



# SMW BLOG

## Archive for the 'books' Category

| [SMW Blog Home](#) |

### [Seashells, Underdogs, and Asperger's](#)

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Just as children are taught to marvel that no two snowflakes are alike, when you live on and respect a coastline, you teach the same about seashells. This is the time of year down here when such lessons begin, lessons about our perceptions of the difference between broken and artfully reshaped.

Right or wrong, underdogs have always been my passion. My heart was bleeding before I could even muster a coherent summary of the chaos I watched in the 60's during my family's daily hour of reverent silence, the Nightly News.

First, I felt for the widows and children of slain political leaders. Next, those poor unloved hippies who got beat up in the streets caught my eye. It wasn't long before I considered myself a part of the counter-culture and, from there, my lifelong pursuit of standing up for creatures great and small was sculpted.

In 1975, I read a book that tugged my heart toward a more specific group of people. *Dibs: In Search of Self*, by play therapy pioneer Virginia Axline, revealed not only the plight of an individual boy but also the fact that perception counts for nearly everything in our experience of this deal we call "life." Written in the mid-60's, *Dibs* recounts the challenges of a real 5-year-old whose behavior could definitely land him somewhere on the spectrum that we call "autistic," and very likely nearest the arena of **Asperger's Syndrome**.

Learning about these shining examples of neuro-atypicality honed my own focus, though not dead-on (I

wound up preferring community-based social work over psychological intervention, but always with children in need.)

People with AS often go through life undiagnosed, successful in most areas of their life but constantly struggling with relationships of all types. I've long been grateful for my own innate ability to read people well; but folks on the autism spectrum are tough reads. People with AS can be especially challenging to communicate with because you usually don't know upfront with what you're contending.

People with AS often find themselves the subject of whispers and misunderstanding. "He's so rude!" "She acts like she doesn't care about anyone's feelings!"

I've had the distinct pleasure of knowing many people with Asperger's Syndrome. The chances are good that any reader of this blog post or [my latest feature](#) also know folks with AS, whether you're aware of it or not. That's what's so great about Michael John Carley's book, *Asperger's from the Inside Out* — though he's written it as a how-to-live-with-it for others with AS, it also comes at a time when many of us are starting to grasp what a few stalwart researchers have been positing for awhile now: the "autism spectrum" as we understand it is likely the tip of an iceberg that more fully represents the human reality of "normal."

I truly enjoyed talking with Carley about his book, his experience with AS, and the organization he heads ([GRASP, the Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Partnership](#).) and about this crest of a wave he's riding.

He is, as are so many with AS, brilliantly verbal, able to weave complex subjects into a sensible pattern if you follow along closely. Fortunately, he has also mastered the art of speaking to those of us who may not have our wires connected in similar fashion or, as he puts it, "don't have as much of the juice" as others. In other words, he's learned to whittle down the complicated stuff for "regular" people like me. Talking with Michael John Carley, even by phone, you can literally feel the exhilaration in his voice about the freedom and release from finally knowing oneself.

There's far more to Carley's cause than just advocating for people with AS, and I think he knows that, even if he's skilled at being appropriately modest. Fortunately for us, his fine-tuned experience and ability at communicating is revealing the astounding beauty of the brain in a way even we neuro-typicals can clutch. Once this current cascade of information and understanding of AS raises the tide along the sand of our comprehension, we'll all be left with a new paradigm about humans. We'll see there are no underdogs, only preciously valuable facets.



~[Tracy Morris](#), Health Channel editor

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