

# Ask an Aspie

by BJ Wanlund  
News Editor

Hello everyone. I hope everyone's having a better week than I am. Of course, maybe I should explain: You see, I'm a huge animation freak, and the animation world suffered a rather huge loss this past Monday, April 14.

Ollie Johnston, a man you may not know personally, but you would know his animation, because as a member of Disney's "Nine Old Men", Walt Disney's inner circle of his most trusted animators, he worked on every Disney animated feature, from the first, Snow White, to his last, "The Fox and the Hound". His style of animation was unmatched, and we may never see another quite like him, ever.

Okay, sad stuff out of the way, I wanted to cover 2 interesting topics this week.

For an individual with Asperger's syndrome, choosing a college is overwhelming in and of itself. There are a few things to keep in mind if you're choosing a college and you're an Aspie.

Firstly, please don't go for a large college like Virginia Tech or UNC for your undergraduate work. The amount of students are absolutely insane, and you WILL get lost in the shuffle, and help is going to be not very easy to find.

Secondly, along those same lines, look for a college that says they have small class sizes. These are fantastic for the Aspie, as most Aspies (myself included) have very limited social interaction skills, and can only handle a certain number of people at any given time.

Third, don't be afraid to discover a really neat smaller college which fits you to a tee. I'd never have found Brevard College had my mother and I not discovered it along I-26 one wintery day in January 2005.

And finally, make sure that the college has a diverse amount of people (including Aspies). This way, you won't be alone in your awkwardness when going to college and making new friends.

The second (and final) topic revolves around how teachers can teach Aspie students. I don't want to approach this topic in my standard tell-it-like-it-is style,

so I hope people like this.

I want to give specific examples of teachers who thought outside of the typical box and was able to teach me rather effectively. I am mentioning teachers by name, so this may seem interesting as it's a bit of a glimpse into my personality as well as the most inspiring teachers I've ever had (and I hope these teachers win more awards than just Teacher of the Year...).

The first example I wish to put forward is my 5th grade teacher, Ms. Angela High. Her style of teaching was especially effective in that she used computer programs (and in those days, we actually had those old Macintoshes in school, if you've seen one, or you went to Fairview Elementary, you know what I'm talking about) to teach the material that she had to teach that didn't have to do with books.

But her style when it came to books was one all her own. She noticed that I was a really expressive reader when reading out loud, so she included me when reading out loud to the other students some of the books we read (like Flat Stanley, remember that, guys?).

All in all, I'd happily have her as a teacher again, and I'd probably enjoy being in her classroom if I did have her as a teacher. She really does wonders for Aspies like myself. I don't know whether she cut her Aspie-teaching teeth teaching me, but I'd like to think she did.

The second and final example is going to be a rather obvious (and long) one, I'm afraid. This teacher not only effectively taught me, she also inspired me beyond belief, not only in music, but in life.

She was my choir director in high school, and she was also my director for the two spring musicals that I participated in, as well as the two straight-up plays I was in. She also was my director when I was in the high school's now-defunct show choir, The Vocal Impressions. Not only that, she was also on my senior project panel.

Her name is Mrs. Anna Marie Kuether, and I'd like to think she had her hands full with me! Her teaching methods were definitively unconventional for a choir director, and I had a whole lot of fun in her classes.

My belief that musicians have a sense of

humor was only strengthened by my interactions with Mrs. Kuether. She always had the biggest smile on her face, and I admit, even in my darkest, blackest moods, I couldn't help but have a big smile on my face whenever I left her classroom.

She always had something funny at the ready, whether it was a funny down-home story from Wilkes County, NC, where she's from, or a funny quip to cover for her bad piano playing, or even a totally random off-topic statement or pun.

When I did *The Wizard of Oz* my freshman year, I actually surprised my mother, but in reality, I wanted to do it, to be honest. However, I have to be frank here and say that while *Wizard of Oz* was a fantastic experience, I would probably NEVER be both on the golf team and do a musical at the same time. I wouldn't recommend that particular arrangement in the slightest for my Aspie brothers and sisters who are in high school currently.

I also wanted to talk about the two trips down to Disney World that I took with Mrs. Kuether and the group. We headed down there for something called Singabration, which featured another constantly smiling face, John Jacobsen, who founded America Sings, which is the organization which organization that organized this event.

While this doesn't exactly have to do with Mrs. Kuether specifically, I am going to take this opportunity to tell a story from my experience.

The first time I went down (2003), we did the "Magic Kingdom thing" the first day, and my compadres actually appreciated something about me: I knew EXACTLY where we were going, and while I hadn't micromanaged our day there, I was basically, for all intents and purposes, a free tour guide.

If you're planning a trip down there, and you want a tour guide like myself, I'd be happy to go, if you a) pay for my tickets, airfare, and hotel, and b) be open to not doing thrill ride after thrill ride, but just seeing a different way to tour Walt Disney World rather than the "commando-style" touring style you're used to.

And with that, I'll see you next time!