

OPINION

Autism everywhere

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In the past few days, *The New York Times* has run a couple of articles featuring people with autism.

This isn't unusual in and of itself, except that neither article ran in the health section. And both take a compassionate look at individuals who struggle with autism in profound ways.

The first, which ran on Sunday, is about Darius McCollum, **notorious for his obsession** with New York's subway trains.

For almost 30 years, this 43-year-old has repeatedly posed as a subway worker. For his transgressions, McCollum has been arrested 23 times (and not without justification; in 1981 he drove one train into the World Trade Center) and written about in colorful terms by the New York press.

But this is the first time that I've noticed anyone talking about his autism. His mother says his obsession with trains is rooted in Asperger syndrome and that he could easily put together model trains and other toys.

Even more heartbreaking is **an article that ran yesterday**, detailing the struggles of a 19-year-old

with cerebral palsy, mental retardation and autism.

Kendall Bailey is a champion swimmer and up for competing in the Olympic Games for disabled athletes in Beijing this September. Like many kids with autism, Bailey is frightened of unfamiliar people and places, flies into uncontrollable rages and crawls under tables.

The story goes on to describe the US team's efforts to keep Bailey from Beijing, but the real story is their reaction to his autism-related behaviors.

As McCollum's mother says, "With all these kids who are autistic, they slip behind the cracks, but nobody is trying to help him at all."

Maybe it's my bias as a journalist or my eternal optimism, but I believe writing about people like McCollum and Bailey is at least a first step.