

For my inaugural article as the newest board member of Spectrum Friends, I wanted to focus on something that is not only well known to people on the spectrum, but to their caregivers and friends as well, and that has to do with sensory issues; in particular a personal experience of myself as an Autistic child and my absolute hatred of having my hair cut. It is very common for children on the spectrum and Autistic adults, to have tactile sensory issues and as a child having my hair cut was at the top of strongest triggers, and certain clothing fabrics as a strong runner-up. The latter of which I still have a lot of issues with.

As a nearly 34 year old adult, who happens to also be a Mathematician by training (I know insert Autism cliché in my bio) I like to try and figure out the reasons behind phenomena that have an easy answer. My particular issue with hair cutting and why it elicited such a strong reaction, is no different. It didn't matter whether it was at a barber shop or my mother cutting it at home. Perhaps it was the sound of scissors cutting the hair, or the sound and physical sensation of clippers as they are guided across my head. Maybe it was the feeling of hair as it fell onto my face. Though the truth could be that it was all of these factors, combined to induce sensory overload. Regardless, of the causes the one thing that wasn't a mystery was my reaction to all of it.

I would whine and cry, and try to do anything to get out of having my hair cut. I would try to move and escape from the chair to avoid having it cut. One time while having it cut at home, I can remember planning in advance that when my Mother would try and use scissors for the portion of the haircut that required them, I would try and move my head in a way that would perhaps cause her to cut herself to make it stop. I must at this point clarify I never intended to hurt my mother out of any malice or anger, my only goal was to get the haircut stopped. I simply deduced that if she is cut from trying to do it, that would be the quickest way to get her to stop and if I could have thought of another way I would have. The plan worked and she cut her finger pretty bad and she gave up. I was maybe 8 or 9 years old at the time and I can remember her saying something to the effect "I hope you enjoy going to school tomorrow with a bad haircut". Which didn't faze me in the slightest.

The next day at school, my peers made several comments about my awful haircut and I was so elated that I stopped the haircut the night before I literally didn't care and told my peers that with a smile. If you're wondering if the haircut was really that bad, the answer is yes 100% and I only wish I had a picture to prove it to you. You see, this happened several years before I was diagnosed with Aspergers Autism, which was the name for it at the time of my diagnosis and the resources and knowledge was very limited even in a University setting where I was diagnosed. This is only one of the many issues I had growing up with Autism and hope to explore that in future articles.

In closing, I hope that you have found this experience to be informative and at the very least an interesting distraction. Oh, if you're wondering how I deal with haircuts today and the answer is I

don't know because I started balding when I was 19 and now I don't even have enough hair growing on top to justify the cost of a haircut so I just shave my head bald. Isn't it ironic how haircuts used to cause so much distress, and now I don't even have enough to get one? Go ahead and laugh at that bit of irony, I know I am.