

My name is _____ and I am Autistic. I have been this way all my life and I will be for the rest of it. It's not something I choose to be and it's nothing something I believe has anywhere near the recognition, understanding that it's claimed by some. I think we've been forgotten, walked over, ignored and left out. The reason is the eternal curse that we must express our discomfort, our frustration, our isolation in the language of the people who inflict it on us. We must prove to our oppressors that we are in fact, oppressed. We must explain to those with the whip that it's use is painful when the whip is used only to be told we deserve it.

In my life I've experienced a constant feeling of isolation. Especially during my time in the public education system. To this day I can still draw mental maps of my primary and secondary school. I can tell you the blind points, the lines of sight, where to walk to not get attacked. I can tell you of repeatedly telling the truth to the teachers, only for the bullying to continue. I could tell you of the time I was attacked by eight in total, only for them to be back at school the next day. I could tell you of the fact I couldn't trust my bag to be back where it was when I left it or the objects in it. I experienced a Red Back Spider bite and the accompanying eleven hours of my life were the worst experience I've had.

The fact that a precious few teachers allowed me to be a part of the Business IT support system allowed me a place to find refuge during lunches. My music scholarship also separated me from my supposed peers. These became the only places I felt safe while in school. Even then they were not entirely safe, I can strongly remember the disbelief of the music teacher at me being harassed by people a part of the program.

Despite all of the other teachers I had, only four stand out and I can still name. There's two more that stand out, feeling to be on my side. No-one else felt to be on my side. Even worse, on the other side of ambivalent. They didn't believe the hostility directed at me, even worse approved of it. I heard it discussed that I had come out as gay, despite no such thing happening.

I even had to defend myself against charges of racism when I was attacked by an Aboriginal student when I was in high school. I was only fifteen at the time and I recall no support, no assistance. The only person to speak in my defence I saw was the Aboriginal Affairs Officer, volunteer at the school.

Despite shifting grades over the years, falling in and out of love with subjects no-one seemed to notice or care. Yet, there were times where I was best at the school. That inconsistency should have triggered some discussions, some awareness of how I was not cast from the same mould, thought the same or learned the same. Somehow I wrote an essay on a subject I had only seen in a documentary and still scored better than half that class.

Later in life, I experienced work place abuse and just as before the sense of isolation prevailed. Despite being taken to a place where I was suicidal, there was no reaction from that company. Only one year later would I discover that not even WorkSafe could not even take action. In 2015 I discovered that despite a clearly false report made to the police, I would again find no assistance, no protection. That I could come under attack and the attack be so approved, by the police.

I am thankful the reporting officers saw through it; saw the place I was in at the time and let me be.

Now in later life, having been diagnosed as Autistic on my own, at my own cost, I looked for programs to try and help me. Just as before due to my Autism Spectrum Level One/with Support, I find I am defined too functional for many programs. Not just that, the skills they teach are the skills I mastered when I was a teenager. I can cook for myself, up to six comfortably. I can take care of a home, budget and more. Yet, despite the days where I struggle, overwhelmed by the world, I do not count. I can not count, I'm seen and defined as being not what I am. Nor it possible that I am anything but the standard, cis-norm.

If there is to be a national strategy for those with Autism, it must not just provide support for all of us. Not just those with profound difficulties in the areas I suffer no challenges in. It must also provide channels, programs for people like me. Programs that just don't focus on our grades but on providing frameworks, foundations for them in their full life. Of giving them the tools they need to learn how they need to learn, the time to learn that. They need to have opportunities to succeed in their own way. A chance to find and hone their interests, not just the interests they're told are appropriate, proper.

It is not the only thing that must be changed. There needs to be far more awareness of Autism and what it means. When speaking on inclusion, diversity, I have been openly mocked. Told I do not count for my appearance. I have been told that me and mine must wait our turn for equality, equity. That I have no place in this conversation as it's not about inclusion for all, it's only for those who group have suffered great injustice.

Yet, autistic people are being left in psych wards, drugged up because there seems to be no other option. Not so long ago, me and mine would be left to suffer our entire lives in silence, the eternal and constant drive to fit in forcing us to be nothing close to who we are. Not so long ago, me and mine were lobotomised. Their personality, the very essence of who they were taken away from them for no reason other than their brain is wired differently than most.

Doesn't that count as suffering? Inequality? A denial of fundamental human dignity? Doesn't it count that the supposed protections given to others of a divergent nature do not apply to me and mine on a few levels? That a person can be fined and punished for having an opinion against the trans, the physically disabled in employment and for it to stand against the autistic among us, for no reason other we speak a little different, doesn't that demand an answer? Doesn't that demand restitution for every single autistic person who was denied a job they were capable of?

If the full time employment rates in England are as low as 19% and the employment rate here in Australia is only 31% there must be something done. Yet, what is supposed to help ranges from useless to offensive. They fail even the most basic tests of dignity and support. They're there to tick boxes, to rake in money for providing a service that truly does nothing.

To truly change the nature of the world for autistics, to allow them to not need to mask. To have to have an inner personality and outer personality. One they only share with their absolutely closest friends. Even have to hide from their family, there needs to be an admission there is a problem. Not just there is a problem, the true scope of it. It is systemic, it is vast and it something that me and mine will face our entirely lives. Some of us have truly long and detailed memories. Memories full of isolation and exhaustion at being effectively an isolated alien among a species not our own. Some of us might not have those memories yet we are just as exhausted, isolated and alone.

If things do change, I sincerely hope that there's never another me. A person who has fallen in love, only for it to never go anywhere because it's expressed the right way according to everyone else. I have fallen in lust, yet because it's not expressed the right way, it is assumed to not exist. That it can't exist. That I can't be successful, can't speak my own mind, can't do anything except the most menial jobs. Or perhaps the opposite, being autistic I must understand computer code, computers on a level no-one else does. That we the autistic, the autistic person, can speak on their own merits on our own talents, abilities. On their own experience and their own nature in their own words.

A place where autistics like me keep our interests and not lose them for the tacit attitude of just give it up, it's not what we expect. The reason I all but gave up playing the clarinet and alto sax after high school. I want to see a place, time where we can speak of our experiences, freely. Of the basic dignity assigned to the neurotypical being given to the neurodiverse.

Only then will there be no chance of another me appearing, bearing the scars I do, the instincts I do and do me harm to this day.