

Portfolio of Writing Samples

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The Reality of Autism

Think of autism and most people see Rain Man. Dustin Hoffman's shuffling character in the award-winning movie whose life is governed by a petty timetable, but who also has an impossible grasp of complex mathematical riddles and almost perfect recall, is an abiding and endearing memory. We recall the movie and we think we understand autism.

The reality can be very different, however. Rain Man was based around the real-life character of the late Kim Peek. Kim was a savant who was probably autistic as well. He had a phenomenal memory and could recall a multitude of facts and figures. Dr. Darold Treffert who was consulted on the Rain Man movie and who is an authority on Savant Syndrome says, *"Kim's memory was not only deep, it was also very wide which is very unique among savants."*

Most people with autism lead much less spectacular lives. They can often be introverted, lacking communication and social interaction skills, capable only of repetitive and restricted actions. Their comfort zone is often quite narrow and simple, and they are usually extremely reluctant to move out of it.

Autism is not a single condition. The term covers a range of brain development disorder conditions and it is not yet fully understood. Those with milder conditions, such as Asperger Syndrome, one of the autism spectrum disorders, can lead fairly normal lives. They may experience relationship difficulties and be very set in their ways, but they will likely seem fairly normal, and not different in the way that the Rain Man character is.

Autism can be detected in young children from around one year old. The lack of communication and language skills can often be the tell-tale sign that indicates the condition. If a child doesn't babble and make speech noises by about a year old, doesn't use hand signals such as waving goodbye, or just general flapping and gesturing, doesn't use single words by around 16 months, then this can possibly be an indication that the child suffers from autism.

There is no known cure for autism. Parents of an autistic child usually have to work harder and see less progress and development for their efforts than parents of a normal child. Strong loving support is often the best thing that parents can give an autistic child. Many autistic adults function quite well in society, however, as they have learned how to cope with life's difficulties in their own way.

Some of the world's great geniuses may have had a leaning towards autism. It has been speculated that both Albert Einstein and Isaac Newton, two of the great pillars of modern science, may have had a form of autism. Mozart, the musical genius, may also have been autistic to some degree.

Interestingly, the Internet has offered those on the autistic spectrum a means of communicating without having to deal with the non-verbal cues and body language they simply don't understand. The impersonal nature of the Internet has created a level playing field for all, autistic people included, whether for social communication, or for remote working.

Crab Orchard Lake

Crab Orchard Lake is a man-made lake that lies around two miles south of Carterville in Williamson County, southern Illinois, sprawling more or less in an east-west alignment. Crab Orchard Lake came into being as a result of Crab Orchard Creek being dammed in the 1930s.

The waters of nearby Little Grassy Lake and Devil's Kitchen Lake, themselves man-made lakes, feed into Crab Orchard Lake to keep it as one of the finest angling and recreational lakes in the region. It is the Big Muddy River, which joins the Mississippi in neighboring Jackson County that is the ultimate source of the water; Crab Orchard Creek is one of its tributaries.

Crab Orchard Lake is a fairly modest 6,695 acres in area. It lies 405 feet above sea level at latitude 37.72 degrees north and longitude 89.07 degrees west. It is a fairly shallow lake with an average depth of about four to six feet, though the west end of the lake can go down to 20 feet of depth or more.

The lake, like its two neighboring lakes, is teeming with fish. In particular, it has a very healthy and almost legendary population of largemouth bass, which attracts anglers from all over. And despite the water willow that grows in patches all over the lake, water skiing, boating, swimming, and other water sports are popular on the lake throughout the summer months.

Crab Orchard Lake lies within Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, a 43,890 acre park established in 1947 that is popular with visitors as a place for hiking, camping and hunting, as well as wildlife watching. Crab Orchard Lake is in the unique position of being completely rural, with all the benefits that can bring, but it is close enough to nearby towns to make it accessible to all.

Three miles to the west of Crab Orchard Lake is the city of Carbondale in Jackson County. Three and a half miles to the east of the lake is the town of Marion, while to the north, Carterville, Cambria, Energy, Crainville and Herrin all lie within easy traveling distance of just a few miles. In addition, the highway between Carbondale and Marion actually crosses the northern part of the lake.

This is an area of outstanding beauty. The banks of the azure majestic waters is not overrun by resorts or housing developments, making it a real nature playground for those who appreciate the outdoors as it should be; natural and unspoilt. For anglers, there's not only largemouth bass in abundance (the record fish caught to date weighed in at 10 pounds 9 ½ ounces), but channel catfish, white and black crappie and bluegill too.

More than one million people visit Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge annually, and many of them come especially to the magnificent centerpiece of Crab Orchard Lake to enjoy its unspoilt natural rural beauty and peaceful setting.

The Refuge area is managed primarily for its wildlife, with human recreational activities being dependent on the welfare of the wildlife. However, there is a natural harmony between the people who flock to the shores of Crab Orchard Lake and the wildlife that roams free within the Refuge. And that of course is how it should be.

How To Avoid Taxes

It's often said that there are two things we can depend on in life: death and taxes. The former will certainly remove all worries about the latter, but until it happens, you have to pay taxes. The Chicago crime king of the 1930s, Al Capone, got away with murder – literally, but it was not paying his taxes that put him in prison. You can easily learn how to avoid taxes, but you should always keep it legal.

1. Having your own home based business can be an excellent tax shelter if managed properly. The thing is, when you work from home, many of the expenses that previously were your responsibility can suddenly become tax-deductible business expenses. Things like heating, lighting, insurance, water, etc, can all be included. You can't claim the full amount, but you could claim tax deduction on say, 25% of your house, or whatever percentage you use for business.

2. Employ family members. Paying a salary to members of your family is one way to reduce taxes. You could get your grown children, or wife – or both – to do simple tasks for you. Give the idea some thought and find something legitimate for them to do.

3. You can write off many work-related expenses. And that doesn't mean just the obvious ones either. Sit down and think about it and you'll be surprised what comes to mind: training, business tools, union dues, depreciation on your cell phone, travel expenses, etc, etc. The more inventive and creative you can be, the more you can save, but again, keep it sensible and legal.

Remember, there's a difference between avoiding taxes, and evading taxes. The former is legal and the latter will put you in prison, just as it did for Al Capone. Always strive to avoid paying taxes, but don't ever evade paying them when you are required to.

There are many ways to legally avoid paying taxes. Employ the services of a good tax adviser and you will be surprised at what you can keep to yourself. Your government won't always tell you what you can and can't do to avoid paying taxes; they have a vested interest after all in getting as much from you as they can. It's up to you to discover how to avoid taxes.

Living With Psoriasis

Most people have never heard of psoriasis when they are first diagnosed with it. It's a funny word that uses a silent "p," which makes it a bit clinical sounding, like psychology or psychiatry, or even slightly religious sounding, like psalms. All that most people know is that it's itchy and unsightly, and sore when the skin cracks.

It takes years of living with psoriasis to eventually bed down with it and intuitively understand what works and what doesn't, and what gives the most relief. It's quite a revelation to discover that most doctors and nurses have no idea what it feels like to have the condition. It's also hurtful to try and not notice the people who meet you for the first time cringing when they are about to grasp your hand to shake it, seeing the silvery bulbous lesions at the last moment and realizing that there's no way to avoid them.

Emotional hurt is a part and parcel of living with psoriasis, but you get over it eventually – more or less. You instinctively don't expose too much skin on summer days to lessen the stares from others. In your lighter moments you might even laugh at the thought of you visiting a nudist colony, imagining the terror that might induce. It's understandable of course how anyone who hasn't seen a body that's at least 80% covered in psoriasis might react in fear if confronted with the sight.

Perhaps the worst part of living with psoriasis is trying new treatments. Just when you've become familiar and reasonably comfortable with one treatment, your doctor suggests that you should try another one, something new that he's been encouraged to try out on his guinea pigs - sorry, patients. The change is always a traumatic time. Your psoriasis invariably gets worse before getting better - or even worse still, depending on the effectiveness of the new treatment.

There's also the problem of knowing that certain enjoyable things will make your psoriasis worse for several days if you partake of them. The biggest one is alcohol. It's all right to have one or two drinks, but if you take more than that, perhaps at a birthday party, or at Christmas or New Year, you will suffer.

Hangovers are the least of the problem for someone trying to live with psoriasis who also takes a few drinks. The lesions flare up red and angry, get even more itchy and scaly, and generally make the whole experience just not worth it.

Living with psoriasis becomes a way of life after 10 years, 20 years, 30 years. There are good times and bad times. Occasionally when life eases up on its pressures, the psoriasis will slowly fade away. One day you'll look at yourself in the mirror coming out of the shower and realize that your body is almost psoriasis free. It's temporary of course, but times like that make you want to go out and celebrate, but breaking out the champagne would only make it worse again. Living with psoriasis can be a challenge, to say the least.

5 SEO Top Tips For Your Web Pages You Can Use Today

Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, is not rocket science. It isn't something that's difficult to start using in your articles or web content, but it will make an enormous difference if you do it right. In this article we will look at 5 SEO tips that you can put to use today to help the search engines decide that your web content really is worthy of being ranked higher.

1. If you're starting a new web site, choose a domain name that has a searched for keyword if possible. There are many keyword tools you can use. Google's free keyword suggestion tool is one easy to use option. You can access it here:
<https://adwords.google.co.uk/select/KeywordToolExternal>

Start by entering the root word or phrase of your chosen topic. For example, if your topic is "dog training," then entering that phrase will return the searched for phrases that include those words. One of them may be suitable for your domain name if it is not already taken and the competition is not too strong. You can determine the competition by entering the phrase in a search engine such as Google in quotes. This will tell you the number of competing pages for the exact phrase. The lower the number of competing pages the better.

Once you have found a phrase, try to get the .com if you can, but the .net or .org will work fine too. Try to get as short a phrase as possible, and try to get the domain as one word without hyphens with all the words bunched up together. However, don't be afraid to use hyphens in the domain name to separate each word if you have to.

2. Each web page should be targeted on a single primary keyword. It can also have one or two secondary keywords targeted, and synonyms of the primary keyword included as well. Make sure that the title tag in the HTML head section of the web page has the primary keyword phrase in it. Also, make sure that the title tag reads well. Make it easy for people to read while also making it acceptable for the search engines.

3. If you want to have keyword and description meta tags in your web pages, and you should, make sure that any keyword phrases you include and separate by a comma, are also included somewhere on the visible page. Include your primary keyword at least once in your description. Keep both meta tags short. About five keywords is enough, and a description of no more than 200 characters – not words – is usually long enough as well.

4. The H1 title tag on the visible page should also contain the primary keyword. This is the headline of the page, so make it compelling for the people who read it. Make them want to read more, while also letting the search engines know that there is no doubt about the subject of the page.

5. You should use your primary keyword, which will also be in your page title and your H1 tag headline, several times throughout the page. Use it at least once in the first paragraph. This helps to reinforce what the page is about. Use theme words and synonyms as well to make your page more themed and LSI friendly.

You can find theme words and synonyms of a primary keyword by entering the phrase in Google and placing a tilde (~) before each word. If, for example, your primary keyword phrase is "dog training," then enter the phrase in Google like this: ~dog ~training. In the results you will see words in bold. These words are the theme words and synonyms you should sprinkle naturally throughout your web copy.

There are many other SEO tips you can use to improve the SEO qualities of your web pages, but following these 5 SEO tips will definitely help a lot. If you always lay out your web pages in a methodical manner and follow this basic routine every time, you will see an improvement, as compared to just throwing up a page and hoping for the best.