

Life on the Autism Spectrum

I would like to provide an account of what it is like being diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome and being on the Autism Spectrum. My name is Garry Burge and I was diagnosed in 1998 as having Asperger Syndrome by Dr Tony Attwood in Brisbane, Australia. Dr Tony Attwood has a website www.tonyattwood.com.au and my own website is www.garryburge.com

Being Autistic can be very challenging, for even though you look the same as other people, they unfortunately do not understand the different way you think and function. For instance, I often think outside the box, but sadly in a society like Australia, 'outside the box' thinking is something that is not harnessed. I managed to self-publish my own book titled "I Want To Work An Asperger Story". This book provides an account of my own challenges and life growing up as someone on the Autism Spectrum and furthermore contains a Foreword from Doctor Tony Attwood. It is very hard to publish and distribute books in Australia as people seem more interested in both sport and drinking alcohol for pointless reasons. So to get the book both published and distributed was in itself a challenge. The book however is in some libraries, as well as the library I currently work in as a Service Support Assistant within the Social Sciences & Humanities Library at the University of Queensland here in Brisbane, Australia.

My earlier life was both challenging and difficult in the fact that I struggled to make friends and found the school system completely beyond me. Added to this, I was also bullied badly within the high school system which impacted badly on my already low self-esteem. I find for instance that in Australia that people are very hostile and there is a lot of hostile and challenging personalities to contend with. The university environment seems though to allow for more intellectual and 'intellectually curious' thinkers to exist. Even though I still struggle to fit in and belong, I find that life seems to be more 'liveable' than just 'survivable' within mainstream Australian society.

I currently work at the University of Queensland Social Sciences & Humanities Library which I indicated earlier within this account. I have worked in the job now for approximately 10 years and a little more. What I still find challenging though is the fact that I am unable to find more meaningful employment. I hold a Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of New England from where I graduated in 1999. I majored in both Politics and Sociology. After completing my undergraduate degree, I worked briefly at the Queensland Parliamentary Library for a 2 year internship. Having worked hard and demonstrating strong potential, I was offered an extension to a 2 month paid position. I worked mainly in audio-visual and assisted in other research areas within the library. Sadly as this was a fill in for another staff member on extended leave, the position was obsolete so I had to leave this position. I then worked in a Queensland Public Service job for 12 months and deal with heightened anxiety and stress being moved around department to department. I was also told that I used my Asperger Syndrome diagnosis as a crutch and plans were in place to have my traineeship ended as well as criticism of my way of thinking.

I then moved on into some other areas of employment being CODA (Carers of Disabled Adults) and some volunteer work. I undertook the volunteer work previously after

experiencing a break down in going through different job agencies and employment consultants. For example the volunteer work which I undertook despite my hard work and efforts, went to another person who was a son of a school colleague at the Brisbane Grammar School.

What I find difficult being an adult on the Autism Spectrum is the fact that I live in a world which does not understand me. I am expected to think and function like everyone else, yet I am wired differently to them. I still want to make friends but find that this is difficult. I experience meltdowns from time to time in my attempts to comply with some of the social pressures and demands placed on me. I find a relationship just beyond me and friendships even more difficult. It often feels like I need a translator just to make sense of the human race as the world is tailored more for them on a social basis than it is for someone on the Autism Spectrum like myself. I am involved in research with the Autism CRC and have contact with Dr Tony Attwood when he is able to make time which often can be difficult. I have been able to travel overseas on my own and I still live with my elderly parents in Brisbane as sadly accommodation is too expensive and social isolation impossible.

I know that this article may be somewhat short for publication but it was written in one go and I thought I would make a contribution to help raise more awareness out there of what it is like being someone on the Autism Spectrum. For more information please feel free to contact me via my website www.garryburge.com

