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# Triumph of discovery

West Bloomfield man turns his struggle with Asperger's into a book to help others

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FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Nick Dubin never could figure out why he couldn't do some of the simplest things very well -- like tell if someone was joking or follow a conversation that jumped around from topic to topic.

Then, in 2004, after years of searching for answers, the 30-year-old West Bloomfield resident and PhD candidate in psychology was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome.

This form of autism isn't as easy to detect as more significant manifestations of the condition, which can lead to delayed speech development and a hypersensitivity to overstimulation. Those who suffer from it often have trouble socializing or communicating with others.

For Dubin, the triumph of discovery led to other milestones. "Asperger Syndrome and Bullying: Strategies and Solutions," a book Dubin wrote, was published this week by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, a large, London-based publisher that specializes in books on autism.

Dubin caught the company's attention after producing a DVD with his dad, Larry, a law professor at University of Detroit Mercy, about the condition. It's one of three the pair has produced.

Dubin's book focuses on his experience with Asperger's and how parents, educators and

health experts can help those with it live more fulfilling lives. It became available online late last month at Amazon.com and elsewhere, a few weeks before it hit bookstores such as Borders.

It's a significant accomplishment for Dubin, a guy who found himself often bullied as a kid and lost in class, tripping up on stuff that should have been a breeze, but wasn't because multitasking is pretty difficult for those with Asperger's.

"It completely drove me crazy," says Dubin of his condition. At times, he felt he was completely isolated, and got angry at himself because of it, he says. "I felt at a loss. I didn't know why I was like this."

Dubin grew up in Birmingham and often stops by his parents' home, which is just around the corner from Derby Middle School. It was at Derby, he says, that he suffered particularly tough times.

His book mixes an analysis and summary of the latest research on Asperger's with anecdotes about his childhood experiences at Derby and elsewhere, and the constant vexations he faced growing up.

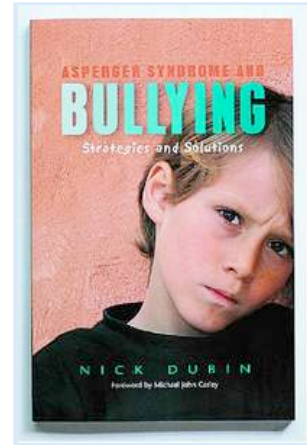
In the first chapter, Dubin tells of how in the fifth grade two kids he knew left him handcuffed to a swing at nearby Poppleton Park. They taunted him until his father peered outside the Dubins' nearby home and intervened. The ruse: They were playing cops and robbers. Those with Asperger's often have an especially tough time knowing when someone is not telling the truth.

The bullying didn't just come from other kids either, he says. Dubin writes about working in high school as a tennis instructor at a posh country club in Bloomfield Hills, where his boss once locked him in a bathroom. He shares how an art teacher in elementary school would hold his work up to the class as an example of what not to do. He even

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(PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press)

The cover of Nick Dubin's just-published book.



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### Find out more

Nick Dubin's book "Asperger Syndrome and Bullying: Strategies and Solutions" is 173 pages and costs \$18.95. To order the book, go to [www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com).

For more information on Dubin, check out [www.nickdubin.com](http://www.nickdubin.com). His site also provides links to sites he recommends on autism and Asperger's.

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talks about how difficult it was for his parents to accept that their only son had autism.

"It wasn't so much that we didn't want to believe it," says his mother, Kitty, a playwright and professor at Oakland University. "We were sort of resistant. I had heard of Asperger's, but I hadn't read a lot about it really. I knew it was associated with autism, and I guess I associated autism with people who didn't have much emotional affects."

By contrast, her son is very affectionate and can be outgoing, she says.

Becoming the best tennis player at Seaholm High, where he graduated in 1996, and earning all-state athletic honors made life easier as a teenager, says Dubin.

It wasn't until college, though, that Dubin received definitive answers.

Dubin failed to pass the student-teaching portion of a master's degree he got several years ago, because the classroom environment he taught in was just too chaotic for him to keep up with. It made the degree, intended for those who want to teach, essentially useless.

After entering a PhD program in psychology, he learned more about Asperger's and eventually got a diagnosis that confirmed his suspicions.

"It's very empowering knowing that what I went through in the past wasn't in vain, and maybe even there was a reason I went through some of it," says Dubin, who now regularly speaks before nonprofit groups that specialize in treating autism, as well as teacher's associations and similar groups. He hopes to finish his PhD from Michigan School of Professional Psychology in Farmington Hills in 2009.

"In a very short period of time, he's really carved a niche for himself," says Katie Kramer, a classmate and close friend of Dubin, who has seen him speak and has helped comb over draft chapters of the book before it was published.

"I know a lot of people with Asperger's know who Nick is and really look up to him," says Kramer, who worked with a doctor whose expertise was autism.

Dubin has made a bit of money from speaking, and producing the educational DVDs with his dad, too, which is great for a poor grad student.

"I'm not J.K. Rowling or anything, but I have made a bit of pocket change," he said. "Yeah, that's great."

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