

In My Mind: Thoughts and Words of Andrew Bloomfield, 2000-2006

A remarkable little book has just been published by a man who lives with quite severe autism and movement disorders in Guelph, Ontario.

Though Andrew hardly ever uses his voice, he shows that he has plenty to say, when supported with augmentative and alternative communication methods. What works reliably for him is typing on a computerized keyboard with voice output, while someone holding his hand or arm pulls it back between each letter so he can consciously decide what key to press next. That he can type at all is noteworthy. What he types gives us amazing insights into his thoughts and perceptions.

When Andrew first learned to use this form of communication, in 1991, he used to speak of himself in the third person, as "AB" or "he"—not as "I" and "me." With more opportunities to communicate since 2000, he uses "I" all the time, and very often the phrases "I think" and "in my mind." With some experience of music therapy as well, he often expresses his thoughts as poetry, a poem being to him "like a song in my mind."

Andrew's words are full of good sense, as well as gentle humour and kindness. He is always surprising his friends--with his perceptions, choice of words, irony and suggestions. What Andrew says challenges some stereotypes about autism. He shows his intelligence and wisdom, and how much he values friends. He describes the ways in which he experiences the symptoms of autism, and suggests strategies that help him to cope. Being able to express himself is vital for directing his own life plan. He clearly thinks about other people, wanting to share what he has learned and experienced. He wants his life to have meaning, especially through his dream project of "Bridges Over Barriers."

In My Mind contains nearly 40 poems, on such subjects as *What makes me the person I am? What is communication? Communicating my way, Saying it with my hands, Words, Anticipation, My Amy (my dog), My excellent life, What makes a good day, Music is good for my soul, Sense of God, Dreaming of what might be....*

Here are two of Andrew's poems:

What it's like to be me

(29 January 2003; set to music)

I'm a bundle of sensations:

I get the urge

to touch and pick,

and I must follow my urges.

Can you see my urges?

I can't tell you:

I just show you.

I'm a bundle of nerves,
and a jumble of thoughts.
I'm in constant motion,
and my mind's always going.

I wonder what it's like to be you.
Do you wonder what it's like to be me?
I'm a time bomb waiting to explode,
and a tear waiting to fall.

Connections

(May 2005)

Connecting is my purpose in life,
It is why we are here.
My world is connecting the dots:
You are one dot,
I am another.
We live in a world of connections,
and the lines spread out from here.

Connecting is like
building a bridge of love,
I reach you with words in a way.

Andrew's email address is <ABC_andrew@hotmail.com>

People wishing to obtain a copy of ***In My Mind*** should mail a cheque or money order, made payable to "Guelph Services for the Autistic" to:

GSA Treasurer

16 Caribou Crescent,
Guelph, ON, Canada, N1E 1C9

Donations of amounts over the basic cost of \$15 per copy qualify for official tax-creditable receipts in Canada. Thus, if you send \$25, you will receive a copy of the book plus a tax receipt for \$10.

Your donation will help the Bridges Over Barriers project, supporting people with autism to express their thoughts reliably.