

SATURDAY 26TH AUGUST 2023

With Lavinia Bonling

SUN SUN SUN

I am writing from a gorgeous Airbnb in Stewkley! Yasmin and I left Anglesey feeling a little chilly - it was around 18 degrees - and began feeling the heat as we approached Leicestershire! It has been a steady 24 degrees! One of my clients informed me on Tuesday it was 26 degrees for them! Wow! We need to remember that many of our Autistic young people struggle with Interception - which means they fail to recognize physical symptoms - and not knowing when they are too hot, or thirsty, or when their skin is burning means we need to keep an active look out for them. Even the likes of me, a woman in my 50s, still cannot tell when I am thirsty. It is only when I am glugging that I am cross with myself for not drinking enough and getting caught out again by my lack of Interception. All I can do is drink regularly and often, in the hope I get it about



right, but it is not always easy. Teaching our children to be mindful and prompting them - whether it is verbal or sliding a bottle in their line of vision - hopefully will encourage them to learn the mantra to drink often. Some children do not recognize when they are hot, and, again, it is encouraging them to stay in the shade (especially if they are light sensitive) and to consider some form of sun protective barrier. This can be an issue, especially if they are sensory avoidant with the likes of sun cream or oil. Encouraging sun hats, baseball caps, sun glasses, not going out in the middle of the day when it is the most hot and bright of the day, as well as considering whether they can tolerate cream, oil or mist is a must.

It felt a little surreal as we have been driving through places like Buckingham, Leighton Buzzard and Winslow, which were old stomping grounds for me as a Community Psychiatric Nurse when I was working with Adults out of Aylesbury. So why am I in Stewkley, the longest village in the UK? Well, Yasmin has a bucket list that is periodically added to. Last year, she vowed she was going to attend Silverstone this year..... on her own. Not only that, she was going to wait for an alert for when the tickets went on sale (November 2022) and then pay for them herself. To an ordinary young 20s adult, this is no big deal. To a young 20's adult who is Autistic, has ADHD and PDA, as well as being dyslexicwell, there are plenty of opportunities for it to not be a success.

Silverstone race circuit is in the middle of nowhere, but there are public buses put on for the event. However, that, in itself, was just another stress that would sabotage the trip. Indeed, as would be organizing accommodation. "Book it" I encouraged and she did. That was the easy part, although nerve racking in waiting for the alert (which happened in college), and then getting home to go online and book the ticket. In typical Autistic fashion, Yasmin has been very vocal about her upcoming trip and has been looking forward to it. She kept asking if I had booked the accommodation feeling there would be nothing left, but I have my methods in and around work. I found an Airbnb that accepted her Collies,



although it was 30 minutes drive away, but this allows for transitioning between Silverstone and our temporary home, and the collies to greet her provide emotional regulation as well as familiarity. We were both quiet driving the 4.5hr journey down, as we both need time to transition, and I still had clients to see at the end of the day (this helps me transition as it is clients I know and allows me to do something very familiar). Yasmin woke up feeling very stressed and "feeling sick" suggesting it was food poisoning. We drove 20 mins, and then she stated she felt unable to attend the event, but we both knew this was tough, and we just needed to transition. I walked her to the gate where she emotionally hauled herself through it. Needless to say, within an hour, I was sent a short video of cars racing round the circuit.

She has achieved successfully something on her bucket list. By Sunday evening, she will be fully rewarded with watching the Sugababes and McFly! The point is sometimes being Autistic is tough, but if we are aware of some of the challenges, then we can achieve some great things. Yasmin is a huge fan of motor sport, and Silverstone was a challenge she set herself, despite feeling nervous about how she was actually going to achieve it. With a bit of support, she has gone on to achieve it - even got to see face to face one of her favourite presenters, Alex Blundel.



EXAM'S PART 2

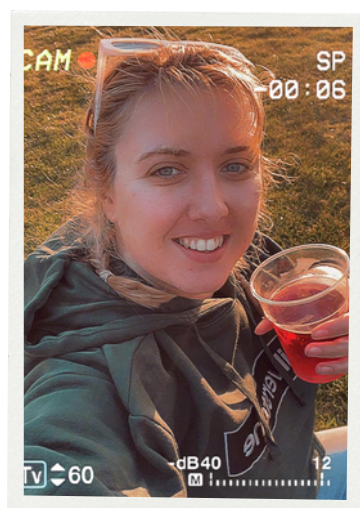
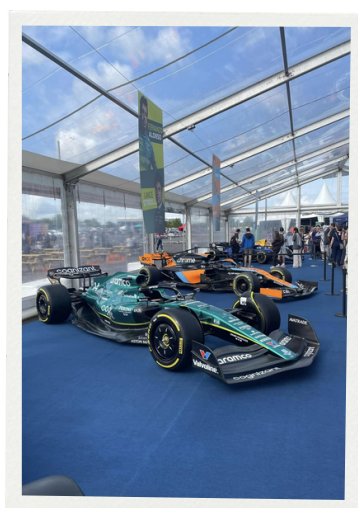
I talked last week about exams not defining you. On Thursday, in England and Wales, the results were out. Yasmin was ecstatic with her results - you may have read her blog - having found the right course and Tutors who nurtured and encouraged her interests. As a young person myself, my Mum stressed to me that I would never go to university like my siblings, but that was "ok". My step-dad spent some time with me trying to teach me Maths, till, in the end, he got so frustrated, he suggested I go to a private Tutor in Edinburgh and do a crash course prior to my O-grades. Of course, at the time, nobody knew or took the interest to consider I was Dyslexic, Autistic, ADHD and PDA. I was deemed a failure by others and myself, and life was pretty horrendous. I scraped through most of my exams, failed my Maths and Geography, although only managed to complete half the Arithmetic's paper and passed (thanks to the Tutor who coaxed me through my 3 week crash course), and did better at English, Food Technology and Religious Studies.

Yet, they did not define me. How could they possibly do that when I was fed through an educational system that had no interest to discover what was of interest to me? Yasmin fared better as I was there to support her, even though she struggled to attend the last 2yrs at school, and only managed sporadic sessions at college before bailing out at the first half term at college. It was all too much. If our interests are focused on, and supported, as I have done with Yasmin, - look at what we can achieve.

It is what we like and do that helps define us, and it is those interests that pave the way for our future. The educational system played havoc with both mine and Yasmin's mental health, but, with focus and determination (obsession?), we have gone on, and continue, to achieve greater things. These have brought successes, new learning through failures, greater stamina and even greater desire to experience more. To all my parents, consider what your child enjoys doing and does well, and continue to nurture that skill set.

Have a great weekend everyone!

Lavinia



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**LIFE
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