

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder Boxed Set: Look Into My Eyes: Asperger's, Hypnosis and Me (autobiography), Asperger's Syndrome: Tips & Strategies, An Autistic Perspective: Death, Dying & Loss

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Includes:

'Look Into My Eyes: Asperger's, Hypnosis and Me'

'Asperger's Syndrome: Tips & Strategies'

'An Autistic Perspective: Death, Dying and Loss'

Dan Jones

Connect with Dan Jones: www.ALT-Solutions.org

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Look Into My Eyes

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Autobiography of my experiences growing up and living with autism spectrum disorder, giving open and honest insight into what it is like to live with autism. This book includes a chapter written by my wife Abbie Jones, about what it is like to be in a relationship with someone with autism spectrum disorder.

CHAPTER ONE Introduction

This book isn't exactly an autobiography or memoir, detailing the story of my life; it is more like an autobiography through the lens of Asperger's, focusing on those areas of my life where Asperger's has played a role. My aim is to be open and honest about both the positive and negative aspects of myself. This book is for those interested in an Aspie-eyed perspective of the world, both internally and externally. This book is written by me, with my thinking style. I want the reader to see how my brain jumps around and makes associations - how I describe things and think about things from within my world, rather than dressing things up and trying to be something I'm not.

This could irritate some people. For example, one of my traits - which I have tried to minimise for the sake of the reader - is repetition. I don't notice I am doing it. I can find myself repeating the same things over and over without any awareness. Even writing a book and then reading what I have written, others can see my repetition, but I can review my work and not see repetition others say is there. I think that this is, in part, because I see things more literally than most; I can read two sentences someone else says are examples of repetition, and to me, they are two completely different sentences in two completely different contexts meaning two completely different things.

I try to give a taste of what it has been like to be me through different stages of my life, from birth to where I'm at currently. I have tried to be thorough in covering as much as possible and showing my learning and progress over the years. I want to make sure people can see how Asperger's impacts on all areas of life.

Having Asperger's can be overwhelming. Every moment can be a sensory overload. I can be walking through a town centre, and I will hear the jarring sounds of machines, and roaring motors of cars, and the chaos of hundreds of different people's voices, and movement coming from everywhere; I find myself constantly having to dodge people, having to try to adapt to people stopping and starting, darting my attention from face to face, and to dogs people are walking, and to movement of signs, and flashes of sunlight off windows, and to objects people are carrying. Normally, my only escape is to go into my mind and shut out as much as possible. I have tried to convey this chaos and sensory assault through my writing.

My main interest is hypnosis, which has featured heavily in my life, as it does in this book. Over a decade ago, I developed a few approaches to help get children to sleep through the way you read bedtime stories to children, and the way you interact with the child at bedtime. I shared and expanded upon these techniques in my 2006 and 2015 books, *Parenting Techniques That Work* and *Sleepy Bedtime Tales* and my 2016 book *Relaxing Tales for Children*. Hypnosis has taught me an immense amount about communication skills and how to begin to understand others. I have been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to teach hypnosis to others in workshops and through online courses and books. I also wrote a novel called *The Hypnotic Assassin* which is very blunt and to the point; I think the writing style reveals that it is written by someone with Asperger's. The novel was intended to be a creative way of teaching people about hypnosis through the use of a story.

The first edition of this book was very successful and popular, but as I was giving talks about my experiences with Asperger's I found myself regularly asked about what it was like for my wife, being married to someone with Asperger's. So I decided that it would be useful to have a chapter written by Abbie about her experience of being in a relationship with someone with Asperger's.

Structure of this book

When I started thinking about how best to write this book, I thought about having someone help me to structure the book; but then, as I was writing what I wanted to include, I decided that I would like the book to be written as closely as possible to how my mind thinks about things. I was aware my mind jumps around from one thing to another - and too much of this would make the book unreadable - but I wanted to give a taste of what it is like in my head.

I first started thinking about why I wanted to write this book. I had to have a purpose, or else I wouldn't write anything and I wouldn't have anything to keep me motivated to type page after page. Once I knew why I wanted to write this book, I had to think about what information I wanted to include here - and then how best to structure that information.

In my mind, what came up was to write chapters in chronological order. There are some bits that didn't fit with this approach because they straddled many chapters, and other bits may get repeated but from a different perspectives. I decided that this was still the best approach to take - so that a parent with a young child with Asperger's or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can read that chapter and see what my experiences were as a child, and what I found helpful and not helpful at that age. Likewise, a parent of a child at a different age - or even someone with Asperger's - can look at the relevant chapter if that is what they are mainly interested in.

As well as having Asperger's Syndrome and being diagnosed as an adult, I have also worked with children of all ages with autism and Asperger's, both in residential childcare and together with families with children with autism and Asperger's. I have had experience of the system and supporting people through the system, and can share my experiences of trying to get diagnosis and help in England.

Reason for writing this book

What motivated me to write this book was to give hope to parents of children with Asperger's and, indeed, to those with Asperger's Syndrome. I have worked with hundreds of parents since 2007, and during that time I have encountered many who seem to have no hope for the future of their child. They deeply love their child, with or without Asperger's, but many of them seem to believe that their child won't achieve much in life, because they have Asperger's.

I have worked with parents that use the term Asperger's as an excuse for their child's poor behaviour, and will sometimes say that their child has a genetic problem so they can't change: "This is the way they are, and so this is the way they always will be." These parents often don't try to address what can be done because they don't believe anything will work. They will respond to suggestions of what they could do by saying, "But that wouldn't work with my child, because he has Asperger's."

In the couple of years before I was diagnosed with Asperger's, I had been looking at myself and felt I most likely had Asperger's, but I didn't see the need to go through diagnosis to find out. I

didn't see the need for a label. Generally, my view is that we are all human, and the one similarity all humans have is that we are all different. We all have our own unique set of skills and qualities. As time went on, a number of experiences led me to seek out diagnosis, and I'm glad I did.

Before I was diagnosed as having Asperger's I used to work with parents and would reframe their perspectives of what future their children could have by giving a different take on their children's traits, or - as I saw them - strengths. I remember teaching a parenting course, where a parent was saying that their child had Asperger's, and that he got so frustrated and angry; he struggled with socialising and didn't really have any friends. The mum went on to say she didn't hold out any hope for her son's future - she feared she would probably have to look after him well into adulthood. Even after that, he wouldn't be able to do any jobs as he would struggle with having work colleagues, and indeed anything where his routine may change. She said he struggled to understand emotions, he always seemed emotionally disconnected and only ever seemed to get excited by noticing patterns in things. She said she knew he cared; he just didn't seem capable of showing it.

I responded by saying, "It sounds to me like he could make a great counsellor or therapist one day."

The mother looked at me, confused. Her background was in working with people with emotional difficulties in a school. I explained that, if he cared and wanted to help people, he would make a great therapist, because he wouldn't get sucked into all the emotions of the problem - something that many therapists do, and it clouds their perspective of a situation. He would be brilliant at picking out patterns in what was said, and at noticing the cause of the problem, and why a client would be stuck with it. I explained that many therapists get lost in the story the client tells, rather than being detached and noticing the patterns within the story.

The mother hadn't looked at her son's condition in this way before. She had said he was intelligent, so I commented that, as an intelligent person, he could learn many of the skills required to show empathy, and he could be taught when those skills should be applied. On the parenting course I was leading, I was teaching about I-messages and reflective listening - and this was with parents without Asperger's. I said, just as they were learning as parents how best to communicate, so could her son. (Her son was on the course in the young people's group learning these same skills and taking them in, despite the mother's insistence at the start that he probably wouldn't be able to. His favourite thing on the course was a relaxation technique which is a skill often vital for children with Asperger's.)

The mother smiled as her outlook for her son suddenly changed, and she saw hope for him. This also became a turning point for her and her son on the parenting course. She now had a more positive perspective on her son, and applications for his skills and abilities, rather than on his deficits and how he wouldn't achieve anything.

When I was sharing all this with the parent, I was able to do so congruently and with conviction, because I genuinely believed everything I was saying. I never told her - or any of the other parents - that I thought I had Asperger's. Rather, all I was doing was describing myself and some of my experiences as I will cover later in this book. Another reason for writing this book is to help me understand myself better. I have lots of information and views in my mind that I am always juggling. I decided that, if I wrote it all down, not only might it be helpful to others, but it might also help me to understand myself - to understand those aspects of myself I like, and those I'm not so keen on. It may also help me to understand how others see me, and how I annoy or irritate others unintentionally - and then what I could do about it.

Something I hope to achieve with this book is to show the development of my experience with

Asperger's over the years. So, I hope to describe how I was at different ages - within this, many of the same symptoms will crop up repeatedly, but in different contexts. I hope that this will be helpful to parents with children with Asperger's; they may recognise some of the symptoms in their children, and they may as a result be able to see how their child's symptoms may progress, and how they may impact on their child growing up. It may even help parents to know what sort of advice or support to give to their child over the coming years, in order to minimise any negative impact.

What is Asperger's (ASD)?

Asperger's is a collection of traits that Austrian paediatrician Hans Asperger recognised within children he was working with in the 1940's. The children appeared to have normal intelligence, but they struggled with non-verbal communication skills and didn't seem to show empathy to others. They spoke in an unusual way - often disjointed, with perhaps an odd pattern of speech, or they would speak in a very formal way, using full words and avoiding contractions (i.e., 'it does not' instead of 'it doesn't'). The children also seemed to have narrow and intense areas of interest - the only topics of conversation about which they wanted to talk.

It wasn't until 1992 that Asperger's Syndrome was used as a diagnostic term, and only in 1994 was it added to the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV). Asperger's has more recently been incorporated into autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as being on the 'high functioning' end of the autistic spectrum. To get a diagnosis, the psychiatrist or psychologist conducting the assessment will look to see whether the traits have been present since very early childhood, and will often want to talk to a parent or carer who can describe the birth and early years of the life of the person seeking diagnosis.

Asperger's is likely a genetic condition. There are some factors which may be related, like premature birth, and stress or illness during pregnancy. So, it is likely that someone with genetic susceptibility to Asperger's can have these genes activated by these factors. Asperger's is a lifelong, incurable condition that affects about 1 in 100 people.

Each individual with Asperger's will be affected in their own unique way. There are certain traits, but they affect each individual differently. Often, the key signs are: difficulties with social interactions (including difficulties understanding the behaviours of others), an intense and narrow interest on a topic, repetitive behaviours, and in childhood there could be delayed motor development or the child may exhibit clumsiness. Often, children with Asperger's will have developed linguistically and cognitively like normal - or perhaps even had advanced development in these areas.

As a child with Asperger's grows up, a parent may begin to suspect something is different about the child due to a lack of social interaction with other children. It is important to remember that Asperger's is a lifelong condition, so a child who had many friends in primary school and nursery school, but then stays in his/her bedroom and never socialises as a teen probably doesn't have Asperger's; on the other hand, a teenager who has never really had friends through their whole childhood, or perhaps latched onto just one or two friends through their childhood may be more likely to have Asperger's.

As a parent you would be looking for clusters of behaviours. Most traits aren't necessarily all present, but there are likely to be a number of traits expressed in some form or another. So the child may grow up with good speech, but all they do is talk about themselves, which is normal for young children, but which gets less common as children grow up. Alternatively, they may feel

compelled to touch specific textures, or to avoid specific textures - or even specific sounds, sights, colours or smells. Their speech may be robotic, monotonous, or repetitive. They may struggle with using or understanding non-verbal communication, but may have very good verbal communication. They may not make eye contact, something many parents and teachers then try to teach the child to do - because most people are raised to look at someone when they are talking to you, as if somehow looking at someone makes the information go into the ears better.

People with Asperger's may well absorb what they are being told better if they aren't made to make eye contact. They may also struggle to understand social or emotional situations - they may find empathising difficult. This is also something that is normal for most teenagers at some point during their development, so it is important to look at this in context with any other signs you notice.

CHAPTER TWO Early Years

Asperger's is a lifelong condition. To get a diagnosis of Asperger's the psychiatrist or psychologist carrying out the assessment looks to the past to see what the person undergoing the assessment was like in the early years of their life. Ideally, the psychiatrist wants to meet with the parents of the person being diagnosed; if that isn't feasible, they will want as much information as possible from different sources, to show what the person was like in those early years.

For me, my dad had unfortunately died from oesophageal cancer less than a year before my adult diagnosis. My mum, who lives some distance away, agreed to come to my assessment with me. If she wasn't able to attend, then they would have wanted to arrange a follow-up appointment at a time when she could attend - or at least to have a telephone appointment with her, although this

wouldn't have been an ideal situation. So I was really glad that my mum was able to make it to my assessment; it definitely saved a lot of potential hassle and uncertainty that I wouldn't have liked.

When my dad died, I looked through many papers of his and found documents he had written about what I was like as a young child. He'd penned them when he was trying to get me seen by a medical professional, because he felt there was something wrong with me. I took copies of these with me to my assessment, and was glad I had these documents in case mum wasn't able to make it to the appointment with me.

If there is no-one to share what the person having the assessment was like as a small child (for example, if someone is going for an adult diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome and either they were adopted or in care, or of an age where close family members have died), then getting this evidence can be more tricky. If the person seeking a diagnosis can get medical records - or has records from nursery school or play school - then this can be helpful when painting a picture.

In this chapter, I relate how my parents described me, and what I remember about being this young age. What I have noticed over the years is how rigid some elements of myself have been. I look back and see things at all different ages that I can still relate to now as an adult. It may be that you, the reader, have a young child, and as you read through this, you notice things that are similar in your child. It may be that you have Asperger's, or are thinking about whether you should seek diagnosis, and whether you are likely to discover you have Asperger's or not. You, too, may relate to some of these experiences.

Looking back, in hindsight, is often filled with connections and answers that were so easily missed at the time. Not only do I have this perspective, but I will also share some of my views from years of working with children with Asperger's and supporting parents of children with Asperger's, about what can be helpful and what I feel is unhelpful.

Birth

I was born in the afternoon of 19th August 1978. It was a year and a few days after Elvis Presley had died of a heart attack in his bathroom. For most of my life, I have had an obsession with Elvis Presley's music and often wondered whether it is because his music might have been playing everywhere over the year after his death and I may have been listening to it through mum's womb, repeatedly picking up on it as something comforting.

This may sound odd, but there is research about music being played to babies in the womb - how such music can soothe the baby. The interesting thing is: if the child hears the music they heard while in the womb, they respond to it unconsciously; it evokes the emotional response they exhibited whilst in the womb. So, if a parent plays a specific calming tune into their womb repeatedly during pregnancy and the unborn baby responds with increased calmness, they can use that same music to help soothe and calm the child as they grow up; the child may well keep a positive association with that tune or music throughout their life.

This also works for voices. If a parent is often shouting and making the unborn baby experience repeated shocks each time they shout, and perhaps also scaring or unsettling their unborn baby, then this voice will have the same effect on the child as they grow up. The difference here is that they may become immune to the shouting and stop experiencing a shock sensation; instead, they may respond by just ignoring the shouting. If the parent regularly talks calmly and softly to the unborn baby and the voice soothes the baby, then that same voice will be likely to soothe the baby

as they grow up.

I was due to be born in September 1978, but came out early. I was small but healthy. Mum has often told me that I never hugged her. I was my mum's first child so she didn't know what to expect. She didn't know what 'normal' behaviour was. If she tried to hug me, I would apparently push away. I have never really liked being hugged, but I do like to be tucked in tight sheets in a bed. Like much that I write about in this book, this is difficult to explain; once I start sharing things, they come out sounding like contradictions. That is one reason for writing this book - maybe, just maybe, seeing them in print will help me notice the connections, and I can then understand how they make sense, how they aren't as illogical as they seem.

I don't like the feeling of clothes wrapped around my arms, legs or neck, but I do like a t-shirt that is tucked in so that I can actually feel like I am wearing one. I don't like being hugged or having people getting close to me, but I do like to be in enclosed spaces or tucked into tight sheets.

When I was born, mum just assumed that my nan was picking me up and looking after me, and 'knowing better' when she was trying to help - that I perhaps was forming a closer attachment to my nan than my mum. Maybe that was why I didn't really hug her and why I would push her away, she thought.

My view is, if that was the case then I would have grown up being 'normal' about hugging, and it probably would have just been my mum that I didn't hug. In my ASD assessment, my mum described how I always shied away from being touched, and disliked being cuddled. Mum described how I was completely different to my other siblings. All of my brothers wanted hugs and attention from mum - and, in fact, other adults and children. I was happy to sit alone in a corner somewhere; I didn't feel a need to seek out the company of others.

One thing I remember from being very young is two teddy bears that I used to have. What I remember about them more than anything else is their smell and feel. One was a small yellow teddy bear with bristly fur. I remember rubbing the fur on my cheek and finding the feeling comforting. The other bear was softer and squishier. Both had different smells and both felt different, but both were comforting. I still own both of these teddy bears, although I don't think I have hugged them since I was just a few years old.

For any parent who can relate to what I have written about me as a baby, I wouldn't immediately jump to the conclusion that someone has ASD because they don't hug, or they push away, or because they were born prematurely. I would look at it as a possible indicator, if there are other things you notice about your child as they grow up. I think people seem to have a tendency to be very insular. They focus on themselves more than they realise. A parent in a similar situation with a baby that doesn't seem to be hugging them should look and see whether the baby is hugging other relatives to see whether the pattern is just with the mother, or also with other relatives and friends.

Nursery school

I don't remember too much about nursery school. What stands out for me is having to stand on a bench in a small dimly-lit classroom singing 'ten sizzling sausages', and then having to jump off the bench when it got to my number. I know that even at this age I would rather be solitary. I was much more comfortable sitting on my own and looking through a book or pushing a singular toy around a room, usually a lorry or a train. I didn't like doing interactive or group activities, yet this is what everyone was pushed to do.

I remember mum telling me that when I went to my first day of nursery school, and on subsequent days, I walked straight in. I didn't hug mum goodbye, I didn't turn to see her before walking into the nursery school, and I didn't cry. Mum told me, she thought at the time that this was a sign of positive attachment - that I must have felt secure in the knowledge that mum would be there when I came out of nursery school - so I was comfortable to go in without any problems. It is only over recent years, when looking back and reflecting, that she has said maybe it was a sign of something else.

I think this is an interesting one for parents, because I would be pleased with a child that doesn't cry at a school gate - a child who isn't clinging to me as a parent, who seems to be comfortable to just walk in to the school without any fuss - but obviously this is a rare reaction from most children. A healthy reaction would usually be perhaps anxiety about entering school on the first day, maybe anxiety, too, on a few subsequent days. After that, the child should have enough experiences of their time in school going well and their parent being there for them when they come out of school that they then begin to go into school without any hassle. It is unusual for this to happen straightaway.

From my perspective as the child, I didn't have a strong attachment to mum, or anyone else in my life, and unless I knew there was a reason to think differently, walking into one building was much the same as walking into another building. I'm sure many children with Asperger's would still find going into school something that evokes anxiety, something which may well lead to crying and may cause difficulty getting them to go in.

For me, I am generally a calm person. And think I always have been. So, in my early years - when I wasn't of an age where I had learnt about thinking about situations before being in them - I had no problem walking into situations. Most children gradually become aware of what others might think of them, and about how they may feel in a situation before they are actually there.

This lies at the heart of many issues that adults have; they have learnt to create mental images of what may go wrong in different situations. This then leads to anxiety, and can lead to avoidance, so that the anxiety or negative perceived outcome doesn't happen.

I am much like everyone else. I would rather avoid some situations than face the prospect of becoming anxious. My attitude to it is that, with many things, I decide I will do them despite feeling anxious, because if I don't, I would shut down much of my life. However, I do have coping strategies I use - especially in situations I have found myself in unwittingly, like being on crowded trains, or being in a town centre, or other locations where there are people around.

I remember in nursery school that I would keep myself to myself as much as possible, and would focus on one thing to shut out everything else. I don't know if this made me appear unresponsive at times, but I do know that I was often described as being a 'quiet, polite boy'. I wasn't intentionally being quiet or polite; I was just keeping in my own world. What I have learnt as an adult is the extent to which people are so self-centred - they often don't take the time to properly observe the external world. I didn't know that when I was just a young child, but I now know that this is likely to be the reason for people making interpretations like 'he is a quiet, polite boy'.

What they meant was: "He was quiet, so he must be a quiet boy, and because he was quiet when I was talking to him he must have been quietly listening, which is polite." It doesn't mean that my being quiet meant I was listening. I have experienced this in my adult life, too. People talk to me, I say nothing, and then weeks later they are telling me about how good it was to talk to me, how helpful my advice was. Yet, I never said anything... They did all the speaking and came to conclusions themselves.

Toddler

I don't have many memories of being a toddler. I remember 'ten sizzling sausages' in nursery school, and I remember having a very heavy metal toy car that I'd sit in and pedal. I remember struggling to get it going. What I do have though is my dad's description of me that I hadn't seen until after he had died of cancer in 2014. A few days after he died, I was at home with my wife. We were going through old handwritten letters, when my wife found one dad had written that described me. She read it in silence for a minute first, and then said, "This describes you as you are now."

She started reading it out to me. It was a description of what I was like as a toddler. In the letter, dad was trying to get me an appointment with a doctor. He described how 'there is something wrong with Daniel'. Much of this book's section on me as a toddler has used dad's descriptions as a starting point. When my wife read out these points I was instantly able to relate to many of them as things I still do, issues I still have, or things I have had into recent years but have gradually been working on reducing. With that in mind, many of these will crop up again in future chapters; I will expand on how they have manifested over the years, what impact they have had on my life, and what I have done about them.

When I was a toddler, I used to twitch. It wasn't a nervous twitch, but it was more something I felt compelled to carry out. I would also find myself tapping - tapping my feet, or tapping my fingers. To me, this wasn't a problem; it was something I did that was probably more of a problem to others than to me. I'm sure others used to find it annoying. I know this was the case later in life.

The whole time, while it isn't a problem to the person doing it and it isn't being identified as a problem by anyone else, there isn't any motivation to address it and change. I don't remember people telling me it was a problem to them until I was in secondary school. I didn't really try to do much about it until I was in my second job as an adult where people were identifying my tapping as a problem at work.

Something I found interesting when reading one of the letters my dad wrote was that I was mentally strange. I would seem to make connections in directions that seemed unusual or odd. To me, as an adult, I think of this as creativity. I can make some seemingly strange decisions. I also say things that now, as an adult, I know sound stupid; this doesn't stop me saying them and thinking they are perfectly natural, normal and logical at the time. An adult example of this is that if I meet someone who looks like someone else, I am very likely to ask them whether they know the person they look like. So far, everyone I have asked this has said they don't know the person. At the time I ask it doesn't seem odd; my brain says that if they look like someone else, then maybe they know them. It is only on reflection that I realise how ridiculous that sounds. It isn't like I think they are related to the other person - which could at least make some sense. I just seem to think that two similar-looking people must know each other.

I have three younger brothers; the next oldest is the son of my mum and dad, and the other two are my half-siblings. When my dad was describing what I was like as a child, he had my brother (two years younger than me) for comparison: him at that younger age and how I seemed to be at the older age. My brother apparently thought 'normally', whereas I had a different view of reality. This is a term I prefer now as an adult: that I have a different view, or perspective, on reality. It isn't that I have a problem; I just see the world differently. We all see the world differently to each other anyway, so this makes me more 'normal'. If I think of things as a bell curve, then the majority of people think similarly in the centre of the curve, and fewer and fewer people think similarly, the

further from the centre of the bell curve you get. I would be towards one of the sides of the curve, but still somewhere on it - just like everyone else.

Another observation my dad made in his letter was that I had problems with reciprocal communication, and would only reciprocate if I was prompted and told what to say. This is again something that is still with me, except that as I have grown up, I don't respond so well to being prompted. As soon as I am prompted, I find myself not wanting to do what I have been prompted to do. I think, sometimes, that the person who prompted me will think I am only doing or saying what I then do or say because they told me to. This stops me doing it at all, which can, in turn, make me appear rude or ungrateful.

I definitely think my parents were correct in prompting me as a child. This has to be done with all children to a certain extent as they are learning and developing. I just never seemed to 'grow out of it'. I continue to this day to really need prompting, but unfortunately I don't respond as well as I probably did as a child to being 'told what to do'.

From a very young age, I started reading. From what I have been told, and what I can remember, I was very good at reading. Where I struggled was in relating to pictures in books. Most books for toddlers contain pictures to help the story along. For many children, the pictures in story books explain the story more easily for the child than the words do. Where I struggled was in identifying what was going on in the pictures. I couldn't grasp the emotions conveyed on characters that were drawn. If there was a picture of a child in a tree, I could say 'that child is in a tree'. If my parents asked "How is Billy feeling in that picture?", I wouldn't be able to read the drawing and work it out.

In his letters, my dad mentioned about issues he observed with my physical coordination as a toddler. When I was older, I definitely significantly improved in this aspect. Dad described that I wasn't clumsy, I just seemed to always bump into things as if I didn't recognise where parts of my body were. When I read this, I thought that described having a proprioception problem. I feel that this would fit with dad's description of me not being clumsy but having some kind of problem with my physical coordination. Likewise, from a young age, I have always been quite good at learning movements and climbing trees, and such things that children do. But I have always had a problem with the bits of me I can't see. When I was about ten years old, I cut my leg open falling over. This isn't unusual for a ten-year-old, except that I was standing still at the time and somehow managed to fall over just by moving a little. Aged ten, I was climbing trees, cycling, horse-riding, playing tag, and so I definitely wasn't clumsy and always falling over and hurting myself. But still, I would often bash my legs or arms or shoulders or head into things, seemingly without realising it was about to happen.

As an adult, I was involved in a road accident which shattered my right arm. My right elbow now sticks out slightly further than it used to, and this slight difference means I am frequently banging it on things like door frames, because I seem to be unaware of its location in space. I also continue to knock my head and bash into things easily.

I remember mum always telling me that I was a bright child. I know this is what parents tell their children, but I do think I was intellectually bright as a child. I could understand what people meant when they told me things; even from a very young age, if I was told something clearly and logical - like telling me to carry out a task - I could do it. What I wasn't very good at was practical things. It took me a very long time to learn how to tie my shoelaces. I remember getting annoyed with myself because I couldn't do it. My brother, who is two years younger than me, was able to tie his laces before I could. I remember him making fun of the fact that he could tie his laces and I couldn't. This used to frustrate me. It made me more determined to succeed, so I would stop feeling like I was stupid.

The thing that frustrated me most was that I could understand the instructions about how to tie my laces. I could see laces being tied, and I believed I could copy the actions I had just watched. But when it came to doing it, I would fail. It didn't seem like it should be difficult, and this just made me more frustrated.

I remember being described as a child who was generally very calm and quiet. But I also threw tantrums. Every child throws tantrums from time to time, especially when they don't get their own way. I don't remember minding so much about getting my own way; I didn't care enough about most things to throw a tantrum about them. I was used to not getting my own way, because it led to a quieter life at home.

What I would throw tantrums about would be when plans were changed and we ended up doing something different to what we were supposed to be doing. Mum has described to me on occasions how I used to throw myself down on the ground and bang my head on the floor. She has described to me about how stubborn I would get at these times. I never liked change, and didn't cope well with it. If something changed, I had to know why, I had to know what the new plan was. I would ask lots of questions about what was going to happen, when and why. I would only calm down once I was happy with the answers to these questions.

In my assessment, mum described a time when she washed her hair and wrapped a towel around her head. I became upset because mum looked different to how she was before washing her hair and, to me, her hair looked 'messy' and I struggled to cope with this change. It is small changes like this that for most children are insignificant. A parent will wash their hair and carry on with the rest of their day. For mum, washing her hair could lead to a child throwing a tantrum and asking questions - she would have to deal with me wanting everything to go back to 'normal'.

As a child, dad described me as 'can be talkative, but talks endlessly about very little'. I remember as a small child not really talking to people, whether it was friends, teachers, family or other adults, unless I had something I found interesting to say to them. Even then, it would be because they had instigated conversation. Many people saw me as a quiet child who didn't really say anything to anyone, and most of the time, this was the case. I think, through much of my life, people have mistakenly thought that I am shy, but the reality is that I don't really have any interest in most of what people talk about.

Dad would get annoyed with me repeatedly talking about the same subjects over and over again and not engaging in any other conversation. All my life I have described myself as being all or nothing. People will either struggle to get any communication out of me, or they will engage me in conversations about things I am interested in and I will talk at them about those things.

From as young as I can remember, mum always described me as being very grown-up in my way of talking and thinking. I quickly passed the stage of talking like a child. I didn't really do imaginative, make-believe talking. I could imagine and talk about ways of doing things, and would create things in my mind - like magic tricks. I could describe them, but this was using my imagination to create real-world items. I never really imagined in a fantasy way.

As well as talking a lot about very little, I used to 'repeat things like a parrot', as dad described me. I would copy words or phrases I heard that had a certain rhythm to them, or things that felt nice to say. I didn't consciously do this; I would just find myself doing it. It wasn't just speech that I would copy - I would copy sounds and tunes too. Again, to a certain extent, all children do this. I have always been fascinated by the scene in *Jaws*, when Martin Brody's son, Sean, is mimicking him at the dinner table. This is something most children do at some time as they grow and develop. I didn't copy body language like Sean was doing in *Jaws*, but I would mimic others verbally - and not directed back at the person I was mimicking. I wouldn't notice that I was mimicking; I would

sometimes do it without any conscious awareness, other times I would become aware of what I was doing, but not of why. So I would know I was saying a phrase or word over and over again, but wouldn't realise that I was saying something someone else had said, and that I was actually copying them. Certain sounds feel good, and if I am absorbed in making them, then I am absorbed in that good feeling.

I always struggled to grasp ideas and concepts. Things had to be made clear for me to understand them. If something was too conceptual or too vague, then I would struggle to understand it or make sense of it. I have always been a very logical thinker, and so could figure things out. An example of this was when I was being babysat and the person looking after us children was sat on the sofa. His feet were gradually pushing the rug towards the fire. There was a fireguard to stop us going near and touching the fire, but the rug was pushing under the fireguard, and I could tell that the spitting fire from the crackling wood that was landing safely within the fireplace would end up going onto the rug and may have caused a fire. I reacted by pulling the rug away from the fire and making the situation safe.

Mum has described to me a few incidents like this, where I could analyse situations and work out that something could go wrong, and I would calmly make the situation safe. Like noticing that toast was being cooked and was burning, while the person cooking had forgotten about it. I knew to turn off the grill and remove the toast to stop it burning. I always seemed good at being able to logically and calmly work through situations in my mind and find solutions. I think it helped that I didn't really get emotional about things, so I didn't end up panicking and not knowing what to do.

I have always been described as a good eater because I will eat anything that is put in front of me and will eat everything. It is rare for me to leave food on my plate. What most people don't realise is how much I hate eating. This has been the case for as long as I can remember. I don't know for sure whether it has always been the case. Mum has always described me as a good eater. I know that, as a toddler, though, I didn't like eating, but rather I found eating a useful tool.

There are many children who seem to have a problem with being fussy about what they eat. My professional experience of this is that it is usually due to how parents have been around giving certain foods to their children. Either the child hasn't liked something so the parent has decided to offer something else, and over time this has become a pattern where the child has learned that they can react in a specific way and the parent will give them what they want, or the parent doesn't particularly like something, and the child picks up on their reaction to the food and adopts it.

Children are incredibly observant. They don't consciously realise how observant they are, but they can pick up on subtle communication from their parents. This is how children do all of their learning during the first few years of life. Most people who have sat through language lessons in school will know how difficult learning a language is. The teacher may well start by teaching how to count to ten, how to say who you are and how to say please and thank you. I know by the time I left school, having sat through lessons many times a week for five years, I still couldn't fluently speak French or German; yet, within five years of life, a child - who is just copying their parents and others around them - can speak their native tongue fluently, and they won't have had any formal lessons, partly because there is no language to use to teach the child.

So, if a child can learn an entire language to a level where they can hold conversations and be understood by the age of two, then they will have no problems learning other behaviours from their parents - like how they should behave during conflict, what foods they should and shouldn't enjoy eating, and how they should think about things.

What I found with eating, and still do, is that it gave me something to do in situations where

others were around. I could focus on just eating and not be hassled into playing or interacting with others. So, eating in social situations can be protective; while you are eating, people assume you are doing something and are more likely to leave you alone. I would get comments about what a good eater I was, but people wouldn't focus on trying to get me to do something different instead of eating. Meanwhile, if I was sat quietly in a corner on my own, people would impose their own views and judgements on me and assume that I must be unconfident, or bored, or that I should go and play, and so they would try to push me into playing with others.

For as long as I can remember, I have never really noticed much about the taste of food - it has always been about how the food feels to eat. If the food doesn't feel right I will probably still eat it, but given the choice, I would always choose the foods that feel best to eat first. I like the feeling of chewing on juicy meat, or sloppy mash, or overcooked vegetables. I don't really like dry foods, like crackers or pastry. Eating is something I am often very indifferent about, so as a child, if food was placed in front of me, I would eat it. On the other hand, if there was no food, unless I was very hungry or in a situation where food would save me from interacting with others, I wouldn't see a need or have a desire to eat.

Something I have always struggled with when eating is how to eat without biting the inside of my mouth. My whole life, this has been an issue. Somehow, probably fifty percent of the time I eat, I will end up biting the inside of my mouth - my cheeks, or my lips, sometimes even my tongue. I do it less when I focus solely on eating and I ignore everything else so that I can picture in my mind where the food is in my mouth at any given time and carefully track its movements during each chew.

Probably the most obvious area to parents of a child on the autistic spectrum is how their child plays and interacts with other children, or - more likely - how they don't seem to be playing or interacting with other children. This was definitely a feature of my childhood. My dad described how I didn't seem to be able to grasp that play was fun, and that I didn't seem to play with others.

For me, play was more of a practical and solitary thing, especially in my early years. If I received Lego, I would sit quietly and diligently making what was on the box, following the instructions. I would rarely make something different with the Lego. I was happy to put together a train track from a wooden train set and just push the train around the track, but wouldn't play with others. When I did play with others, it would either be because it was being forced upon me, or because I was carrying out a specific role. So, I could be playing a game with someone else, like my brother, and we would both have roles to play in the game. He may be playing the King during a game, and I may have to collect things for him, and so I would go off on my own and collect things and return them, but we wouldn't actually be playing together: I would be doing my thing and he would be doing his.

It was always really difficult to understand play, because people would say that one thing was actually something else as if it actually was something else, and then they would treat it as that other thing. So they may, say, use kitchen roll tubes as swords and act like they really were swords, even though I knew they weren't - they were just kitchen roll tubes. Someone saying 'let's get in the car' and then getting in between some cushions from the furniture placed around the floor and pretending to drive off and perhaps pretending to evade a chasing car was always confusing to me. Some things made more sense though: someone saying 'let's hide in the den', and then getting in under a blanket propped up by cushions, for example, made more sense, because we had made that den. It was a static object with walls and a roof.

If you are a parent reading this and you recognise in your child a lot of what I have written about as a toddler and from my nursery school experiences, then they may well have autism spectrum

disorder (ASD). Everyone's experience on the autistic spectrum is different, but there will also be similarities. A child with ASD will have issues socially, they will view life quite literally rather than metaphorically and they are likely to have sensory issues. In the next chapter, I will be discussing what I was like through my primary school years. This is the first period of my life where I can confidently recall memories. During the chapter, I will cover how my experiences developed as I grew up.

If your child is displaying similar behaviours to those I have described here, it may be worth talking with a general practitioner about whether an ASD assessment would be worth looking into. As a general rule, I'm not a fan of labelling people, but I am aware that if someone is in need of additional support, then a label can be useful. For example, having an ASD diagnosis can help get extra support around education. Adults with ASD can also get extra support within their work. I wish I had been diagnosed younger, as I believe it would have helped me over the years.

CHAPTER THREE Primary Years

Many of my earliest memories are from my primary years. I don't really remember much before that, and what I think I remember, I can't be confident about - are they my memories, or just memories based on photographs I have seen? In this chapter, I will share my experience of my primary school years from about five years old up to ten or so. During this time, I began to recognise that I was different and started to learn about how to cope with the world around me.

Mum always described me as having a lot of common sense. I would describe myself as having common sense that sometimes isn't common, and other times doesn't make sense... From a very young age, mum trusted me to look after my younger siblings. She had tried babysitters, but often I was still the person with the most common sense in the room. I had good observation skills for safety, and because I couldn't care less about most things that others seemed to really care about, I was often very calm. If there was an incident that needed to be handled I was likely to be the one who could work out what to do, and then calmly do it. This trait has helped immensely throughout my life.

Mum was a riding instructor, so growing up, she had to work when everyone else was off. My stepdad was a landscape gardener, so he worked long hours whenever the weather was suitable. Because mum taught people to ride horses, I spent most of my time around horses as a child. From the age of about eight, when mum was teaching, I would often be looking after my brothers. We would be at the riding centre, so mum wasn't far away if we needed her - she couldn't afford to have anyone else look after us, but she trusted me and felt I was responsible enough to look after my brothers. I knew that if there was a problem, I could either find mum, or seek out any of the other adults who ran the stables.

I remember some of my first experiences attending my first primary school. It was a small school with a cold outdoor swimming pool. I have certain memories that stand out about the pool. I remember flies floating in the pool. I remember the smell of the water. It smelt like water - I mean, it didn't have an odd smell - but I remember the fresh watery smell from the pool. I also remember the feeling of being in the water, and remember times when my nan would come along and help out during swimming lessons. I didn't like the swimming cap I had to wear. It used to hurt my head when I put it on and took it off. The cap would stick to my hair and felt like it pulled hair out of my head whenever I took it off. I did enjoy swimming though. My favourite thing about swimming was being underwater. I loved putting my head underwater, and as I got more confident, I would hold myself fully underwater at the steps. I loved how the sound changed underwater - it was quiet and peaceful, not as chaotic and overwhelming as the world above the water. I remember believing I could almost breathe underwater. I was aware that I couldn't, but I felt that I was able to stay underwater longer by relaxing and imagining I was breathing, so I would make all the actions of breathing without actually breathing in. I would almost cycle air round, as if I was somehow breathing within myself.

I didn't really have many friends in primary school. I was polite, so if someone engaged with me, I would be polite and do my best to try to engage with them back, but I didn't really have much interest in interacting with other people. I would much rather have spent a break time at the hedges around the outside of the school grounds searching for snails and looking at other creatures. I didn't feel like I was missing anything. I would take an ice cream tub around with me which I would fill with leaves, twigs, snails, caterpillars or grasshoppers. I wasn't necessarily very good at socialising, and didn't particularly care about others. That isn't to say I wanted bad things to happen to others - I have always wanted everyone to be alright - but I was far more caring of animals. One day, when I was out with mum while she was teaching horse riding, I found an injured grasshopper. I took it home and tried to nurse it back to health by creating an environment for it and giving it some food. Unfortunately, it didn't survive. I didn't get upset about it not surviving. I wanted it to live and get better, but my attitude was: once it had died, it had died. I did all I could think of to try to save it, and to my knowledge I couldn't have done more. I remember burying it in the garden, because I thought that was what was supposed to happen to dead things, then I got on with my life. I didn't get upset about not being able to save it, because I had done everything I felt I was able to do.

At one time, mum tried to arrange a birthday party for me at home. She invited many children I knew, and on the day of my party, no-one turned up. I think this was a telling sign of my relationships with others. I was polite to people but never really invested in my relationships with the other children in school. I was pretty much the same at home. I would prefer to spend time alone doing my own thing, but was generally polite. I don't recall too much play with my brothers. When we did play, it was usually something active like hide and seek or manhunt, or it was making dens or climbing trees. It wasn't really things where I was having to play with my brothers, but more things where I played alongside my brothers, or could feel like I was doing my own thing or engaging in a project - making something for some purpose.

I was far better at getting on with adults. I would ask questions all the time about things I was

interested in, wanting to know more. At school, I would take my time getting ready to leave lessons so that the other children would leave and I could then ask the teacher any questions I had. If the lesson didn't interest me, then I would get out as quickly as I could to try to avoid being stuck in the middle of a crowd of children all leaving at once. If I had to choose between spending time with children or adults I would usually choose to stand around the adults, and would normally latch on to one adult whom I would sit next to and talk to. That adult was normally chosen because they'd first approached me and started talking to me, but they would then be stuck with me until they walked away. If they walked off and left me, I wouldn't seek anyone else out; I would rather sit on my own and keep myself to myself. Sometimes, another adult would come and talk to me and I would then talk to them about topics I enjoyed until they walked off too.

Before I really discovered non-fiction books, my favourite thing to play with was Lego. I would like making what was on the box - most of the Lego I had was normal Lego, but I always asked for Technic Lego for birthdays and Christmas - it looked and sounded more grown-up, and my view was, with Technic Lego, you were making something proper, not just a brick house or an equally simple item. I remember getting a Lego train set one year. I loved the feel of the train rails - how smooth they were on top - and loved how they fitted together and the smell of the pieces. I also loved the feel and smell of Lego tires. I would put them in my mouth and gently squish them between my teeth just to get the feeling of them.

When I used my Lego, I would place parts in orderly piles on the floor, and would get annoyed if anyone knocked them and messed up my area. I have mentioned previously - and will probably mention again - that things I say seem to have a lot of contradiction in them, which is confusing to me. However, I see these areas of contradiction and confusion as places where I am likely to learn more about myself. One such area is how I like things to be tidy and to make sense, yet I can easily live in a mess. My Lego on the floor probably looked messy, but I would have everything in its place. I would know where all the different kinds of blocks were. There would be order to my mess. As a child, especially, I found that I could focus on one thing, and that what mattered to others didn't necessarily matter to me. Mum often said she thought I would grow up to be a mad professor, always coming up with ideas and creating inventions but living in a mess. I don't remember thinking of my bedroom as a mess - things would be in piles where I could find them.

I did sometimes play team games, but I never volunteered to play - rather, it would be because I was told I had to play. Just like in school, when children are told they have to play football. I'm not totally against playing team games, I just don't focus on the team element of the game. I remember in my second primary school, a very small school in Arundel, West Sussex, playing football from time to time with other children, because many of them enjoyed football, and the only way to fit in was to join in. I have always liked being very active, so I liked running around. I liked being chased by people and seeing if I could evade them. But I didn't like having to be part of a team and having to interact with others. What's more, I didn't care whether I won or lost, which didn't seem to go down well with others on the same 'team' as me.

My focus was on questions like: 'I wonder whether I can make it to the other end of the pitch without anyone getting the ball off of me...' I didn't care whether they could or not. I would just want to find out the answer; and then next time, I would try to do better than my previous times.

I remember one football game where my thinking got me in trouble. One advantage of not particularly being interested in others and treating everyone about the same, regardless of who they are and what they are like, is that I would blend into the background and fit into most groups. There have always been exceptions, but generally I could loiter with a group and no-one would

question my presence - sometimes, people wouldn't even be aware that I was there. One day while playing football on the playground in my primary school, the ball was kicked by someone. It left the playground and rolled down the grass bank alongside the playground.

Down the bank, two children got hold of the ball and started to throw it between them. Another child and I went down to get it back. When we got near the children, the other boy went closer to get the ball. He got between them, and they started throwing the ball over his head to each other. I got close to them but was stood off to the side - almost like myself and the two children were in a triangle. One of the children said 'here', and threw the ball to me. I caught the ball, turned around, and started walking back to the playground.

At that point it didn't cross my mind that they were including me in their 'game' of throwing the ball over the head of the other child, and that they didn't actually want us to have the ball back. I just thought it was thrown to me to take back to the playground. I walked towards the playground and back up the grass bank, when one of the children jumped on me angrily. I had no idea why they were angry and why they jumped on me. Then, one of the children playing football shouted at that child and jumped on him, then the other child jumped on to that child, and another child who was playing football jumped on them, and then it seemed nearly all the boys in the playground got involved.

I calmly crawled out from under the pile of children, walked across the playground, still holding the ball, and told a teacher that a fight seemed to have started down the grass bank. I didn't think any more of it. Some teachers dealt with the situation, and break time ended.

The next morning in assembly, the Head Teacher spoke about the fight that happened in the playground the day before. He said he wanted the children who started it to stand up. About six children stood up. He then said the person who was the main cause of the fight hadn't stood up, and he wanted him to stand up as well. I looked around wondering who it was. As far as I could see, the children that had taken the ball had both stood up - as had the children that attacked those two, when one of them had jumped on me.

After what seemed like a long pause, the Head singled me out and told me to stand up, saying I was the cause of the fight. This confused me; all I'd done was go and get the ball and walk back up to the playground with the ball, and then, when a fight broke out, I'd gone and got a teacher to deal with the fight. I remember being annoyed for ages about being blamed for something I felt I hadn't done.

Every year, as a young child, our family went on holiday to local holiday camps. One year while on holiday at a local camp, my brother and I were signed up to learn and play football with West Ham football players. My brother appeared to love it, and played well. I, on the other hand, didn't. I didn't want to play football. I didn't care that it was apparently professional football players teaching us - despite being told that I should care and that it was a great opportunity. My stepdad got very angry about me refusing to play football and join in the football lessons he had paid for. He was saying how he had paid for us to do it, and we should be grateful and keen to do it - it is what boys do and what boys like. My view was that I didn't ask him to pay for me to play football. I didn't say I wanted to play football, so why would I play football? It wasn't my problem he had spent his money on it - to me, that didn't change anything. Telling me he spent money on it, or that I should take part, wasn't going to change anything. I still wasn't going to play.

What I wanted to do on holiday was to go to the beach, and to play on my own, or go swimming in a pool on my own. I used to dislike having to spend enforced time with my brothers and family, so the last thing I would want to do was to spend enforced time in the company of football players and groups of other highly active and chaotic children. I have always preferred peace and calm

over chaos and sensory overload.

The first primary school I attended was in Aldingbourne, West Sussex. I was there until I was seven. The family then moved from Westergate to Warningcamp, a small town a few miles away, on the outskirts of Arundel. There, I went to a primary school in Arundel, before attending secondary school in Littlehampton.

While I was at primary school in Aldingbourne, I began reading books. I remember lessons where teachers would read stories like *The BFG* and *Stig of the Dump*, and we would sit on the floor and listen to the stories being read. I used to listen to these stories being read and think that they didn't sound like the stories we had available to us to read. I didn't really understand why I had to read these books. I read them, but they didn't really interest me. They were so small and easy to read that by the time I left the primary school, I had read every book available to me. My reading age had been measured at the end of my final term in the school when I was seven; I was identified as having a reading age of at least nine and a half.

I didn't really enjoy reading the fiction books I was made to read. My favourite fiction books were those where each chapter ends with different options and you have to pick an outcome for the chapter and read from the page number for the chosen outcome. For books like that, I used to like trying to work out which option was likely to have the most beneficial outcome, and why. The books were always mystery books, so I used to try to look through the chapters to notice any clues - either in the writing or in the images - that would give me more knowledge about which option I should select.

I don't recall seeing any non-fiction books until I was eight years old. Prior to that age, the only books I was aware of were very thin and uninteresting children's books. It was shortly after starting my second primary school that I became aware of other books and genres.

Not long after starting in the school, the Head Teacher at the time was clearing out old books. I knew my grandparents had old books, but I had never looked at them; we had some old books at home, too, but I hadn't looked at those either. But in school we were told that we could look through the books and see if there were any we would like to keep. Obviously, I, like any other child, wasn't going to want to miss out, so I took a look at the books.

I still own almost all of the books I picked up on that day. One or two have gone missing over the years, but may turn up one day. The first thing I noticed about the books was the age of some of them. Some dated back to the 1800s, which I found exciting - to be able to hold and read something from that long ago. To me as an eight-year-old, these books that were over 100 years old were fascinating. They were older than any people I knew. I was able to hold something that people had held and read a century earlier. I still love old books, and for some reason, my definition of an old book is still one that is dated 1899 or earlier - even though I am thirty years older now than I was as an eight-year-old. I don't think of books from the 1900s as old, even though, now, a book from 1929 would be as old to me now as a book from 1899 was to me then.

The second thing I noticed about all these old books - and it still wasn't the content of the books - was their smell. I loved the smell. There was, and still is, something calming about the smell of an old book. Third was the feel. They didn't feel like the school books I was used to handling, with their glossy pages. The feel of things is very important to me. I don't mind the feel of a new glossy book, and don't mind the smell of new glossy books - but nothing compares to the feel or the smell of old books.

That day in school, I picked up many books about geography, physics, poetry - and even some

novels, like 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, and Gulliver's Travels. During my primary school years, I was bought many non-fiction books. At my second primary school I had stopped reading fiction books altogether, because I couldn't see the point in them when nothing they taught was real. The last fiction book I read, other than Z for Zachariah and Macbeth in secondary school (which we were made to read as part of our English lessons), was a hardback collection of Secret Seven stories which mum gave me one day when I was home ill from school, aged eight.

At about the same age, I found a book that had a profound influence on me - The Magic of Thinking Big. This was a book I found lying around the house one day, and as a small child who loved magic, seeing a book with 'Big' and 'Magic' both written in the title was enough to make me want to know what it was about. The book taught me that you can achieve almost anything; you just have to plan and put in effort.

I learnt an incredible amount between the age of eight and ten - it has helped me immensely. The next significant learning wasn't until I was 13, when I discovered hypnosis. As well as discovering The Magic of Thinking Big, I also lived in an environment that allowed me to spend a lot of time in the woods - or at least outside, with nature. I used to spend much of my time sitting in trees. I found life at home often stressful and noisy, and I wanted to escape, so I would go into the woods. I would find a tree, climb up high, and sit on a branch with my eyes closed, just listening.

In the tree I would focus my attention on the sounds of birds. I would try to locate where they were by focusing on individual sounds. I would focus on the sounds of the rustling leaves and try to notice each individual one, trying to break the sound down and see how it was formed. As an eight-year-old, I had never heard of meditation, but I had discovered meditation for myself. Sitting in a tree doing this helped me to feel calm; it helped to shut out the 'noise'. I think I was lucky having the opportunity to grow up in the countryside rather than in a town during this period of my life. Warningcamp became a place I would call home as a child - and still think of as home now.

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3-book boxed set helping the reader understand autism spectrum disorder. This is the essential guide for parents, partners, friends and professionals in understanding those with Asperger's Syndrome (autism spectrum disorder) and knowing how you can help them thrive. This boxed set consists of three books by autistic YouTuber, hypnotherapy and family therapy trainer Dan Jones: 'Look Into My Eyes: Asperger's, Hypnosis and Me', 'Asperger's Syndrome: Tips & Strategies' and 'An Autistic Perspective: Death, Dying and Loss'

Look Into My Eyes: Asperger's, Hypnosis and Me is an autobiography of Dan Jones experiences growing up and living with autism spectrum disorder, giving open and honest insight into what it is like to live with autism. This book includes a chapter written by Dan's wife Abbie Jones, about what it is like to be in a relationship with someone with autism spectrum disorder. Look Into My Eyes is more than just an autobiography because Dan has over 20 years experience working with those on the autistic spectrum and their families, teachers and employers so he shares his professional knowledge throughout the book as well as his personal experiences. Look Into My Eyes is laid out chronologically so that the reader can see what life is like at different ages as someone with autism spectrum disorder, what challenges are faced and what can help the autistic person cope and navigate life as well as exploring strengths those on the autistic spectrum have and how these can be developed.

Asperger's Syndrome: Tips & Strategies is a collection of tips and strategies based on Dan Jones experiences as someone who has high functioning autism spectrum disorder and over 20+ years of experience working with those on the autistic spectrum, their families, teachers and employers. This book is for parents/carers, teachers, employers, friends and work colleagues and for those on the autistic spectrum of all ages. Most books of tips and strategies for parents of autistic children, or for those with autism, or their friends, work colleagues and employers are written by professionals who work with people on the autistic spectrum but those professionals don't usually have autism spectrum disorder themselves. This book is unique because Dan not only has over 20 years of experience working with those on the autistic spectrum, their families, employers, teachers and others involved in their lives, but he also has high-functioning autism spectrum disorder (what used to be diagnosed as Asperger's Syndrome) so he has personal knowledge and experience of what works and what doesn't.

An Autistic Perspective: Death, Dying and Loss Growing up Dan noticed that he thought and responded to death, dying and loss differently to others. Following the recent death of his father and granddad he decided he wanted to share how having autism spectrum disorder impacts on the experience of death, dying and loss. There are positives and negatives and many people make incorrect judgements about what they think is going on in the mind of someone with autism about whether they care or not, so he wanted to share what is really going on (and that those with autism do care and have emotions like everyone else - often very intensely) and share some tips based on an autistic way of thinking that can be of benefit to neuro-typical people. This book covers more than just death and dying, it covers a broad range of losses that occur like transitioning from primary school to secondary school, or from school to work, from home-life to independent living, all of which involve loss of one way of life and the associated routines and familiarity. It covers areas like relationship breakups and shares about the triad of impairments and different ways those with autism spectrum disorder respond to things and what can be done to help the autistic person and what the autistic person can do to help themselves.

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