

A Day In The Life ... as told to Crystal Tapcredi

What is a regular day like for a child with autism? While each child is different, this is one boy's story ...

My name is Michael, and I live with autism. I am 9 years old, so even though I've been told about my diagnosis, I'm not always sure what it means.

It's 7 AM. I burst into my mom's room for a few moments of snuggling; just as suddenly, I dart off. In my mind, it's now imperative that I solve some math problem before breakfast. Sitting quietly, I suddenly begin to race up and down the hallway; I really don't want to interrupt my playtime, but I simply can't help myself. My brain and nervous system are built differently than the typical child's; they make me do and say things that other people sometimes find hard to understand. My senses are sensitive, and my communication with other people, difficult.

8:30 AM: On the school yard, before the bell rings, at recess and at lunch time, I run around the yard, mostly by myself.

It's not that I want to be alone, but I don't know how to approach other children to play; when they approach me, I don't understand the clues they give about what they're feeling and what they'd like to do.

My different brain has not absorbed the little rules that make other peoples' lives run smoothly. They are puzzled by the things I do and say, and think that I must not want to play with them; after a while, they go away.

2:00 PM: During class time, I am

often distracted from the teacher's lessons by the loud insistence of my senses: the buzz of the lights; the bouquet of the soap on my skin; the taste of my pencil. It may be that my t-shirt itches. Or I may notice an impossibly interesting speck of dirt on the floor.

I find these sensations so overwhelming that I simply must investigate them. This is often disruptive of the other children; fortunately, I have an adult friend, my EA, who helps me with my impulses, and to stay safe.

If I do take interest in my studies, I may be distracted by something on the page – a word or number – and become obsessed with it.

3:15 PM: I am especially fond of swimming and climbing, so I often do these things after school. It would be nice to have a friend nearby to do them with me. Although I may not always show it, I do love to have special people nearby.

8:00 PM: At bedtime, I take a long time to settle down, as all of my senses keep sending me messages, even though I don't want them to. My day has been exhausting, but with the help and love of my family, friends and teachers, I will do it all over again tomorrow.

While my brain and nervous system are built differently than the typical child's, my heart is built the same. So, if you see me or someone else doing the things we do to cope with our autism, please remember to be a friend.



A HIGHER EDUCATION *... continued from page 3*

rewarding work. I'm not making as much as some of my friends [who are] making a car part in a factory, but I'm getting something that's worth more than that."

In the same vein, he says that teaching is a "rewarding, interesting" career choice, with time during the summer for other pursuits, like drawing. He writes and draws comics, and in the past, had his own web comic.

Nicholas is a practitioner of two martial arts: *Shouto-Kahn*, a street-fighting form of karate; and *Aikido*, a defensive art that turns the opponent's own energy against them. Soon he will explore *Ken-do*, the art of Japanese sword-fighting.

His musical side is expressed through the *didgeridoo*, a wind instrument indigenous to Australia. It is, he says, "a hollow, wooden stick with beeswax on the end; when you blow into it, it makes a sound with very heavy overtones."

Currently completing his undergraduate degree in zoology, he looks forward to attending teacher's college in Ontario, and then teaching elsewhere in Canada, or perhaps, Asia.

A thoughtful education in the arts, science and athletics: The groundwork for a rewarding life – and great preparation for bringing fun to the lives of our kids. ♥

