



I'd like to share with all of you a personal message I wrote to my friends and family today, April 2, 2014, in observance of World Autism Awareness Day.

-Trevor

Here's a little something you may not know about me...

Today, April 2nd, is World Autism Awareness Day and I know that some of you have friends or family who are autistic. Others may have known someone at work or school, or maybe you simply never realized the person had autism because there is what's called the "spectrum" of autism which means the degree of functioning the person is capable of.

Stick with me...

"Low Functioning" applies in cases where you may see children or adults who cannot, or choose not to, communicate, may flail around, rock back and forth, vocalize odd squeaks and sounds, etc. as their means of reaching out to the "neuro-typical" (ie: non-autistic) world.

"High Functioning" on the other hand, means just that, and these individuals often blend into everyday society without much notice except that they can be recognized by odd social behavior and lack of social skills, especially as children. By adulthood, many of these folks have learned by observation and trial and error what is expected of them in the "normal" world. These high functioning people very often have Asperger Syndrome, something we are all the more aware of thanks to TV shows featuring Asperger characters and the successes of people who have, or are suspected of being, "Aspies". These include everyone from Bill Gates to Steve Jobs, Stanley Kubrick to Abraham Lincoln, and many others I will name later.

What you may not realize is that you all know at least one person who is a High Functioning Aspie, namely, me!

I was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome around two summers ago, and I can say that it certainly made sense of most of my life up until that point. I always knew, as did all of you, that I have a unique perspective on life, work

and relationships. I have been accused of being cold and detached by acquaintances, but those very close to me know I am quite the opposite in my heart, always putting you, the people I care for, above my own interests time and again. This has also led to situations where I have been taken advantage of by unscrupulous people here and there in the past, some who were aware of my condition and used it to their own benefit via deceit, but each event was a learning experience that put me in a better position to recognize these instances, and thankfully I have my friends and family to support me and help me to keep an eye out for these situations. I hope I never lose my faith in other humans.

Now you are probably realizing this diagnosis explains why I am so bad about returning phone calls, it's but one step up from sticking my tongue in the electrical socket in my book of things to avoid at all costs. It's why I stare at your mouth while you talk instead of your eyes. It's why even the faintest scent from a candle, perfume, even shampoo or plastics drives me up the wall. It is why I have poor motor coordination and can't really play sports and tend to drop things and be generally clumsy. People know not to let me wash the good china. Vibrations go straight to my core. I see patterns and connections that most do not, in clothing, artwork, history and nature. The slightest sound, however distant, or the faintest flicker of a light bulb, will get my attention like a firecracker going off. Vibrations go straight to my core... did I mention that poor

memory is common in Aspies? My senses are so attuned that recently I was able to hear a bolt coming loose on the alternator while I was driving my car down the highway at 65-mph. If you hand me an instruction manual I will still be reading it when you come back 4-hours later, stymied, but if you show me how to do something once, I will have it down pat.

Body language and innuendo? Nope, it's all lost on me. That's why I might stare at you blankly once you've finished a thought or interrupt you mid-sentence because I haven't realized if you've finished speaking or are just pausing. You may see my eyes darting around taking in everything but you when we are sitting across from one another in a restaurant, but I assure you I am listening, just being over-stimulated by the scenes going on around us, mentally logging your words, their actions, and all the sounds and smells. Yes, I get distracted easily, but be patient and I will come back around. I can be driven through a city I have never visited before in my life and then be able to make my way around with ease due to the "photographic memories" I created along the route. I am highly attuned visually, sounds and music do little for me which is a contradiction to my youth spent in the music scene, but if you think about it, the low bass rumbles were almost like a sonic hug, a warm all-enveloping comfort that I oddly enjoyed. I don't like being alone in public but I prefer one-on-one interactions if I can plan for it. If you invite me to your party, be ready for some awkward

silences and inappropriate jokes, but hey, I will be laughing at myself right along with you. Math is my downfall, numbers might as well be blurred pixels on a screen because my brain cannot easily process them, but I can invent, create and devise detailed and futuristic inventions that to me seem obvious if not far-fetched to others. I think you are starting to get the point here, I'm a weirdo, but now we all know why.

Why now?

I decided to "come out" as an Aspie because I hear more and more debate on the causes, issues, challenges and treatments for people with Asperger's, and I feel that shining a light on the topic can only do good for all sides of the conversation considering the vast misinformation that is out there.

I'd also like to encourage parents, teachers and caretakers of neuro-diverse kids to explore art and music as a means of self-expression for these unique young people, as this often results in a reduction in outbursts and aggressive behavior in such children, considering that many are simply expressing frustrations they feel by not having a means to explore their creativity.

There are also huge differences in how kids on the Autism spectrum are taught in the classroom. Some schools get this right and deserve recognition but others still need to

prioritize teaching neuro-diverse individuals in normal classrooms among their peers, rather than special education settings, this being the single most important time for young people with Asperger's to observe and learn valuable social skills, while also helping their neuro-typical classmates to appreciate the special perspective these students can offer.

My art is a pure reflection of my individual mind & creativity and that is something I plan to dig into even deeper as it is not only a great way to express myself when I may not be able to socially, it is also something I am learning gives joy to others. What could be better than that?

Autism and Asperger's are not diseases, you won't catch it, they are simply brain variations that are not yet fully understood. I am not on government disability, as I do not see this as a disability, but a beautiful gift I am fortunate to have received. Personally, and from research and reading, I do not know of any Aspies who would change their brain to "normal" if a magic pill were created that could instantly do just that. Why? I think it's because we appreciate these differences that give us a view of life and the world around us that is wonderful, special, often frustrating but always fascinating. It is my most valuable asset.

Without some of these great and successful Aspies, where would society and civilization be today?

## **Artists**

Michelangelo

Andy Warhol

Charles Schultz

Wasily Kadinsky

Vincent van Gogh

Leonardo da Vinci

## **Actors**

Michael Palin

Dan Aykroyd

Daryl Hannah

Andy Kaufman

Robin Williams

Marilyn Monroe

Keith Olbermann

## **Writers**

Jane Austen

Mark Twain

Franz Kafka

Shakespeare

HP Lovecraft

Isaac Asimov

George Orwell

Henry Thoreau

Virginia Woolf

Temple Grandin

Emily Dickenson  
Charles Dickenson  
Fredrich Nietzsche  
Hans Christian Andersen

### **Filmmakers**

Jim Henson  
Woody Allen  
Stanley Kubrick  
Alfred Hitchcock

### **Musicians**

Mozart  
Bob Dylan  
Beethoven  
David Byrne  
Susan Boyle  
Elvis Presley  
Gary Numan  
Craig Nicholls (The Vines)  
Michael Jackson

### **Scientists & Inventors**

Bill Gates  
Henry Ford  
Nicola Tesla  
Michelangelo  
Isaac Newton  
Albert Einstein

Thomas Edison  
Charles Darwin  
Howard Hughes  
Benjamin Franklin  
Alexander Graham Bell

### **Historical Figures**

Socrates  
Cleopatra  
Peter the Great  
Catherine the Great  
King Louis IV of France

### **Presidents & Politicians**

Al Gore  
James Garfield  
Andrew Jackson  
Andrew Johnson  
Teddy Roosevelt  
Abraham Lincoln  
Thomas Jefferson  
George Washington  
John Quincy Adams

I highly suggest that those of you who are interested to learn a bit more about Asperger's, and by default me, check out these easy-to-read guides intended for parents of Autistic children. They do a great job of laying out what life with Asperger's is really like.

Aspergers Links:

[Basic Understanding of Asperger's](#)

[Loving Someone With Asperger's](#)

[Why Aspies Seem So Awkward Around Others](#)

[I Hired Someone With Asperger's, Now What?](#)

[Here's a soundbyte that helps to explain what having heightened senses is like for an Aspie.](#)

(Volume warning, turn down speakers.)

Today, everything changes for me, yet nothing really changes at all. By that I mean I am opening myself up to future prejudice and judgments because I will likely forever be labeled as, "That guy with Asperger's" before the myriad other things I have accomplished, but I'll continue living the same life I always have. I didn't change, but I changed the way people will view me, and other people on the Autism spectrum, and I hope that starts some conversations.

Thank you all for being amazing and wonderful people who have never judged me but rather encouraged my individualism and appreciated me for my quirks. It means more to me than most of you will ever know.

With love,

Trevor Chowning

