

Asperger's causes voluntarily homeless Hare Krishna devotee to reflect

Rob Edwards was living voluntarily homeless, travelling around the county spreading the Hare Krishna message. He couldn't understand why he chose that lifestyle - but then he found out he had Asperger's Syndrome and it all made sense.



Rob used to work in recruitment

For the past year, 32-year-old Rob Edwards has been living a nomadic lifestyle based on his beliefs as a Hare Krishna.

Voluntarily homeless after quitting the daily grind of an office job, Rob cycled around the South West spreading the Hare Krishna word; surviving only on the good will of others.

This lifestyle made sense to him although he couldn't explain why - that was until his friend handed him a book about Asperger's Syndrome.

Of the 200 symptoms listed at the back of the book, Rob found he had almost all of them.

Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's Syndrome is a form of autism.

People with the condition find social interaction very difficult.

Rob says he finds it difficult to look people in the eye when talking to them and he cannot relax in social situations.

Although he finds it difficult to interact with people, he can however talk confidently about a subject he knows about (e.g. Hare Krishna) in front of thousands of people.

The lack of demonstratable empathy can also be a problem when in a relationship.

Sufferers can also suffer from clumsiness.

"Reading that book was like reading an autobiography," he said. "I already thought I might have it but that was in a jokey, hypochondriac way. You see things and think 'ooh maybe I've got a bit of that' and to read it was like, 'oh my god, that's actually real'."

Finding out was initially quite a shock. Things he had interpreted as being part of his personality were now symptoms of the condition.

"It's a bit like you've been robbed of your sense of being. I thought I was just me but now I know I have this thing and other people do the same thing as me. Maybe that's me being miserable and not dealing with it properly but that's how it feels right now. I'm sure it'll go away," he said.

"Once I've come to accept the condition I will probably see it as me and that everyone is unique and individual."

To a certain extent, Rob has always known there was something different about him. At school, while all the children were running around in the playground, Rob used to just walk around the railings, alone.

He also had trouble handling negative comments. While other school children could laugh hurtful comments off, for Rob it was as if they were 'carved into his brain'.

"And so you end up getting into all kinds of situations and getting bullied," he said.

Another aspect of Asperger's which has had a direct impact on Rob's life is his inability to form long term relationships. He said he's never wanted people to get too close to him as it's 'beyond' him.

"I can't deal with people getting too close and working me out. If I get into an emotional situation with someone, I feel incredibly vulnerable and I make it all go wrong."

Hare Krishna devotee

Over the past few years, Rob has devoted himself to Hare Krishna by travelling around Somerset and Devon talking about the religion. He survived on donations and by selling Hare Krishna literature.



Hare Krishna became popular in the 70s

"In India, this is traditional. It might not be with a bike and a trailer, but they go from town to town and talk to people and that's what they do."

Previously working as an office manager for a recruitment agency which looked after special needs children, Rob became disillusioned with the daily grind which left him feeling "empty and hollow".

"I had all the things I wanted - I could jet off on holiday and I had money to spend but it didn't mean anything and that's when I started looking for something else and I kind of fell into this particular thing of riding around on a bike," he said.

"I'm doing what I want, it's what I believe. It's like I'm not a hypocrite any more. I'm doing what feels natural to me and I'm not sponging off anyone else to do it."

As a Hare Krishna, Rob spends a lot of his time meditating which he finds relaxing.

"It's been everything I need - lots of time on my own, I only see people every now and then and no-one really gets to know me all that well. It's good like that but then also in a lot of ways it's very difficult."

Since finding out he has Asperger's, Rob has moved back in with his mother so that he can re-assess.

"I've got a personality that does things in a different way to most other people and in a similar way to a smaller number of people."

Rob Edwards

"I'm a bit lost as what to do with myself now."

"It's pretty horrible. It kind of feels odd that everything which has ever happened should be so connected by this one thing but in a way it's positive because I know that other people are going through that and there's a supportive community.

"In one sense I do feel on my own but maybe by knowing it I'll also get to know people who are going through it and that'll make things a lot easier. Some people might find their niche in life and really it's not affecting them that much, they're just trying to get on with things and they're not suffering too much from depression and anxiety but then other people may never settle down.

"I've been reading about these crash and burn cycles where you try and start a new life and make everything perfect and then you scrap it all and go somewhere else and make new friends and then you scrap that. I know some people that that's a pattern for and that's a pattern for me and it's alright but then at some point I think you have to be fixed on one thing."

Before his self diagnosis, Rob was planning on cycling to India to spread the word of Hare Krishna however now he's not so sure.

He did say that with everything there are some advantages to having the condition as there are certain things you can do really well.

"I don't think it stops me from working with other people. The way I do it has to be the right way and I think the people I'm closely working with have to understand my particular needs."

He said in the long run he's sure it'll make a positive impact in his life, he's just got to find out who he is.

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