



Write to: **The Editor, *Communication*, The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG** or email: [communication@nas.org.uk](mailto:communication@nas.org.uk)

**Enclose your name and full postal address, even if you don't want them published.** We are always keen to hear from our readers, but we can't publish all contributions we receive, and we reserve the right to edit. **Please state clearly if you do not want your letter published.** The views expressed in the letters published here are those of the letter-writers and not necessarily of the NAS.

# Brain research: a personal view

**In September 2005, my husband John and I lost our daughter Susan.** She was 49 years old and had been diagnosed as having autism at the age of three. We wanted her brain to be donated for research and arranged for its safekeeping by scientists, until it could be used in this way. It is now in the care of the Brain Bank for Autism and Related Developmental Research at Oxford University. In April this year, John died. He pledged to donate his brain to research in his will. I have done the same. I will always miss and mourn Susan and John, but I will always be glad that their gifts and mine may benefit others.

I believe that it is only through research on the brain – with brain imaging and electroencephalograms that record electrical activity in the brain – in life, or post-mortem examinations after death – that we can develop understanding of the neurology underlying any aspect of human life. Autism is particularly complicated. The whole spectrum includes people of all levels of cognitive ability from those who are profoundly disabled up to those of 'genius' level.

The aim of brain research is to identify the causes of the specific disabilities affecting social interaction, social communication and social imagination in all cases, and other aspects of cognitive and motor skills in many. It will also shed light on the special positive skills. These may be shown in, for example, remarkable memory, mathematical ability, visuospatial skills and musical talent. Some people may have remarkable vocabularies, even if other aspects of language are not so good.

I hope that everyone involved – people with autism, their families and professionals – can appreciate how research into brains, in life and in death, might lead to ways of encouraging positive skills, as well as ways of overcoming disabilities. Those of us, like me, who are happy to donate their brains for post-mortem research, are making a positive contribution. I do understand that some may have emotional objections to this type of research but hope that what I have written does help you to understand my point of view. There is certainly no pressure to donate on anyone

who feels uncomfortable about doing so, but the main barrier to developing understanding of autism through this research is the lack of donated brain tissue. So I hope that everyone in the autism community will give this issue their consideration. **Dr Lorna Wing**

→ For more information, call free on 0800 089 0707, email [brenda.nally@clneuro.ox.ac.uk](mailto:brenda.nally@clneuro.ox.ac.uk) or visit [www.brainbankforautism.org.uk](http://www.brainbankforautism.org.uk) Or write to **The UK Brain Bank for Autism & Related Developmental Research, Neuropathology Department, Oxford University, Level 1, West Wing, John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford OX3 9DU.**

**Lorna Wing** has had a seminal influence on the understanding of autism and a long association with the NAS. She was a founder member and, although officially retired, Dr Wing continues to act as Consultant to the NAS Lorna Wing Centre for Autism.



© www.stockphoto.com/OneBlueLight

We will be running a Q&A (question-and-answer) feature on this topic in our Autumn 2011 issue. If you would like to ask a question (or tell us your views) on this subject, write to the NAS postal or email address, at the top of the page, marking your correspondence 'Brain donation Q&A'. We may not be able to publish all the questions we are asked. If we don't publish your question, we will contact you with a relevant answer.