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# INTRODUCTION



**T**his book began as a series of letters I wrote to my husband, Andy, during the summer of 2008. In March of that year, I had heard of Asperger Syndrome for the first time, and, realizing immediately that the characteristics fit my husband of twenty years, I had spent the intervening months reading anything about Asperger's that I could get my hands on. I was reeling from the amount of information I was suddenly trying to integrate, not to mention the emotions that accompanied this paradigm shift in my understanding of my husband.

I am a teacher, and when school ended that June and my schedule freed up, my brain was fully available for this task. Because I think better in writing, I decided to start every morning by composing a letter to Andy about something new I had learned and what that information had made me realize about him. This exercise had two purposes: one, it allowed me to process what I was learning; and two, it allowed me to "teach" Andy about Asperger Syndrome (AS). After his initial review of the information in the spring and his acknowledgment that

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yes, it did seem to fit him perfectly, he had returned to other things, namely, farming and fishing. Meanwhile, I was still processing new information and dealing with the tectonic shift that the “diagnosis” was going to make in our lives – well, at least in my life.

The process went like this: I would awaken around 5 AM – already thinking about some newly named characteristic like “the special interest” – and start typing away at my computer. Because I am a readery-writery kind of person, this factoid would coalesce with a bunch of other things I had read or heard, from Steve Martin songs to *The Wind in the Willows*. I would hammer out an essay-as-letter, print it out, and hand it to Andy to read over breakfast after he was done with his morning chores. He would read it, almost always chuckle or laugh out loud at what I had written, grin and give me a kiss, and then go on about his day.

That fall, I also started chatting on a blog posted by one of my favorite writers. I live in very rural Central New York and have found very few women I can truly relate to. None of the other farm wives are voracious readers, and none of the other voracious readers in the area are farm wives. I am an oddball here in Chenango County! So I had become used to being a bit of hermit with no real close friends, just trying to farm, teach, raise my kids, and find friends in novels. However, on this blog I had stumbled upon, I suddenly found my tribe. Scattered from sea to shining sea and from near Canada to near Mexico, here was this group of people who read like me, wrote like me, thought like me ... and who liked me! I started to feel as if my peculiar thoughts were not only understood but cherished by other people.

Emboldened by this sudden and unexpected group of friends, I launched a blog of my own where I shared this odd journey of Asperg-

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er's discovery I was on. And voila! Another tribe of women popped up, this time from across the world. Women from the United States and from England and Australia chimed in to say that they too were married to a man with Asperger Syndrome, and that they thoroughly agreed with what I was saying. They appreciated my efforts to embrace the idiosyncrasies and to write about the day-to-day challenges they present. Marriage to someone with AS creates an unusual type of life that is hard to discuss with people who have not experienced it.

I started to realize that perhaps I did have a unique outlook on the Asperger's marriage and that maybe I should finally put my writing abilities to some purpose by sharing my thoughts with others. With Andy's permission, I started to seek a publisher and began to revise my letters to him into a series of "conversations" with the people scattered across the planet who might be interested in my ramblings. I also realized that many of the challenges associated with marriage to a man with Asperger Syndrome are not much different than the challenges associated with marriage in general, and that perhaps my thoughts about my specific relationship might bring a chuckle, a realization, or a new appreciation to people in any kind of marriage.

In July of 2009, the ever-gracious John Elder Robison, author of *Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's* and a committed advocate for AS, agreed to meet me for lunch while I was visiting friends in Central Massachusetts. He had read one of my blog entries (because I had e-mailed him about it) and enjoyed it, and when I sought his advice about possibly getting a book of such stories published, he recommended AAPC Publishing, whom I contacted that fall. The day I received AAPC's letter and contract in the mail, my scream of joy must

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have been heard throughout the state. My life-long dream of having a book published, delayed for twenty years after college, was finally going to come true.

Over the year that this book has been headed toward print, the American Psychiatric Association has decided that Asperger Syndrome, previously listed as a distinct condition in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*<sup>1</sup> (DSM-IV), will be subsumed under the broader category of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the fifth edition, expected to be released in 2013.

Like many others touched by Asperger's, I am of two minds about this. If I had not heard about Asperger Syndrome as a distinct condition, I would most likely *not* have identified Andy as a person with an autism spectrum disorder. On the other hand, knowing that AS is a condition on the autism spectrum allows the information about non-Asperger's autism to have relevance even for the higher-functioning folks. For example, the other night we watched *Rainman*,<sup>2</sup> a 1988 movie about a young man, played by Tom Cruise, whose brother, Raymond, played by Dustin Hoffmann, has autism. Andy said he suddenly felt a bizarre but enlightening solidarity with Raymond that he had not felt when he originally saw the movie, to the point that he has now jokingly added to his conversation sprinklers "Uh-oh!" and "I'm a very good driver." Similarly, when I now read anything by Temple Grandin<sup>3</sup> or when I saw the recent movie about her, I had much more empathy for Andy, realizing he was not all that far away on the spectrum. Furthermore, classifying Asperger's as ASD will hopefully make more services available for children who are identified as having AS.

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Now that I am fully immersed in the world of autism and Asperger's, I so appreciate the work AAPC does in bringing information, hope, ideas, and solutions to all the families out there who face the challenges and embrace the joys that autism brings. For all those readers whose daily lives are touched by Asperger's and for those who want to understand, may my thoughts and ruminations bring some understanding and maybe even a smile. And for all those readers not directly touched by autism, may you see that marriage to an Aspergian is really just one more example of how life on this wild and wonderful planet gives us all opportunities to accept and embrace the diversity of the human experience.

Summer 2010



- <sup>1</sup> American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: Author.
- <sup>2</sup> *Rainman*. (1988). Los Angeles, CA: MGM.
- <sup>3</sup> More on Temple Grandin to follow. She is a brilliant animal scientist who has high-functioning autism, and who speaks and writes frequently on both animal behavior and autism.