

David at the age of 60
(Right)



My story

Diagnosed by a quiz

One day sat at his brother's house, David Preston from Dorset came across a test in a magazine. Little did he know it would be the test that diagnosed with him Asperger's syndrome at the age of 62. He told **Jasmine Rigby** about about his journey

David had spent the majority of his life trying to discover why he was different from everybody

else. So, when he found out what was wrong by a quiz in a magazine he was relieved. He studied psychology for several years to try and find a cure for himself, but unfortunately it didn't. "All I ever wanted was to make myself more sociable but it just wasn't happening no matter what I did," said David.

He described his life as a "ratchet" after several things fell apart over the years.

"My life was like a ratchet, I was only moving in one motion and for me that was backwards."

According to the National Autistic Society, many people on the autism spectrum have difficulty processing everyday sensory information. This can have a profound effect on a person's life.

"For a very long time I've had daily problems with headaches and sore eyes. People used to question why I was always wearing sunglasses in the winter," he laughed.

Being sensitive to light is something that David had to live with every single day. But that was just one of many problems.

He continued: "I have been under medical attention many of times. The first time I was on anti-depressants was when I was 17 and they have continued ever since. I was constantly wondering what was wrong with me. I mean I knew there was definitely something wrong. I just didn't know what."

After three failing marriages and embarrassing himself in situations, David truly believes he could have had a successful marriage, not only that but he could have gained clarity instead of blaming his upbringing.

"It's bloody lonely! I have reached out to so many people and tried to be a good friend but something always went wrong, just like all my marriages did. All three of my wives left for the same reason."

According to the The National Autistic Society People with Asperger's syndrome often have difficulty 'reading' other people - recognising or understanding others' feelings and intentions - and expressing their own emotions. These were difficulties David often faced.

"I didn't know how to flirt. If I ever

did flirt it resulted in a disaster like the time I got a slap in the face. I said to a lovely looking lady 'ooo I like girls with big bums', so it's not surprising I got a slap around the face is it! I used to come out and say stupid things."

THE DIAGNOSIS

Four years ago David discovered a test when reading a magazine at his brother's house. The test was created by Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Oxford University.

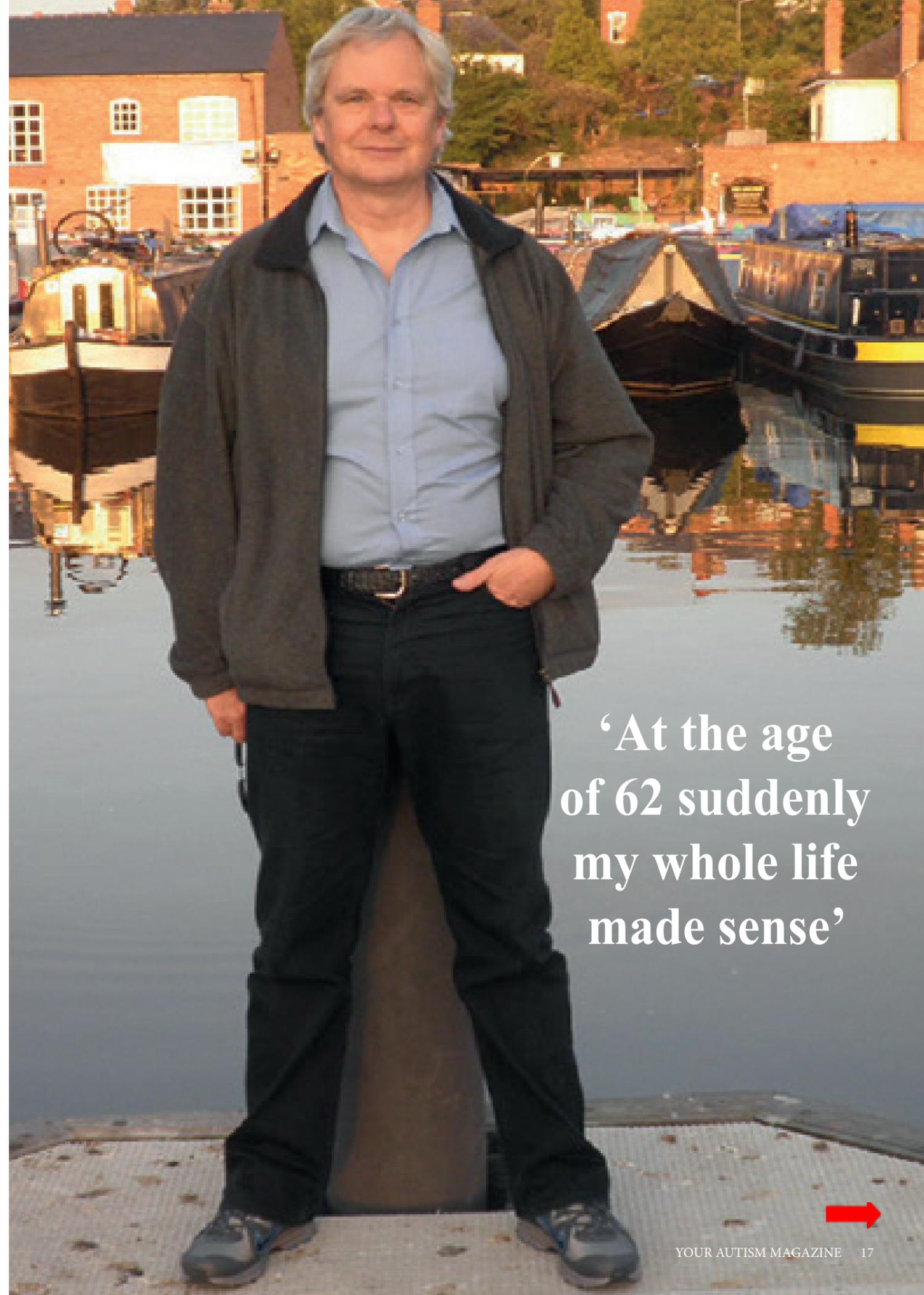
"I did this quiz, and as I was doing it I was imaging all my life situations and how hopeless I had previously been at social events and all the ritualistic crap and OCD symptoms that I had experienced. 45 out of 50 that was my final result."

David explained if the test result was above 30 then it was likely you have Asperger's syndrome. After, receiving a 45, he was determined to get the official diagnosis he had waited all those years for.

"I went to my GP that had seen me crack up every three to four years and said I think I have got Asperger's."

David was referred to an autism clinic in Dorset, a place that had the answers he had needed.

"I had to go back and forth a few times



'At the age of 62 suddenly my whole life made sense'



to undertake several tests which I was absolutely awful at.”

After he had carried out several tests, which included interpreting cartoons that showed different situations, The pensioner was diagnosed.

AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS

“At the age of 62 my whole life finally made sense I no longer had to make excuses for myself. I felt two things really a huge sigh of relief but I couldn’t help feel despair that I had wasted my life trying to study myself, and doing a degree when after all it was a quiz in a magazine that diagnosed me.”

Although, David was relieved that finally he didn’t have to blame himself for his rollercoaster life, he felt a sense of guilt and anger at the late diagnosis.

“After several years of resenting my parents I suddenly felt guilt. I had always blamed them for my social skills and now all of a sudden I was told it couldn’t have been helped.

“I mean it’s just typical isn’t it, all I had ever wanted is to get the bottom of it and find out what was wrong, yet when I found out I wanted more.”

Mental health lecturer at Salford University, Rob Kennedy, said: “People don’t know enough about autism and there needs to be more done on it.”

David admits he was completely wrong about what he thought Asperger’s was.

“I thought I knew what Asperger’s was but I have done a lot of reading since and I was clearly unaware. I always thought those with Asperger’s were like a robot holding no emotion. I couldn’t have been further from the truth.”

The National Autistic Society say that

autism is incurable, but the right support at the right time can make an enormous difference to people’s lives. This is something David strongly agrees with as he is proof.

“Since being diagnosed I have attended courses on mindfulness and also social courses which have helped me improve eye contact and to not be so withdrawn. After never holding down a job and after three marriages ending, I would say early diagnosis definitely needs to happen because I believe my late diagnosis affected my career and relationships. I wouldn’t want anyone to go through that.”

Without the support that David has received in the last four years, he feels his anxiety would have got even worse. “Don’t get me wrong I still get that horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach and aching palpitations, it feels like my heart is a door and someone is continuously knocking to get out.”

There is no cure for Asperger’s syndrome yet there are many approaches that can help.

Rob Kennedy said: “Anxiety is a common trait of autism and the majority of people on the spectrum are likely to experience it. However, receiving the right support can help improve your anxiety and social skills. Support is essential.”

Compared to four years ago, David’s anxiety levels and social skills have improved due to the support that is now in place.

“Of course there are times when I still feel lonely, particularly at social events when everyone is mingling and enjoying themselves.

If I hear someone talking about music I’m in heaven because I’ve got someone to hold onto. That’s what I have learned I now socialise with those who share a similar interest.”

It’s never too late. Although he is in the late stages of his life he is in no doubt that he can go on to achieve his dreams as he has already succeeded in most. “I have achieved incredible things, standing for parliament for example. Not only that but I visited Moscow giving a talk about a subject I knew nothing about, I have featured on TV and radio and I am a writer. This is just the start of a new life.”

A strong belief of David’s is that many people don’t get help because they don’t want to be labelled. But it’s all about self-awareness.

“Self-acceptance is so important and most definitely my diagnosis has helped me to grow as a person. The very most important thing is it has enabled me to accept myself and go on to achieve my dreams,” he excitedly explained.

Psychologist at Bangor University, Claire Owen said: “David is a prime example of why diagnosis needs to be spotted as soon as possible. The support can help you to go on and do astonishing things like he has.”

For David it was a long journey but he got there. Better late than never. ●

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