

Dear [REDACTED]

5 April 5, 2019

It is sad for me that there will be no follow-up from you to this letter. But I will be thinking of you.

I also would like to thank you for being my pen-pal. I am humbled and honored that we shared a bit of our lives. I am particularly honored that you chose to tell me that you were diagnosed with autism at 1.5y, and that learning to speak was slow and hard for you. You have indeed overcome a significant obstacle in your life. I would never have suspected that you have any language problem or delay from your writing. You write well (better, I might complain, than some university students who can't compose correct English sentences). Your obstacle (autism) I suspect is more of a challenge than mine. I have dyslexia (reading disability) and likely some attention disorder; I spell poorly; I read slowly; I fail at music and baseball, but I was a pretty good actor and distance runner in high-school and college; I can program computers, and I can apparently teach anatomy if you listen to some y comments from my students. I hope you find your unique abilities.

I mentioned (anonymously of course) what you had said to one of my colleagues who is an expert in autism. She said "sounds like you have made great progress after some significant challenges." We both say "Way to go! Keep up the good work." And all this is interesting timing because this is Autism Awareness Week.

I think both you and I, [REDACTED], have 'quirky brains'. I hope you find the ways that your brain is 'gifted'.

I love your picture of the flamingo. It got me thinking about flamingos and how crazy I was as a young man. I spent a foreign-study semester in college, studying in India. A friend had heard there were some flamingos in a place where they had never been seen before. So we went to look. We were in a forest where there were tigers. We wore hats, like face masks on backwards, with big eyes against the back of our heads because the locals said this minimizes surprise tiger attacks. Apparently tigers are more likely to attack animals that are moving away, and the eyes in the back of our heads would make the tiger think we were looking at it. I never saw a tiger. We rode on old bullock carts, like in the middle ages, with a cow pulling a small bumpy two-wheeled wagon. Somewhere deep in a drawer I have some slides of the flamingos we saw; I couldn't find the pictures but I published a short report in a scientific journal (and I attach a copy).

I hope your fourteenth birthday was filled with fun, family and friends. I have no memory of my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was in middle school in Connecticut. I was living in a house built in 1680, once owned by Benedict Arnold (a famous traitor in the American Revolutionary War). I recall that I only had one friend then, Walter Lamb, who is now a famous writer. (<http://www.wallylamb.net/>)

So to mirror you last paragraph, I also don't know what else to say. Shortly after you get this letter I will have my birthday. I turn 69 on June 1. I hope that you have a wonderful 14 year-old pen pal when you turn 69. I have had fun writing to you. Thank you for being my pen pal.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

LifesGood – with quirky brains and great pen-pals.