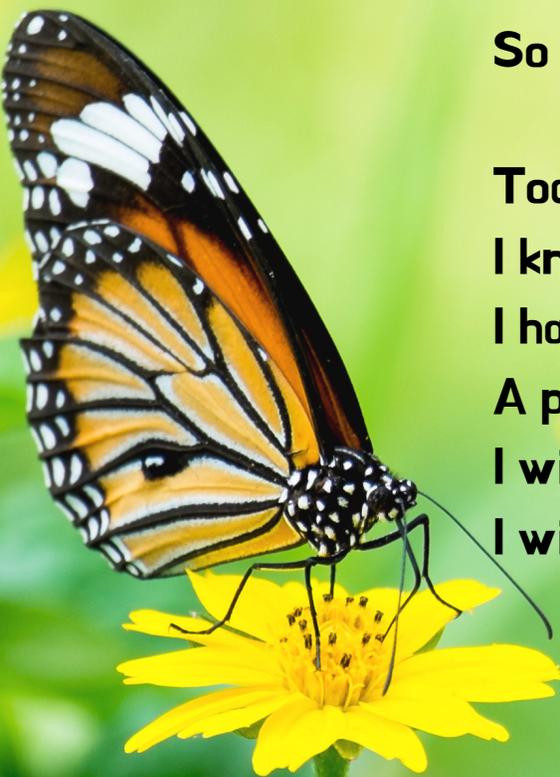
I know who I am and I can clearly see my future.

I have Autism, and that's alright.

A perspective most can't bring to the fight.

I will be there for those who walk my same path.

I will stand up for those whose voices still lack



**NATASHA
POWER**

**WHAT IS FLIRTING,
DOES THAT
ACTUALLY EXIST?**



**HAVE AT LEAST ONE
UNUSUAL, UNIQUE,
YET COMPLETELY
IMPRACTICAL TALENT.**



**Getting excited and start stimming,
then realise there's other people around.**



**SAID SOMETHING
EMBARRASSING OR
INAPPROPRIATE
AT WORK OR SCHOOL
WITHOUT REALISING.**



STEP 1: SELECT AN UNUSUAL TOPIC.

**STEP 2: BECOME AN
EXPERT ON THIS VERY
SPECIFIC TOPIC.**

**STEP 3: MAKE SURE
EVERYONE AROUND
HEARS ABOUT AND
KNOWS THIS TOPIC.**



**When at another house,
spending more time with
the pet than the person.
Who doesn't?**



Hi I'm Carson.

I thought I might share a little bit about myself in celebration of World Autism Day and Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month because I am autistic. I'm proud to be autistic because a lot of cool people have autism like me, like inventors like Albert Einstein and Satoshi Tajiri, the creator of Pokémon. Also my dad is autistic, and he is really smart and owns a big car dealership.

Being autistic just means my brain works differently than most people, and that's ok.

Some things that are easy for me are remembering facts and details about things I enjoy learning about like planes, ships, geography and history. I remember most things that I read. Being autistic means some things might be a little harder for me, like being in a room that is loud or has different food smells or if people are too close and I need space. It can make it hard to focus so I like being in quiet spaces sometimes to do my work. Sometimes it can be hard to find the right words in conversation or I might just talk too much about planes! (:



But just like all of you, I love to play with friends and have fun. And I like a lot of things that most kids do, like playing games like Fortnite, Roblox and Minecraft, swimming, and I also love my pets – my 2 dogs and 2 guinea pigs.



Thank you
for listening



CARSON
MAY

AUTISM DIAGNOSIS AND EXPERIENCE

by Trudy Goad (tagAught)

Disclaimer: I don't own either the lyrics or the music of "I Am A Rock" - they belong to Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel.

Whenever I start to talk about my experience with being diagnosed autistic, I open with, ***"Asperger's was put into the DSM-IV the year I graduated high school."*** (1994) That was what I was diagnosed with in 2012 (a year and two months before the DSM-5 came out). From when I was 5 years old, all through most of my life, my theme song was Simon and Garfunkel's ***"I Am A Rock"***. So much of that song spoke to me.

"I am a rock, I am an island.
I've built walls, a fortress deep and mighty,
That none may penetrate...
I have my books
And my poetry to protect me
I am shielded in my armor,
Hiding in my room, safe within my womb"



I was quiet, solitary,
and an avid reader
who was reasonably
happy to devour
books rather than play
with other children.

I knew I was different. But I didn't know why. I didn't have the words, the knowledge, or the ability to articulate what was so different about me, save that I was shy, introverted, liked books, and had no real ideas on how to interact 'appropriately' with my peers.

When Asperger's entered the DSM-IV, it showed up in the news. My mother proceeded to go to the Geneva Centre (we lived in Toronto at the time). She was asked how old I was, and when she said I was 18, she was told, "Oh, she'll grow out of it." (We learned a couple of years ago that this was because there was no funding for programs for autistic adults at the time. Why they couldn't have just said that rather than lied, I don't know....)

In either 2001 or 2002, my brother saw an article about Asperger's in the New York Times (probably interviewing Tony Attwood, given the timing), and sent it to my mom with the note, ***"Does this sound like someone we know?"*** (Or maybe he sent it to both her and me. Can't remember now if I received it directly from him, or if my mom forwarded it.) I read it, agreed that it sounded a lot like me, and decided I wanted to see if I could get a diagnosis. Note that the article talked mostly about the social difficulties of understanding of body language and of issues around what I've taken to calling the "communications chasm" between autistics and non-autistics. At least, that's what I remember now.

AUTISM DIAGNOSIS AND EXPERIENCE

by Trudy Goold (tagAught)

At the time, I was having a number of issues dealing with a lot of things - looking back on it now, I was edging around burnout - and a large part of the reason I decided that I wanted a diagnosis was because I was feeling like the coping strategies I had developed for things - interacting with other people, dealing with sensory issues, keeping my environment clean - were malfunctioning, or were no longer good enough. I was also teetering on the edge of slipping into a depression - years-long, it ended up being - so my emotional resilience wasn't the best either.



I was still living in Toronto then, so I went and booked an appointment with Queen Street Mental Health, specifically about a diagnosis of Asperger's. I didn't know about the Geneva Centre at the time - any more than I knew about the other aspects of autism, including that that was why I had sensory issues - went down, and had an interview of an hour and a half with a psychiatrist there.

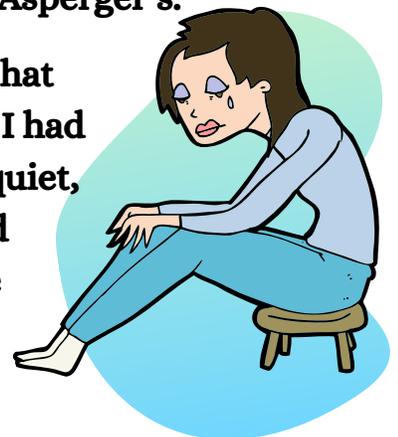
He then - after a bunch of questions where the ones I can remember have nothing to do with autism (not repeated here because it's a more adult question) - informed me that if I was an Aspie, I was the most well-adjusted Aspie he had ever met.



Thanks for nothing. That was of no help to me at all, and I left there more than a little infuriated - and still drowning in slowly maladaptive coping strategies and emotional issues.

It didn't come back up until 2006/2007. My youngest sister - who is currently a Speech Language Pathologist in the Greater Toronto Area - was doing her Communications Disorders Assistant diploma, which involved a fair amount of work with autistics in the "classical"/"Kanner's" autism part of the spectrum. We had discussed it throughout the year, and the idea was settling back in my mind that I might have Asperger's.

It was late April 2007 when she sent me a set of three documents that she'd gotten in class, as traits to look for to help identify autistics. I had been working the overnight shift at my job (no people, darkness, quiet, the occasional sight of raccoon kits playing on the lawns), so I read them when I got home. I got through about one and a half of those documents when I burst into tears and couldn't stop. Everything mentioned there was just so familiar. *This was me.*



AUTISM DIAGNOSIS AND EXPERIENCE

by Trudy Goold (tagAught)

I was in tears for over half an hour, and ended up having to call my mother in Costa Rica to talk to her about it. Now, I know that I was having a meltdown with the sheer force of my relief that I wasn't alone in my differences. Then, all I knew was that I couldn't stop crying. I ended up going to the Sunnybrook Hospital Emergency to try to get in to see a psychiatrist.

(That ended up a disaster. I got a teaching psychiatrist, and every appointment she had a different student talking to me. *"No, my depression is 'gray'. It's apathy. I've never thought about hurting myself or others. That's not the way I react to depression."* Every. Single. Appointment. I mean, I understand the importance of asking that question. But for goodness sake, once it's asked, only revisit it if there are more warning signs, or the patient brings it up!)

So, after about eight visits, including one that had my parents in because they wanted to talk about concerns they had (they regularly visited Canada during the summer), I stopped going to that psychiatrist altogether. I wasn't getting helped there, and I certainly wasn't getting any assistance in getting a diagnosis!



I finally found a psychologist that I clicked with the next spring. Unfortunately, he had no education in dealing with autism at all, but he could at least help with the depression, and some of the underlying emotional issues from childhood, and the unrecognized-by-me anxiety.

He did an excellent job with that, and I had my youngest sister giving me the occasional suggestion for things (like looking at the blogs of autistic adults, though I didn't start really going through them until after my official diagnosis).

At that point - 2007/8 - I consider myself to have gotten a self-diagnosis, supported by someone who was getting training in dealing with autistics (family member or not). At that point, I was happy with the support I was getting, so I didn't pursue the idea of an official diagnosis any further then.



AUTISM DIAGNOSIS AND EXPERIENCE

by Trudy Goold (tagAught)



I lost my job in 2009 (a combination of factors, including a long term disability leave and my semi-continual requests to switch back to the overnight shift because of a heat allergy, when I had seniority over everyone in the department - I will likely talk more about this in an essay in the school/workplace edition), and in 2011, my parents moved me to Newfoundland with them (they moved there in 2009), because they couldn't afford to keep supporting me in Toronto.



In preparation for that, my mom and my youngest sister - who was in St. John's in preparation for doing an Anatomy and Physiology course at the university, so that she could be a practicing SLP here in Canada (her degree was taken at a US university, and they don't require the A&P course for SLPs; we do) - started checking with the Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador about getting assistance for me.

When I came down, in August, I got introduced to some more information about autism - including the fact that deep pressure hugs are a wonderful thing, and the fact that as a child, I had a very monotone affect - and a friend of a friend of my sister's, who is still a very good friend of mine. (They're over to my parents' with me every holiday dinner, in fact. :))

Overall, however, the ASNL was very unhelpful at the time (the aforementioned things were all my sister and mother). We tried a variety of places to get a diagnosis (including places that we could have apparently gotten one, if we'd spoken to the right person!), until I finally asked the friend mentioned above where they'd gotten theirs. (Appointments after appointments, phone calls after phone calls - my mom's been great. I really hate the phone, and she's been tireless in advocating for me and working to find ways that I could live as independently as possible.) That was through the THRIVE network, which is a group of organizations that do assistance with mental health, including the psychiatric department of one of the hospitals - which ran (and still runs, I think) something called the START clinic.

So, armed with all the information about the testing that needed to be done for a diagnosis, and the results of some of the tests I'd taken online, I headed off.



AUTISM DIAGNOSIS AND EXPERIENCE

by **Trudy Goold (tagAught)**

The beginning of March 2012 saw me get my diagnosis made official.

At the same time, we'd also managed to (finally) find a psychologist who had some experience with autistics who could be my go-to psychologist, and she helped us with filling out the forms to get the Disability Tax Credit and the Registered Disability Savings Program, now that my diagnosis was official.

(More than anything, that was a good reason to get a diagnosis. So that I could take that to government and get the financial assistance I needed, especially as I was approaching burnout again. Only worse, this time; I don't think I'm going to come out of the burnout enough to have a 'standard' employment.)

I know there are a lot of different reactions to getting a diagnosis, but mine as you may guess from the fact that I had been pursuing it, if a bit desultorily until my move to Newfoundland - was very much a feeling of *relief*. Finally, I had an officially-backed explanation for some of the things that I had trouble with. Things weren't My Fault - I wasn't lazy, or entitled, or any of that. My brain works differently than the majority of humanity, and that was a Reason for things. (A good friend of mine has gone over the concept of 'reason' vs. 'excuse' a number of times. And this is a reason.)

It also helped improve my relationship with the members of my family, because now they had resources they could go to for explanations of things that I do as a matter of course, but aren't 'normal'.

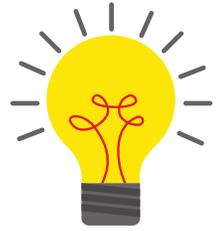
Now, aside from the information my sister gave me and books my parents found (including a few that persuaded my father that he is on the spectrum, though he doesn't see the point of getting an official diagnosis for himself), I didn't really do a lot of research into autism until the beginning of 2013. That was when I really discovered the autism blogosphere, and starting making contacts there. And found out about executive function! Now that was a revelation! :)

So many more things started making sense!

YES!

AUTISM DIAGNOSIS AND EXPERIENCE

by Trudy Goold (tagAught)



It's definitely been a journey of self-discovery, and I can look back now at my childhood, my adolescence, and my young adulthood, and go,

So that's why things happened like that!"

I've learned to recognize when I'm heading close to the edge, whether for sensory overload or a meltdown (though I can't always stop them in their tracks, at least I can be more prepared for them happening). I've worked out more coping mechanisms and trade-offs - I spend half of January hiding out in my apartment with my cat rather than going out places, because I want to spend time with my extended family in December, and that's something that I have consciously chosen to do.

I have considered myself to be proudly autistic since sometime between my self-diagnosis and my official one; certainly when I moved to Newfoundland in August 2011, I started being very open about being autistic. And I actually found that when I read a breakdown of the "Autism Spectrum Disorder" diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 when it came out in the spring of 2013, I fit in with those criteria even better than I fit the previous criteria for Asperger's. Yes, autism has its downsides. Yes, those can be a huge struggle, made worse by society's views and reactions to autism. But autism also has its joys. And I find that I'm a happier person, much more settled in myself (and my second NL psychologist - this one trained in autism, because my previous psychologist had hit the limit of her ability to help with that - agrees).

And I have friends. Good, close friends, most of whom I've made thanks to starting my path in autism advocacy back in 2015. I suspect a number of them will show up in this and other editions of *Autistics Aloud: Lifespans...* and one of them is our wonderful editor, who coined the hashtag #AutisticOxygen - being with other autistics (in a positive relationship) helps give us more energy.



For me, being diagnosed as autistic and the path that it's led me to has been an overwhelmingly positive (or pos-aut-ive) experience. And I hope that the work I'm doing with my advocacy, the work my friends are doing, will help lead to more positive experiences for all autistics.

Wishing all those reading all the best!

THE AUTISM LIFE

DANIELLE GRIFFIN

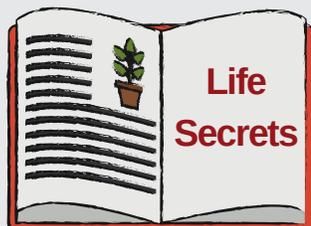


MEET SOMEONE,
THEN COMPLETELY
FORGET THEIR
FACE AND NAME.



HOWEVER, YOU DO
REMEMBER THEIR
FAVOURITE MOVIE OR
SOME OTHER TINY
INSIGNIFICANT DETAIL
ABOUT THEIR LIFE.

WONDERED: DOES EVERYONE
ELSE HAVE A SECRET LIFE



SKILLS MANUAL THAT I
FORGOT TO PICK UP?

IN DETENTION
OR SUSPENSION
FOR 'ACTING OUT'
(MELTDOWN)
AT SCHOOL.



I'VE BEEN THERE.

WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

ERIC SALEM



NIKON D3400 DIGITAL SINGLE LENS REFLEX CAMERA
IMAGE SHOT DURING THE MORNING IN THE MIDDLE OF DECEMBER IN 2018

”AUTISM MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE. NEUROTYPICALS SEE AUTISM DIFFERENTLY FROM AUTISTICS AND PEOPLE WITH ASPERGER’S SYNDROME.



SOME PEOPLE COULD BE LIKE THE DR. MURPHY CHARACTER OF THE TELEVISION DRAMA CALLED ”THE GOOD DOCTOR”.

THIS CHARACTER IS ON THE SPECTRUM.”

CHEERY HEART



facebook.com/cheeryheartart/



[@cheeryheartart/](https://instagram.com/cheeryheartart/)



[@cheeryheartart/](https://twitter.com/cheeryheartart/)

I started with a self diagnosis of everything from depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder to self diagnosed ADHD and sleeping problems.

Then I was treated for the depression and anxiety with medication which in turn made it much worse. I was on this medication for many years until I was 31 years old.

By that time I had gained over 80 lbs, stopped being able to function at all, extremely tired and even more depressed then I ever had been. I was very close to taking my own life and had made my husband take me to the hospital as my last attempt for help. One month later I had been diagnosed with Autism.

I know my psychiatrist is not really educated with autism and has little to no knowledge about it but he did his due diligence in figure out what was wrong with me. He instantly took me off the medication I was on and changed me over to one that is more for autism traits.

The last few months have been difficult but the world is much better for me. I am happy, I'm achieving things I never thought I would be able too, I'm going to school, I'm able to wake up during the day with energy and not have to sleep all day.

Sure, I have my bad days and everything breaks down but never to a point that I want to ever think of leaving existence. I do not have a diagnosis of bipolar but I think it will be the next step in my journey. It was hard to get where I am now and hope others find their path.



DANIELLE PENG

A Perspective of Positivity



As long as I've known I had autism when I was little, it was just something that I had.

I knew I was different, but didn't know major details of it like I know it today.

My dreams of going into the military were shattered when recruiting said I could not join because of Autism, (they defined it as Aspergers) and OCD. (Obsessive compulsive disorder). So that was my situation out of high school. So I got creative, many years before I was already building my expertise in military studies and military history, war fare, weapons etc.

Eventually in 2006 I created what was WOODSTOCK'S military specialist then to Carleton county's military specialist, an operation in which I would give war history presentations to high schools and middle schools all over the area. WOODSTOCK High, Carleton North, Hartland Community School.

That was meant to share my gifts and my knowledge with further generations.

From 2005 and onward I was also starting to build models. I've always been a scratch builder. They at first were very rudimentary. But as skill increased, the machinery collection grew. The level of detail and ability increased.

My view of autism is largely a positive one. Yes I've had challenges, and continue to. Many challenges that I've seen don't come from us, but from the neurotypical world that does not understand us. My strengths that come with autism and OCD are visual and or photographic memory, strong memory for facts details dates, focus on goals, public speaking, networking ability, designing ability, alertness.

The legacy of autism is ever evolving from when it was being first heard of from, professionals, to a very few autistics themselves such as Temple Grandin in the 1970s to the today where in the US alone it is 1 in 40 are diagnosed with autism.



NC-4 Nancy first aircraft to cross the Atlantic Ocean

With my business - Bouma Woodworks, which I started in 2015 I have been able to make money and build a business profile. Products today are military model, guns, tanks, vehicles, aircraft, warships and numerous categories of furniture.

A Perspective of Positivity



But it can some days come with it's problems. OCD for many can be debilitating, it has been for me a times too. But it also pushes me to do better in my work. Including physical fitness.



Autism with me has always been about productivity. I've always had a sense of pride when it came to being different. With my interests in school, in military and military history, some would try to discourage me and slow it down.

Creativity with the models as they became more intricate is also a sense of pride. It's also part of the "different not less" direction that you hear as a modern viewpoint for autism. As well those who still see differences always in a negative way fight against actually autistic advocates in a number of ways. Such as parents saying to "actually autistic" people, you don't know what it's like.



With saying that statement they forget that some of us had more prevalent autistic traits when we were younger, as well as that some of us, including me have cousin neurosiblings who have higher support needs and more prevalent traits. I am a part of both of those categories as I was younger I had more prevalent traits which I have since grew out of. I have numerous cousins on the spectrum as well, one with more prevalent traits with higher support needs. So on these support pages, I see the negativity, fighting view points as well as complaints from parents and autistics themselves venting their daily frustrations.



Since 2006 onward other passions have come out from different spheres of focus, politics as well is one of them.



A Perspective of Positivity



I've been heavily involved in Provincial and Federal Conservative politics in Canada since 2008. Getting more involved when David Alward won the PCNB Leadership convention. Helping his campaign for Premier in 2010 and in 2011 helping MP Mike Allen's campaign under Prime Minister Harper. My connection to the conservatives comes from their stronger support for Veterans and our Armed Forces, as well as provincially better support for Inclusion in schools, in my opinion. This year I am working on the conservative team again.



Linking my interest and activism for autism from 2007 onward with politics and the military sphere has benefited each strength in contexts of pushing awareness and showing capabilities of autistics and the skills we have and develop. Today the picture of meaningful employment for autistics is clearer than ever, with a sight of greater need than ever. We've pushed awareness, people are aware.

But it's acceptance that is the next major battle of this war for equal acceptance and rights.



A Perspective of Positivity



With creating political connections and military connections I've been able to show the Canadian forces my strengths with building models and certain designs in the past alongside with politicians. The need for politicians to meet us and see our strengths and what industry and the productivity of the workforce can gain from including us is a major reason why I continue to push projects connecting autism and government.



NC-4 Nancy first aircraft to cross the Atlantic Ocean

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Positivity comes with hard work and proactive work. A persons viewpoint , their mental strength and positivity comes from inside confidence as well as surrounding influences, with children on the spectrum these are incredibly important in achieving goals to making friends to doing well in school.

Positivity, something I think we all need to work on.



When I revealed I was autistic I had one response above all the others that bothered me the most:

“That’s great! I’m glad you have learned more about yourself.”

There was no follow up sentence and we continued with the work of the day. On the surface it seems to be a positive response from someone more open minded than most. But after nearly two years I still feel very uncomfortable with it.

Why? Let’s phrase it another way...

“I’m happy for you but let’s drop it and move on.”

This response illustrates a general disinterest in learning about real life autistic experience. Despite the politeness, it is no more accepting than a negative response. But why is it so hard for people to accept that a living true form of autism exists?

People as a whole are very resistant to change. We enjoy stories that reaffirm our beliefs and share those freely. We quickly shut down everything else. Heaven forbid that we learn something that would force us to change social status quo. It is hard to accept there is much more variance to human life than what most humans are willing to cope with.

But appealing to humanity is exactly how to accomplish this. Telling an engaging and heart wrenching tale appeals to human empathy making change plausible if the right audience can be reached.

Many autistics use social media, personal blogs, and unpaid publications to attempt fresh communication surrounding the question “What is autism?” often through reckless reveals of our personal lives. These are things we wouldn't reveal in person to our best friends and we post them hoping to make a difference. But the algorithms restrict our voices. Those who find us are usually already seeking out a similar view.

So we very rarely change the minds of those with a different preconceived notion of the definition. The larger platforms that can access a wider audience and have more influence for change, rarely take up our stories.



We are turned down from national magazines, barely network newsworthy and certainly not what the big publishers are looking for. But because we desperately want to make a difference and selflessly help a future generation live better autistic lives, we expose ourselves on smaller platforms.

Why are we so desperate?

Autism and anonymity cannot seem to exist together. Even those who don't want to be activists will at some point in their life be forced to “explain themselves”.

Perhaps it will be a job they run the risk of losing because the social demands are too high. Or perhaps a relationship they are a part of will be riddled with miscommunication that needs to be examined and understood.

Even diagnosis itself is based on very revealing accounts of our lives. There is no blood test, not even a set of characteristic physical symptoms. In the doctor's office, it's a different kind of undressing, beyond nudity, a dissection not everyone is ready for.

After diagnosis comes the fight for services if there are any at all.

And some of those existing services are proving to be more damaging than helpful. Once again we are looking into the judgmental eyes of status quo as behaviourists insist we act "less autistic" and more like "normal human beings".

This implies that being autistic is somehow inhuman.

Autistics often find themselves having to prove we are autistic enough and/or human enough in our everyday lives. For example, it's believed autistics have no empathy. In actual fact, many of us have too much empathy leading to feelings so over whelming we must temper them to avoid breaking down. Protecting our vulnerability has led many to believe we don't feel at all, an inhuman concept.

We are therefore forced to prove our humanity.

On the flip side, sometimes if we don't exhibit stereotypical autistic traits then people don't believe we are autistic at all. For example if we hide our discomfort and difficulties in a social group in order to participate and be accepted, we are told we are doing "just fine". People don't see the exhaustion we suffer from, working so hard to fit in. We are therefore forced to prove we are autistic.

Having to fight these kinds of battles on a daily basis is extremely damaging. We cannot just live our lives. We are exposed and exploitable. So again, why do we reach out at all?

Well here is a little of my story:

I was having trouble of the nature I chose to keep personal. I went to my family doctor armed with lists of those troubles and the results of a few tests recommended by Autism Canada.

My husband was with me prepared to provide witness if needed. But it was a very clean case. My family Doctor diagnosed me on the spot and I choose to end my search for diagnosis with her. It was enough confirmation for me. But confirmation was only a piece of the puzzle.

After my diagnosis, there were no supports offered. Everything I would need, all the advice or tools to move my life forward post diagnosis, I had to source and apply myself. And everything I found was from my autistic peers who posted their intimate reveals on small platforms like Autistics Aloud and Twitter. I owe my happiness and my self-understanding to those accounts. And I know I am not the only autistic out there who will rely on those same stories, or perhaps even my own story, to find ways to survive in a world where we need to prove ourselves at every turn.



My fellow unicorns' unbridled stories showed me that even if the status quo doesn't approve of me, I am normal in a wider sample of true human experience.

So what is autism?

It is the breaking of the familiar, a solid rewrite to the definition of normal. And if autism is accepted as a variation of normal than simple things like how we evaluate desirable qualities will need to be redefined.

And that is why it is so hard for the general public to accept autism (and why we may never appear on CBC's The National or in Canadian Living Magazine).



As Editor I sometimes get the pleasure of interviewing my neurosiblings that have Autism who I have a shared interest with. Sometimes they are referred to as a 'special interest' or something that we have a very intense interest in - but some of us like to see it more as something that brings us a great amount of joy and a way to express ourselves in a way that feels safer for a variety of reasons.

Though that joy and interest is a whole lot of communication.

When Gordie asked me to create something for him for this Edition we sat down and had some conversations and we watched many wrestling clips!

Yes...wrestling! Think WWF type of wrestling. So much fun!

In preparation for me to write this we shared scenes with each other that we liked a lot as well as who our favourite wrestlers are/were. Though that sharing I started to see more and more how wrestling was a safe space for Gordie and how his favourite wrestlers were a reflection of how he sees himself as a person who has autism, when contrasted against the world.

We both are huge fans of Rowdy Roddy Piper who unfortunately passed away in 2015.

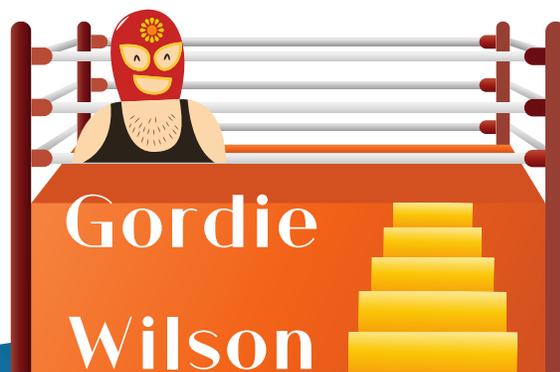
Roderick George Toombs was nothing like his bigger than life wrestling persona. Roderick was a homebody, he liked to be with his family or only a few close friends.

"I like the fact that I can go away and lose myself so I don't have to live in the world of courage that everyone else does. I like creating, it's what I do, and acting allows me to stretch all those different muscles in all kinds of ways. That's pretty cool."

- Roddy Piper(Roderick Toombs)

Though Gordie I learned that Roddy didn't even like coming to the matches that he wasn't in and would often watch from his home where he felt more comfortable and not needing to put his Rowdy Rowdy mask on. I sure could relate to that I could see that Gordie really did too. Autism can involve a lot of masking. It became eye opening for me through my time with Gordie how and why Autism plays a role in our shared love of this type of wrestling.

The more clips we watched, the more my memory was jogged by all the wrestlers that I have loved or hated since childhood. We shared stories and I was excited on one occasion to show him a clip he's never seen before from another Wrestler that we share as a favourite -



Randy (*Randall Poffo*)
"Oooh Yeah!" Macho Man
Savage

It was where Mean Gene came to Randy and Miss Elizabeth's estate to interview Macho Man. The phone kept ringing with offers. Eventually a woman pops out of his pool trying to get to the Wrestling Superstar and he says a line that left Gordie and I laughing so hard that people came to check on us!

"Here we have a typical situation!"

says Savage to Mean Gene as he points to the overcome woman.

★ Just another day in the life of a Wrestling SuperStar! ★

We also watched clips of a Wrestler who I hadn't thought about in a long time - **The British Bulldog Davey Boy Smith.**



He'd come our draped in the flag and with an actual British Bulldog, named **Matlida!**



It means a lot that Gordie shared his 3 favourite Wrestlers with me and that I learned more about them. But more importantly I got to learn more about what Autism is from Gordie because of a shared interest and how we can relate to each other. It really struck me that these characters are so relatable to us because they are allowed to be these versions of themselves and it's celebrated.

It gave us both an outlet to express something that we see ourselves in but in a way that those who aren't Autistic can't get. It freed us from that outside misunderstanding that often still exists around Autism as a condition and therefore still means stigma and misunderstanding for Autistic people/those who have Autism.

To quote Macho Man - "Oooh Yeah!"



Autistic Oxygen

by Patricia George-Zwicker

There's a life-affirming feeling when autistic people are around other people who have autism. It's a feeling that allows us to truly be seen and accommodated without masking our differences, and embrace whatever thing in life brings us joy - animals, places, interests, and stims. I call this Autistic Oxygen.

Below are a selection of my Autistic Oxygen designs that I use to make buttons and pins. Each design represents a breath of fresh aO2.





LifeSpans

In the summer of 2018, a group of Autistics had an idea for a magazine where Autistic Canadians share perspectives across the lifespan - and one year later, it is now a reality. I'm so excited to be sharing Edition 1 of 10 in a Series that I believe can be ground-breaking in Canada.

I turned 50 this year and I have known I am Autistic for 7 years now. It's been such a life-changing 7 years & now here I am beginning this LifeSpans journey. It's taken me this long to have a good understanding of what Autism is and what it means to have this neurology. I want to learn more though. I want to hear from my Neurosibilings of all intersectionalities, ages, and diagnosis status about the topics the effect us the most throughout our LifeSpan as people who experience the world differently.

I hope LifeSpans can start to shine a light on what life is like for Autistic people in Canada. I am hoping as our stories unfold it begins to capture our "accent". Most of all, I hope that it will help everyone who comes across this exciting series to see the true value in Autistics / people with autism (or however you/the person chooses to identify), getting to know each other, and building a community. We must get to meet each other. It makes a huge difference as we are often so isolated from one another.

So here we go! Let's find out from Autistics and people with autism of all ages what life is like for us in Canada. What are our hopes, dreams, fears. What do we want for our future?

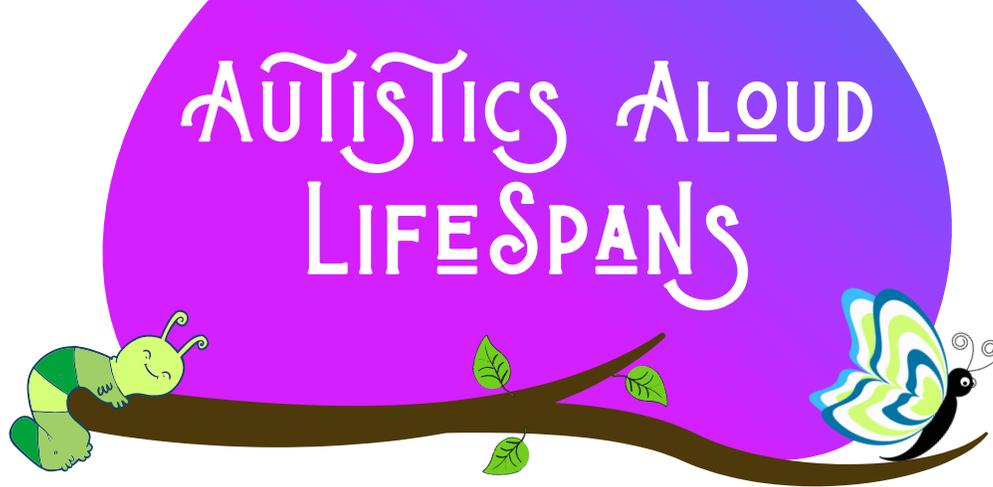
Ultimately for me the answer to the question of What is Autism? is quite simple really - it's people .

And we belong here and we deserve to live our best possible lives.



1 in 66 statistic on the front cover retrieved from:

www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/infographic-autism-spectrum-disorder-children-youth-canada-2018.html



Thank you so much for your interest in Autistics Aloud and LifeSpans, the 10 Edition Series that focuses on the lifespan of Autistic people in Canada as shared by first person expression.

Submissions are open for all the topics below anytime. Editions will be released over the next 3 - 4 year period. You can choose to submit to whatever topics interest you.

**Edition 2 will focus on mental and physical health.
See next page for contact info!**

EDITION 1: WHAT IS AUTISM, FROM AUTISTIC/ASD PEOPLE'S POINT OF VIEW?

EDITION 2: MIND, BODY, & SPIRIT: MENTAL HEALTH & PHYSICAL HEALTH

EDITION 3: DIAGNOSIS: FORMAL, SELF-DIAGNOSIS AND THE SPACES IN BETWEEN

EDITION 4: NEURODIVERSITY & INTERSECTIONALITY

EDITION 5: PRIDE: GENDER, SEXUALITY, DATING & RELATIONSHIPS

EDITION 6: SIBLINGS, COUSINS, MENTORS & BEST FRIENDS

EDITION 7: EDUCATION, HOUSING, & EMPLOYMENT

EDITION 8: TBD! AUTISTIC CONTRIBUTORS WILL CHOOSE THE THEME!

EDITION 9: ALSO TBD! WE ARE BUILDING OUR THEMES AS A COLLECTIVE :)

EDITION 10: LIFESPANS: ADVICE TO YOUNGER/OLDER AUTISTICS AND THE WORLD



By Autistics for Everyone!



Autistics Aloud © Autism Nova Scotia 2019



Autistics Aloud is a print and digital grassroots publication based in Nova Scotia, Canada.



Autistics Aloud has been supported by Autism Nova Scotia since it began in 2005 as a quarterly published Newsletter and was started by first person voice, Danny Melvin, who saw a need for Autistic led expression. Until Danny stepped aside in 2016 he and M. Keith were the newsletters sole Editors. Volumes 1 -9 ran had an impressive and respectable 11 year run. In April 2017, Canadian Disability Rights Autistic activist and artist Patricia George-Zwicker accepted the position of Editor. Patricia wanted to take the newsletter to a magazine format - a big change after 11 years, but they kept the original values in mind. So Patricia took on that new challenge in the Spring of 2017; a pioneering step that took Autistics Aloud into new unexplored territory.

On June 23, 2017 Autistics Aloud was published as a Magazine for the first time. It was 18 pages long. The Autumn edition that followed doubled to 36 pages. The Winter edition was a whopping 48 pages. 31 unique first person perspectives were shared. That's 102 pages of content ranging from poetry to reviews; feature articles that take on topics like autism and addiction, making a case for an Autistic Neanderthal, and Autistic identity! We highlighted artists, woodworkers, bakers, photographers, plumbers, original music, and original cartoons. We signal boosted organizations that promote autism friendly events and gave space to anyone on the Autism Spectrum who have a business they'd like to promote. Autistics Aloud Volume 10 made it into Question Period at the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in April 2018. Copies were personally presented to Members of Parliament, Senators & Leaders in various stakeholder Autism Communities all throughout Canada.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED & HOW TO CONTACT US

To inquire about how to make a Submission or any other inquiries about the magazine, use one of the contact methods below. Please note: under 16 will need parent/guardian consent. We don't require a formal diagnosis, and all entries are subject to approval for publishing.

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- ★ **Phone:** 902-593-1015 ext 307 / **Editor** - Patricia George-Zwicker
902-593-1015 ext 309 / **Managing Editor** - David Paterson
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- ★ **To Join Low Traffic Mailing List:** <https://goo.gl/oNzZ5b>
- ★ **To make a donation which goes directly back to Autistics Aloud**
autismnovascotia.ca/give (select "Autistics Aloud" in drop down box)
- ★ **WEBSITE:** autismnovascotia.ca/autistics-aloud

Social Media



@autisticsaloud



@AutisticAloud

Autistics Aloud is a publication of Autism Nova Scotia that has been in circulation since 2005. Every year since, we have proudly provided a platform for autistic voices to be heard across Canada.

This is the first edition of a new project called LifeSpans. Each edition will explore a theme from the perspective of Autistic Canadians who are children, adults, and seniors. In this inaugural magazine, 15 contributors share their insights to one of the most commonly asked questions:

WHAT IS AUTISM?

