

So, what do you do?

I used to hate those words. Because I wasn't able to get work, I was stuck and I believed I had no value. That I never had and never would. Unfortunately that feeling was commonplace in my life. I had always felt like Pinocchio in a world of real boys but that did change.

Adversity has always been a passenger in my journey. As much of a constant in my life as breathing. A shadow walking in an eclipsed world.

Memories often coming with a torrent of tears. To look back is to reflect on pain and isolation. If that's where my story ended I don't know how I would have dealt with that. A life unloved because of the perceptions of others. I was the child that couldn't learn, that one that never wanted to stand out. Every time I was told I had failed was another bullet hole in my heart. I never expected anything from my life or myself because I was never given the impression I could. I have been homeless, desperately trying to figure out just how to feed myself. Felt like human connections would always be out of reach.

An alien in a world that was never created for me, a world I thought I would never fit. Fitting in is funny, I tried that for most of my life. However, I found my place once I decided to be me wholeheartedly. To shout from the rooftops, I am autistic, I am not like you... please just understand me.

Being seen for "me", was one of the toughest challenges of my life. I had only ever found that with 3 people, in 40 years. Constantly misunderstood, dismissed, daily reinforcement of the valueless self image.

I severely damaged my spine at the age of 28 leaving me housebound and living with relentless and constant pain. So finding out I was autistic at 41 felt too late. Like betting on a race that has already run. How do you deal with that, finding out your whole life even you didn't know who you were. That you tried to wear the suit of lives and people who will never see the world in the same way. Not only that but I find out who I am while trapped in a box I can't leave. A living room which all too often felt like a prison cell.

The truth is the day I knew who I was, I had the chance to really understand myself. That's when I rose, becoming the phoenix from the ashes of my misunderstood life.

On the 14th September 2020 at 14:40 I was reborn. I was 41 and I looked back at a life I couldn't change. I knew something had to change and that my experiences were too often those of the autistic community. I began working on a global acceptance campaign but completely under the

radar. Not even my wife knew what I was doing. I started by trying to get a story I wrote for my daughter published. I had made her a promise that one day I would give her a printed copy. I didn't know how I was going to do that but that promise changed everything. I was signed by a publisher and created a traditional picture book with a difference, it was created for all children. When creating it I thought about what an autistic mind needs. What could be done to make it more accessible to autistic children. We have stronger senses and a deep connection to our instinctual side. This meant staying within a positive visual threshold. Adding emotional cues to the story and not just the images. We simplified facial expressions, in fact I ensured everything was done to make it as much of a calming experience as I could. It is now being considered for an International World Record for the "the first autism friendly traditional picture book".

What no one was aware of at the time was Kaleidoscope has a very specific purpose. Sensory sensitivities have been known about since the 1970s. So if that's the case why is my children's book the first? Shouldn't we have sensory sensitive media for those that need it? I went public and discovered I could communicate with both autistic and non autistic people at the same time. I think that is simply because I had been so confused and lost for so long I needed as many answers as I could get. Plus not being able to even have real conversations most of my life plays a part. Only really understanding how to talk to people in August 2021 plays another. I began talking about my life and the experiences as well as the lack of them. Yesterday's tomorrows un-lived and days I'd rather be forgotten.

I took the spotlight but visibility wasn't something I ever really wanted. I simply took it on to ensure it shone brightly on the autistic and neurodivergent community. Mylifeautistic.com was never my simply project but a community one. I am simply here to start conversations so that others feel safer and more comfortable using their own voice. Often physically shaking, settling off panic attacks and meltdowns, never really knowing if I could really do this, I stood up for, spoke for and represented the community in the media. This led to becoming a human rights activist.

I still live with brutal pain levels every second of every day. I am housebound and all treatment options have been considered

Pain management is my only option going forward. One day the pain will be too much and I'll be on too many pain killers to focus. If I am going to help create understanding and a better world for the community it needs to be now.

So what do I do?

I bring hope to autistic people and caregivers. I show children that autism isn't something to fear or be ashamed of. I help change perspectives and explain the inner workings of an autistic mind. Campaign for media created and directed at the community by the community. I push my limits physically and mentally to change lives.

I have become a passionate voice for people that often feel like their own is dismissed.

So what do I do?

I am a proud autistic husband, father, author, advocate and human rights activist for the autistic and neurodivergent community.

I care... that's what I do.