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## The Vestiges of Disability

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# The Vestiges of Disability

## *Les vestiges du handicap*

Jan A. Wozniak<sup>1,2</sup>

### Abstract

This collection of poetry consists of two parts, marking a chronological transition from disability to empowerment. The first, 'Big Yellow Buses' and 'The Dead of Winter', address the consequences of growing up without an autism diagnosis, including themes of bullying, isolation, and despair. The second, 'Autistic Bunker' and 'Atlas Unbound', focus on life after receiving a diagnosis, including its effect on authenticity, purpose, and change. The temporal progression from the confusion and hardship of undiagnosed childhood and adolescence to the self-awareness and community integration of adulthood indicates a profound transformation in personal identity. By evoking the visceral and cognitive dimensions of autistic experiences across lifespan development, these poems reiterate the importance of awareness, acceptance, and community connectedness, which remain tantamount to supporting the health and wellbeing of autistic individuals currently and in the years to come.

### Keywords

Mental health, sensory differences, autistic needs, autism awareness, progress

### Resumé

Cette œuvre poétique se compose de quatre poèmes en deux parties, marquant une transition chronologique entre le handicap et l'autonomisation. La première partie, comprenant « Big Yellow Buses » et « The Dead of Winter », aborde les conséquences d'une enfance sans diagnostic

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d'autisme, notamment les thèmes de l'intimidation, de l'isolement et du désespoir. La deuxième, constituée des poèmes « Autistic Bunker » et « Atlas Unbound », se concentre sur la vie après avoir reçu un diagnostic, y compris son effet sur l'authenticité, la raison d'être et le changement. La progression temporelle entre la confusion et les difficultés de l'enfance et de l'adolescence non diagnostiquées et la prise de conscience de soi et l'intégration dans la communauté à l'âge adulte indique une transformation profonde de l'identité personnelle. En évoquant les dimensions viscérales et cognitives des expériences autistiques tout au long de la vie, ces poèmes réitèrent l'importance de la prise de conscience, de l'acceptation et des liens avec la communauté, qui restent essentiels pour soutenir la santé et le bien-être des personnes autistes aujourd'hui et dans les années à venir.

**Mots-clés**

*Santé mentale, différences sensorielles, besoins des autistes, sensibilisation à l'autisme, progrès*

**Big Yellow Buses**

Freezing up, catatonic like a scarecrow-

feeling not quite human today (being a  
verbal punching bag for bullies & all).

In the rural Southwest, I take my beatings  
politely; the bus ride, my 5-year stretch  
in a yellow prison on wheels. Momentarily  
free, I'd walk my driveway in silence, then  
open the front door of my home & begin  
to scream (my lovely after school routine).

### **The Dead of Winter**

Dear Son, your mother worries when she sees that melancholic dog  
come running. Seasonal rotation, the dead of winter hits hard,  
fingers flick the I.V. drip as the hemlock sets in. Your apartment  
in the upper Northwest, a barren tundra - sparse, frozen, unforgiving;  
shades drawn, mail stacking by the door, empties stand like monuments  
to one's enduring lament. The bottles clink by noon, ambient sounds  
emanating from within, but regrettably, still no signs of the boy I once  
knew. He's buried deep in the permafrost and we can't seem to get through.

### **Autistic Bunker**

My space is a fortress of special interests—  
science books and exercise equipment fortify the perimeter,  
while blackout curtains repel the intrusive glare of daylight's assault.  
A symphony of white noise emanates from the machine next to me,  
as the city explodes in a crescendo of screams, trumpeting horns,  
and round-the-clock emergency sirens just outside my window.  
Hey-ho! Light and sound, the yin and yang of my sensory issues  
keep me hypervigilant from oh-six hundred to twenty-two hundred  
each day, holding my position as a hermit, a recluse, an agoraphobic  
soul, with a vitamin D deficiency that would panic most physicians.  
My partner (sardonically) refers to it as "a cave," never fully appreciating  
this soldier's militaristic discipline, having to wade through the social tripwires  
and sensory ambushes of the neurotypical jungle. Amidst the fray,  
I hunker down behind the walls of my carefully constructed bunker,  
finding momentary peace amidst all the world's calamity.

## Atlas Unbound

My journey, an odyssey, circumnavigating a world not designed for inclusivity, where

Inaccessibility manifests as towering mountains, discrimination, a cunning predator, always lurking in the tall grass, calls for Herculean effort and Sisyphean persistence to endure.

I have borne the weight, unknowingly, disability configured into perceived burdensomeness, so many years spent trudging alone through the muddy foothills of indifference, carrying internalized shame and guilt like a colossal stone on my shoulders.

In a culture that measures individual worth by stride and speed, my journey, like Hephaestus',<sup>3</sup> unfolds like an intricate dance of invisible barriers as the rhythm of expectations clashes against the melody of my inherent neurodiversity.

I look upon the Scylla and Charybdis<sup>4</sup> of disabilities: on one side, the long tentacles of ableism bear down with dehumanizing stereotypes, making disclosure a negative experience; on the other, marginalization, a relentless, vacuous force, prevents escape from the gravitational pull of socioeconomic stressors.

However, with strength in numbers, my community found, I refuse the Siren call luring disabled minds and bodies to shipwreck amidst broken systems, institutions, and policies while families tiptoe the poverty line from here till eternity, their faith diminishing into dust each day.

For I am Atlas unbound, not burdened by negative conceptions of disability, but empowered by resilience to strive for something more, knowing the path to an inclusive and equitable world is always within reach, my eyes now fixate on the infinite horizon of progress.

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<sup>3</sup> Hephaestus is an Olympian God in Greek mythology known for having a disability.

<sup>4</sup> Two ancient sea monsters encountered by Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. Being caught between the two means you're confronted with two unfavourable options or choices in a particular situation, leaving you to feel stuck or hopeless.