

**SPOTTED**

# Adult life; halting harassment; curious couple

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## WEEK OF MARCH 7<sup>TH</sup>

### Adult life

An upcoming book highlights the challenges for **adults on the spectrum** — and for the worried parents who want the best for their grown-up children.

The book, “**Autism Adulthood**,” is part memoir and part guide, brimming with practical tips for caregivers. Author **Susan Senator**’s son Nat was diagnosed with autism at age 3. Now 25, Nat is living away from home but needs a lot of support.

“There have been quite a few memoirs from autism parents with small children,” self-advocate **John Elder Robison** writes in the book’s foreword. “Many of those children were diagnosed within the past 20 years, and they are becoming adults today. A few will make the smooth transition to independent adulthood, but many won’t. Susan’s book speaks powerfully to the parents of those kids with more significant challenges.”

The book comes out 5 April.

#### SOURCES:

**Susan Senator** /

Autism Adulthood: Strategies and Insights for a Fulfilling Life

<http://susansenator.com/adulthood.html>

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### Surprise diagnosis

Speaking of adults with autism, a **blog post** by a mother of four whose husband was diagnosed at

age 30 **went viral this week.**

Jessica Offer of Australia's Sunshine Coast says she knew her oldest daughter "wasn't neurotypical" when she started kindergarten. Her husband Chris, however, thought the girl's quirks were normal.

"Wanna know why? Because for him it was his normal, too," Jessica writes. "He had many of the exact same struggles when he was young that she was experiencing now. But no one made any connection."

Just three months after his daughter was diagnosed with autism, Chris received the same diagnosis.

"Autism didn't change my husband. He's never not been autistic and it's what makes him who he is," Jessica writes, noting that Chris' early years might have been easier had he been diagnosed. He might have had the support he needed, she writes, "rather than having to cleverly wing it for over 25 years."

#### SOURCES:

**Girl Tribe** / 03 Mar 2016

We were married 7 years before it occurred to us that my husband was autistic.

<https://girltribe.wordpress.com/2016/03/03/we-were-married-7-years-before-it-occurred-to-us-that-my-husband-was-autistic/>

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## Halting harassment

A chilling essay in *The New York Times* last week spotlights the ongoing problem of **sexual harassment in science**. **A. Hope Jahren**, professor of geobiology at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu, describes her extracurricular role as advisor to countless young women who have been hit on by men in their labs.

"It's not something I can put on my C.V., but I believe [it is] one of my most important duties ... and I am called upon to do it many times each year," Jahren writes, describing her inbox as an "inadvertent clearinghouse for unsolicited love notes."

Excerpts from these notes, with subject lines such as, "I need to tell you," and acknowledgements of inappropriateness such as, "you know I could get fired for this," speckle the piece, in which Jahren argues that sexual harassment is one reason scientific fields "shed women the way the trees on campus lose their leaves in the fall."

To address this persistent problem, the National Institutes of Health is rethinking its anti-harassment policies. In a short correspondence published last week in *Nature*, agency director **Francis Collins** and his colleagues say they will meet with colleagues in government and academia over the coming months “to more fully understand the nature and extent of sexual harassment among scientists.”

“These data should guide us in determining what kinds of policy and procedure are most likely to help,” they write.

**SOURCES:**

**The New York Times** / 04 Mar 2016

She wanted to do her research. He wanted to talk ‘feelings.’

<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/06/opinion/sunday/she-wanted-to-do-her-research-he-wanted-to-talk-feelings.html>

**Nature** / 03 Mar 2016

Policy: NIH push to stop sexual harassment

<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v531/n7592/full/531035b.html>

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## Patent primer

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office launched its investigation into who owns the rights to the gene-editing tool **CRISPR** yesterday. The process could take months or even years, with additional time tacked on for appeals.

A piece in this week’s *Nature* is a veritable **cheat sheet for all things CRISPR patent**, running down the relevant history and explaining how the coming months are likely to play out.

Among many important dates to keep in mind is March 2013, when the U.S. switched from awarding patents to those who invented a technology to awarding them to whomever is fastest to file the paperwork. **Jennifer Doudna** of the University of California, Berkeley and **Emmanuelle Charpentier** of the Max Planck Institute for Infection Biology in Berlin, Germany, were **first to report CRISPR’s gene-editing chops**. They were also first to file a patent application in May 2012. However, **Feng Zhang** of the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard filed a fast-track application in December 2012 and won the patent. In short, had all this unfolded one year later, the CRISPR controversy might have been avoided.

**SOURCES:**

**Nature** / 07 Mar 2016

How the US CRISPR patent probe will play out

<http://www.nature.com/news/how-the-us-crispr-patent-probe-will-play-out-1.19519>

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## Curious couple

An article in the latest issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* highlights the work of autism researchers **Karen Pierce** and **Eric Courchesne**. The married couple co-directs the Autism Center of Excellence at the University of California, San Diego. Their ongoing study examines brain development in ‘baby sibs,’ who have older brothers or sisters with autism — and increased odds of receiving an autism diagnosis themselves.

“We really need to understand autism from the beginning, imaging the brain at the youngest ages you could possibly do it,” Pierce told the journal.

Getting babies to lay still in a scanner is no easy feat. But through a clever combination of nap deprivation, later-than-usual bedtimes and noise-reducing headphones, Pierce and Courchesne have managed to pull it off. They have now scanned more than 100 sleeping tots aged 1 to 2 years and tracked their symptoms over time.

When the study began in 2007, the researchers took turns running late-night experiments and being home with their own babies, Pierce notes. “I just remember feeling very sleep-deprived during those early years,” she says.

### SOURCES:

**PNAS** / 23 Feb 2016

Sitting still, for science

<http://www.pnas.org/content/113/8/1960.full>

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