

I am a fish swimming with a large school of fish. All the fish look identical, rather a dull brown sludge colour, all swimming with the same style and stroke, all except for me. For some reason I am gold, shiny and slightly thin. I don't swim with the same finesse as the other fish, I seem to be rather lopsided and quite often find myself going against the flow of the river, I don't quite know how this happens, I try so hard to swim the same way but sometimes there seems to be a fierce pounding roar of water and a white swirling foam that sends me spiraling in the other direction, I look around myself expecting to see the other fish struggling against this change in conditions but find that it is only me that is cascading, plunging and churning in the torrents of water, the other fish are still swimming calmly with the same trusted stroke in fact the water that surrounds them is calm, serene and crystal clear with sun beams dancing and sparkling within it. Sometimes I am in that clear, warm, soft water enjoying my swim with the other fish, feeling like I belong. Other times I am in polluted, dark, eerie water that scares me.

This is how I used to feel on a daily basis. I struggled to understand why this continually happened to me then one day I was told I have Aspergers and that my brain works slightly differently to most other people. I was given a couple of books to read about Aspergers and suddenly everything became clear. I understand why I often swim in the wrong direction!

This diagnosis changed my life. I think people really have no idea quite how isolating, strange and confusing life can be for me.

Take a normal daily activity such as eating. Certain foods for me are utter torture. The texture of pasta to me is unbearable. It feels like slimy, squelchy worms that make me retch and my stomach churn. The feeling of revulsion sweeps over me and firmly grips me. I get this feeling with lots of different foods. People get cross and tell me to just eat it but I really, really can't.

Another problem for me is shopping centres. People everywhere, pushing, jostling, voices echoing and bouncing from every surface, florescent lights buzzing and flickering, loud shop music pulsating through my ears. The pain of this becomes overwhelming, a poison seeping through my veins and gripping me.

During a school day I feel more like the little gold fish than anywhere else in my life. On very bad days I even swap my sometimes torrid river

for the confines of a fish bowl with nowhere to escape to. Hundreds of eyes staring in at me waiting to see which direction I'm going to swim in. If events don't progress the way I expect them to or in my mind the way they should I become dizzy with confusion, I start to swim in a funny manner wishing I could swim far away but the sides of the bowl keep me in the agony of the situation.

My Aspergers will never go away and I will never be cured but at least the diagnosis has helped me to understand why I am that different fish.