

PARENTING AUTISM & ASPERGERS NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 2
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Seasons greeting to you and welcome to the second edition of

"The Parenting Autism & Aspergers Newsletter"

Inside this edition you will find:

1. Hot Topic of Discussion – The Canadian Government's scary view on autism.
2. In the News – Surfing for autism.
3. Parenting Tips - How to survive a trip to the local store.
4. Famous Aspies - Bram Cohen; computer programmer extraordinaire...
5. And Now for Something Completely Different. .
.. a wacky Yuletide tale.

I hope you enjoy this edition.....

Best Wishes

John Hillage

The Canadian government's scary view on autism:

Whilst surfing the net this week I came across some worrying news about the government in Canada's stance on autism.

This was posted on the autism crisis blogspot which bills itself as "the science and ethics of autism advocacy" and appears an excellent blog devoted political issues about autism.

The Canadian government have recently updated the Health Canada website with the clear view from government that autism is a disease that needs curing.

The website goes on to say that the government's view is that "More research is needed to better understand the incidence, causes, effective early screening tools, optimal treatments, and hopefully one day, prevention."

In a sense this all sounds fairly sensible until you look at the end of the sentence closely.

The very clear view is that they want to prevent autism from Canada in the future.

The logical conclusion from this is that the Canadian government views autism as a disease that they want rid of; permanently.

And they envision a future in Canada without any autistic children.

For me this seems to echo way too closely the views of a certain Austrian-born dictator in Nazi Germany.

Hitler slaughtered millions of people with an array of disabilities with the aim of creating a race of people with no so-called "faults".

Is there where the Canadian government really wants to go?

Such a view belittles and insults the hundreds of thousands of people diagnosed with autism and their families too.

Despite the challenges that having an autistic child can bring I doubt that there are many parents out there who truly believe they would be better off without their child.

Surely the government would be better off spending their money on educating the general public about autism.

A few well placed television adverts and characters with autism sensitively portrayed in dramas and soap operas, would go a huge way to change public perceptions.

So many of the fears and prejudice in society about autism are through sheer ignorance, and education is always the key.

Because in my view autistic kids have as much right to this world as other kids.

Maybe it is time the world started to understand and take more time to see what the autistic child in this world really needs.

Rather than constantly trying to fit autistic kids into "boxes" and expecting them to always try to "fit in".

When does the world at large ever try to "fit in" with autistic kids?

So to the Canadian government my message is simple "think again and think hard....."

If you want to read the full article about this worrying trend visit:

<http://autismcrisis.blogspot.com/2006/11/canadas-eugenic-government.html>

Surfing for autism:

On to a slightly more optimistic note I would like to share some information from an article in the Sunday UK paper that I recently read called "The Observer".

This article told of a young 7 year old boy (Luke) in New York with Fragile X Syndrome.

Fragile X to my knowledge (although someone may shoot me down in flames on this!) is a form of learning disability which whilst not a classic type of autism has a number of very autistic symptoms as part of its diagnosis.

Anyway Luke is generally in a very isolated and silent world and wants nothing more than to be left alone with his TV/VCR to put his Elmo tape in and out of the slot for hours on end.

Much to the dismay of his dad who penned the article and clearly dreams for so much more interaction with Luke.

His dad stumbled across a guy called Izzy Paskowitz on the TV, who runs one day surf camps for autistic children.

The camps are called Surfers Healing - the name is my only real bugbear with the whole thing as I just don't like this whole idea of "healing sick autistic children".

To me autism is just the way a child is, not a sickness...but no matter as I don't let philosophical points get in the way too much of useful approaches.

Izzy himself had an autistic child who had really got into surfing with his dad so much that it had improved his moods, his communication and generally helped to improve his autistic traits.

But as Luke and his dad were in New York they could not get to see Izzy who is in California.

But instead they hooked up with a man named Elliot Zuckerman who is an ex-pro surfer who surfs off the coast near New York City.

And as you can probably guess Luke loved it (it wouldn't be much of a story otherwise!)

First of all he cried for the first 50 yards out to sea, but was soon calm, then chattering and grinning excitedly.

After their first surf Luke's dad thought that would be it (as most of Luke's activities bore him after several minutes and he is on to the next thing).

But Luke immediately shouted "more!", pointed to the sea and the session continued for an hour (completely unheard of to Luke's dad).

At the end of the session Luke is still smiling and repeats "All riiight!" over and over.

But best of all for days following the session Luke seems calmer, happier, more willing for eye contact, hugging and other great stuff with his dad.

Now Luke and his dad do this together and it seems to have helped bring their relationship to a whole new exciting level.

Now I will be honest with you here and say there is no great scientific study of why this works.

And it facts its only anecdotal evidence - so clearly science is not at the base of it at all.

And I am not a big believer in hokey theories of autism cures; unless they tend to make common sense to me.

But the biggest thing I think is that if something workswhy not try it!

That doesn't mean that surfing (if you can even get your child to try it) is going to give him some miracle autism cure.

It may do nothing as it may not be his thing, but it could really help him to break out a little.

Just in the same way that horse riding is great for some children in helping to bring them a little out of themselves.

So it does not have to be surfing but just think about trying something "outside of the box" and you never know what can happen.

This story really just illustrates the changes that can happen for autistic children through experiencing a variety of activities.

If you want to know more and get contact details for Surfers Healing I would suggest that you read the whole story at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/medicine/story/0,,1962523,00.html>

Parenting Tip - Helping your child in the store

This month's parenting tip was very grateful received from Erin Bailey to help start this section off.

Erin thinks that parents exchanging tips like these will be invaluable.

I agree 100% and hope that some of you can help out by sending in your suggestions and tips for next time.

Well thank again for this great tip Erin and here we go.....

"I've always had trouble in stores keeping my son from touching EVERY single thing he comes in contact with.

He has never broken anything, but has made several messes by knocking things off shelves.

It would always be embarrassing and no matter how many times I scolded him he would always turn right back around and touch this or that.

Finally I found a way to keep his hands busy.

I have my son carry a little stress ball with him when ever we go into a store.

That seems to cut down on all those embarrassing mishaps of him knocking things on the floor.

It works so well that he also has one at school to help him keep his hands to himself and off of other students."

Bram Cohen - Computer programmer extraordinaire....

Bram Cohen is somewhat of a legend in the computer world.

Although obviously less well heard of in the world at large; as the computer world tends not to feature greatly in the world's popular media.

He is a graduate of New York University and has a diagnosis of Aspergers.

In an interview with Wrongplanet.net (an Aspergers website) he said "I hated school, and dropped out of college. I got picked on a lot in school, and had a lot of trouble making friends."

Which is an all too common schooling experience for children diagnosed with Aspergers.

Following such negative experiences at school he went on to university and taught himself computer programming skills.

He began work on a program called Bit Torrent in 2001 which is basically a bit of software that computer users can use to share files such as music and video across the internet.

Bit Torrent has taken the internet by storm and over 20 million people worldwide have downloaded this free software.

The media giant Warner Brothers plans to use Bit Torrent to distribute future films and TV shows.

So this is some pretty powerful stuff from Bram.

But Bram does struggle as many other aspies at times in the world.

On social skills he says "There's no single thing which causes problems, it's a general missing skill set of being able to read faces, and being able to express thoughts on one's own face properly (there are other social cues, of course, but in my case I learned starting with the face, and everything else was easy from there)."

But Bram is married and a highly respected figure in the computer science field.

So is a great inspirational figure in the world of Aspergers and Autism.

To read and interview with Bram on Wrongplanet.net visit:

<http://www.wrongplanet.net/modules.php?name=Writing&pa=showpage&pid=98>

And Now for Something Completely Different . . .

Christmas has never looked better for one "Christmas Goat" this year.

Every year for the last 40 years the Swedish city of Gasle have had a giant goat made from straw to celebrate Christmas.

This is an ancient tradition from before Santa Claus (and even Wal Mart or Ikea!); where the goat was the bearer of Christmas gifts.

However our hapless Camel (I will call him Sid as I don't know his real name) has been the victim of all kinds of vandalism in the past.

Poor Sid has been torched, vandalized, chopped off at the legs and even run over by a car!

Clearly there is not enough good evening TV on in Sweden!

But on a more serious note this year Sid is now safer than ever.

This year he has been doused in flame-resistant chemicals and according to Anna Ostman (a member of the organising committee) "it is impossible to burn it to the ground this year, although you might be able to singe its paws".

Whilst probably not 100% pleased I am sure that Sid is sleeping a little better (though probably a little hurt at being called "it"!)

According to Freddy Klassmo (representative of the company with the chemicals) "not even napalm can set fire to the goat now".

Which I am sure is just the kind of comment to instill a feeling of peace and calm at Christmas for all living in Gasle!

However there is something that all of you readers out there can do to help Sid out even more.

You can keep a diligent and watchful eye on him from the comfort of your own home by following him on the local 24 hour web cam at:

http://www.merjuligavle.se/merjuligavle/mjig_Bocken.aspx?id=52

Go check it out and do your bit for Sid this Christmas.....!!

Well that's all for this edition and I hope you enjoyed it.

I want to sincerely offer you and your loved ones an enjoyable festive period and a prosperous new year.

Please look out in your in-box for the next newsletter in mid-January time.

And as ever.....please send in any inspirational stories that you know of, any questions that you would like our team of experts to answer, any topics that you wish to be discussed and news stories that you want to share.

We will publish as many as we can.

Until next month.....

Seasonal Wishes

John Hillage

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P.S. Please feel free to forward this newsletter to your friends.

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The write of the material present in the "The Parenting Autism & Aspergers Newsletter" believes that a multi-disciplinary approach to parenting aspergers

children is of extreme importance. This means combining the approaches of a wide variety of disciplines involved with aspergers children and their parents such as social workers, nurses, teachers, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, speech therapists. Also it involves using the knowledge and information of parents them selves. The author recognizes that within scientific, educational, social and medical fields there are widely divergent viewpoints and opinions. This material is written for the express purpose of sharing educational information gathered from the experiences of the author and other people in the areas mentioned above. None of the information contained in this email is intended to diagnose, prevent, treat, or cure aspergers, nor is it intended to prescribe any of the techniques, materials or concepts presented as a form of treatment for aspergers. Before beginning any practice relating to aspergers it is highly recommended that you first obtain the consent and advice of a qualified health, education or social care professional. Should you choose to make use of the information contained herein without first consulting a health, education or social care professional, you are prescribing for yourself, which is your inalienable right. However, the author assumes no responsibility for the choices you make after your review of the information contained herein and your consultation with a qualified health, education or social care professional. None of the statements in this article or in the book have been evaluated by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA), or the American Medical Association (AMA). This material is not warranted for any particular or general purpose whatsoever. Viewers of this material assume any and all risks for any use of this material. This material may not be reproduced in any way.
