



## **I Thought I Was Failing at Life. Then I Realised Life Wasn't Built for Me**

It is 2am and I am wide awake, replaying a conversation I had that afternoon.

I can see the meeting room, the fluorescent lights, the way I interrupted someone without meaning to. I am analysing tone, replaying facial expressions, trying to calculate whether I spoke too bluntly or not enough. By morning I will be exhausted, but right now my brain will not switch off. This was my normal.

For years, I believed this was anxiety.

In the early 2000s I was diagnosed with general anxiety disorder, later social anxiety. The labels felt accurate enough. I was anxious. Social situations drained me. But the diagnosis framed the problem as fragility. As something I needed to overcome.

I was bright. I worked hard. I achieved 97 percent at university. I wanted a career in finance. I also felt permanently out of step, as though everyone else had been handed a script for adulthood that I had somehow missed. When a professor told me that if I could not talk to people I would struggle to succeed, I absorbed it as confirmation of what I already suspected, I was not built correctly.

I was severely depressed. I experienced suicidal thoughts. I still handed in excellent work.

I was diagnosed as autistic at 25.

Late diagnosis does not feel like a lightbulb moment. It feels like a slow recalibration of everything you thought you knew about yourself. Research shows that increasing numbers of women are being diagnosed in adulthood, often after years of treatment for anxiety or depression that never quite explained the full picture. Masking, which clinicians now recognise as common among autistic women, allows many of us to appear competent for decades at considerable internal cost.

When I received my diagnosis, there was relief. There was also grief.

I thought about the child who forced herself to maintain eye contact because she had been told it was polite. I thought about the teenager who copied other girls' mannerisms so she would not stand out. I thought about the woman who lay awake at 2am believing she was weak, when in reality she was exhausted from constant self-monitoring.

Diagnosis explained my past. It did not immediately improve my present.

I still had to go to work. I still had to function in environments that were loud, ambiguous and socially complex. I still had to manage meetings, deadlines and expectations that required performance as

much as competence. Understanding helped me feel less broken. It did not reduce overwhelm.

So I began writing about it.

I did not intend to build a following. I was trying to articulate something that felt difficult to name. I wrote about the cognitive load of small talk, about the way December can feel like sensory warfare, about the quiet panic of medical appointments where instructions come too fast. I wrote honestly.

In December alone, more than four million people viewed that content.

Four million is not a vanity metric. It is evidence of recognition. Women in their thirties and forties wrote to say they were only now discovering they were autistic. Men described decades of burnout without explanation. The same question surfaced again and again: what do we do with this knowledge.

The turning point came during a medical emergency in April 2025. I was in severe pain from kidney stones and called NHS 111. I was told to get myself to hospital or I would not be helped. I was overwhelmed and struggling to process instructions. I phoned my father. He stayed on the line with me until I was safe.

Afterwards, I could not stop thinking about the fragility of that support. I had someone to call. That was not policy. That was luck.

Autism Acceptance Month has helped bring adult diagnosis into public conversation. But awareness does not sit with you in A&E. It does not prepare you for a high-stakes meeting when your nervous system is already stretched. It does not help you regulate after a day spent masking.

That realisation is what led to AntiPocket.

It launches on 1 April, not as a symbolic gesture but as a response to a gap I experienced repeatedly. AntiPocket is designed as a steady digital companion for autistic adults navigating work, healthcare and relationships. It offers practical tools for regulation and preparation. It is structured so that organisations can embed it into diversity and inclusion strategies, recognising that increasing numbers of employees are discovering their neurodivergence in adulthood.

I did not build it because I wanted to be an entrepreneur. I built it because I was tired of seeing people reach understanding and still feel alone.

The hardest part of late diagnosis is not learning that you are autistic. It is realising how long you believed you were failing at being human.

If we are finally acknowledging that women and adults were missed for decades, then the next step cannot be more conversation alone. It has to be something solid.

Understanding explains the past. Support changes what comes next.

### **Editor's note**

Rosie is an autistic founder, speaker and author of My Autistic Fight Song. Her social platforms reach millions each month and she regularly speaks and appears on podcasts about autism, ambition and relationships. AntiPocket, her support app for neurodivergent adults, launches publicly on 1 April and is available for discussion during Autism Acceptance Month.

