

My Two Wonderful Journeys of Overcoming *ASD*

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My Two Wonderful Journeys

Of Overcoming ASD

By Lok Quan Heung 樂君享

I had two wonderful journeys

- *My journey to help my child overcoming Asperger's Syndrome*
- *My journey to write this book and get it published*

My journeys prove that there are ways to overcome ASD. Let me share these journeys with you.

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Introduction

This is an incredibly touching story-- one that recounts the journey of a father and son in how they fought against fate and the adversities brought on by Asperger's Syndrome. It proves that anyone regardless of their age and circumstances, with faith, hope, love and wisdom, can overcome his or her development disabilities and go on to live a great life.

Through this book, readers will be brought along onto the journey of how a father and son overcame each of their Asperger's syndrome, getting a peek of the daily struggles and hardships from the perspective of those with ASD, along with the author's self-reflection and in-depth analysis on the ingredients to their success. This book is not only autobiographical but also pragmatic in describing and recording the journey to overcoming Asperger's Syndrome of two generations. It is one of the firsts of its kind in Hong Kong and possibly even in the entire Chinese community.

Having known the author personally for nearly four years, he is an amazing father and husband who is genuine and loving to all those around him, with great social skills as well as work-life balance. According to the author's self-assessment, similar to his son, he also possessed symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome ever since he was a child. However, he couldn't find any professional support at the time because the syndrome was still unknown to most in Hong Kong a few decades ago. So the author decided to rescue himself. Fast forward to now, he feels completely unencumbered and lives with ease. If so, one can definitely call it a successful case.

I have also had the honor to witness the amazing growth and development of the author's son. After nearly two years of training under Potential Development Association for his ASD during his kindergarten years, he now excels in primary school without any assistance or counseling services. He even received the "Conduct and Diligence" award at the end of the year and his teacher commended him as a "well-organized student, with immense leadership potential". Although we cannot foresee his future, the success so far could be an indicator for the solid foundation we have built for the rest of his growth and development.

The success of the author and his son proves that change is possible. Even though one may be born with a development disability like Asperger's Syndrome, it is possible to overcome its challenges and move on to live life comfortably. I believe the author's absolute trust and love in life was one of the secret ingredients to their success. I have witnessed first-hand the author's perseverance and determination in creating positive change as well as his complete trust in therapists and those around him. His relentless and proactive attitude was a great fuel that kept them moving forward in this uphill battle against ASD.

The author slowly began to realize his social and communication difficulties during his teenage years. But like other successful people, he did not complain or sulk. Instead, he persevered and proactively crafted himself strategies and implemented them daily, and slowly but surely, step by step, he overcame the social hurdles brought on by ASD. Two decades later, with nine hard years of struggling behind him, ASD no longer burdens him and he handles social situations with ease and confidence. Through these years, I am sure everyone around him has witnessed his tremendous hard work and growth.

Upon seeing his younger son encountering similar social difficulties like a reflection of his younger self, and its potential detriment to the sibling relationship between his two sons, he panicked. Employing the same persistent attitude and faith from his teenage years, the author made an incredible sacrifice— he decided to take half a year off from work and dedicate his time wholeheartedly in helping his younger son through his ASD. With an unwavering will, he focused all his time in teaching his son and helping him catch up. The author's dedication and love for his son is something we can all admire, and I am so ecstatic to witness the fruition of all their hard work.

Unlike the author's teenage journey, this time around him and his son are not alone in the battle against ASD, but instead with their loving wife and mother, plus a team of professionals, which meant a lot more resources and support than ever before. All the professional resources, advice, support provided a much more systematic training to help his son. The journey to overcoming ASD became a lot quicker and in just a little over two years, there was significant progress. With that said, the success ultimately relied on the author's open heart, trust, and respect for the therapists and professionals.

Their story also brings up some interesting points about a successful treatment. Although both the father and son each triumphantly fought against their own ASD, their respective experiences were completely different, and readers will have a chance to see the juxtaposition and how each approach works.

First of which is the author's method of "top-down," which is driven by his own will and determination to consciously overcome challenges. For example, when he experienced extreme anxiety during a presentation, he told himself to treat the audience as wooden puppets. Eventually it became a habit and was able to suppress his anxiety. The latter was the method of "bottom-up" and homeopathic. Since the son was only a few years old, unaware of the situation, he simply played and participated in activities with his father specifically designed by therapists and professionals. Day by day, he interacted and socialized with others. He learned to read his own mind and understand other people's feelings and affection. The author reckoned his son did not even realize it was therapy at all and was just enjoying himself in those training activities that were designed to feel like normal games and playtime. Relative to the top-down method, the latter was obviously significantly more stimulating, efficient, and fun in which improvements and progress came more naturally.

This is an incredible story of two generations successfully overcoming ASD in each of his own ways. Whether you are someone who has been diagnosed/labeled with Asperger's Syndrome or Autism, or a parent, teacher, social worker, psychologist, or therapists of someone who has crossed paths with it, or simply someone interested in human psychology and its growth and development, I am sure this can become a useful reference and you will find resonance in their hard-fought journey. How can you and I miss out on such an amazing story?

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Preface

I have two sons, Gi, who was assessed gifted, and Ag, who was assessed with Asperger's Syndrome. Gi was very smart when he was a very little boy. He was very articulate, good looking and sweet. He learned fast and behaved well. Everybody liked him. Several good friends of my wife, Susan, kept saying: "You two should give birth to more children." We considered this a big compliment.

Ever since Gi started to attend kindergarten, he kept on getting many awards. At primary school, he was appointed as class monitor year after year. He excelled in every subjects, Chinese, English, Arithmetic and even music, fine arts and physical exercises. He has been a role model and got "Conduct and Diligence" award (see note 1) in every school term.

My second son, Ag, was with Asperger's Syndrome, one kind of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He was absolutely speechless before age 2.5, never said anything. He did not even nod or shake his head. He seemed to be an extremely slow learner. He was a lonely boy, no eye contact, no communication, no verbal expression at all. He was cold to everyone. When Ag was a toddler, we got lost him three times, once in a playground and twice in a shopping mall. When we found Ag, my wife, Susan, held him tightly in her chest. Tears came out uncontrollably, yet Ag was cold absolutely, without any sign of empathy and understanding. I was scared by his behavior. Ag was 3.5 years old but he was still a piece of ice.

In summer 2007, Ag was four and a half. We brought Ag to undertake a six hours long assessment, held on two days separately. In the de-briefing, Sue broke down, trembling. She sobbed in no control. I refused to accept this diagnosis and brought Ag to a clinical psychologist for a second assessment. This time, it was "mild degree of autism".

How could such a big disparity happen to my two children? Gi was way ahead of his peer but Ag was way behind. After recovering from the shock, disappointment and sadness, Sue and I arranged Ag to attend special training school. Time never waited. Six months passed quickly. There was very little improvement. Ag was still an icy child, with very little communication. I worried because Ag became uncooperative and declined Sue's instruction at home, which was

actually training recommended by therapists. Gradually, Sue was losing her patience. She started shouting to the boy. Ag escaped and hid himself in his wardrobe. Sue sobbed helplessly. She was overrun by anxiety and disappointment.

To learn more about Asperger's Syndrome, in the winter of 2007, I started reading Tony Attwood's book "The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome". I was totally shocked and overwhelmed. I realized that I was also a person with Asperger's Syndrome before, in my childhood, adolescence and it lasted till my mid-thirties! The behavior, weaknesses and difficulties of all those children with Asperger's described in the book suddenly aroused my very old and forgotten memories. When I was a boy, I was deemed as shy, sheepish, submissive and stupid. During my youth and early adulthood, I had social difficulties and many unpleasant experiences. Gone were all these bad moments and memories. I had forgotten all these, perhaps for more than 20 years. However, these sorrows and unhappiness suddenly all returned to my mind in a lightening flash. These memories were hurting. As a father, I determined to disallow the same painful curse shadowing my child life long. I would dare every effort, every cost, every day and every minute to help my son.

It was also at year end 2007, Gi passed the gifted children assessment of both The Chinese University of Hong Kong and another university respectively. Gi started to join training programs run by these universities. It was hard to balance between Gi and Ag. Sue and I were happy and motivated by Gi's fast learning but worried a lot that Ag was behind significantly, in certain aspect for two years.

After many sleepless nights, I made two decisions. First, I took six months no pay leave beginning from year 2008. I wanted to seize the "golden learning period" to help Ag overcoming the obstacles. Second, it was our utmost priority to help Ag in all aspects. Gi was very smart, enthusiastic and pleasant. He kept a smiling face all day long. It was never-endingly enjoyable when guiding, teaching or playing with Gi, yet I had to turn and pay attention to Ag instead, who behaved like a freezing stone. I knew that it would be a long journey, perhaps full of difficulty and disappointment, yet I strived to close the gap between Gi and Ag.

Gi was a lovely boy and very smart. He learnt everything fast and was outstanding even when he was a toddler. If I had spared more time with him, he would have had developed even better.

When I looked back my decision then, I did not have any guilty feeling of giving priority to Ag. But I admitted that I was very unhappy. On the other hand, I knew that if I did not change my priority, no chance there would be a happy family.

There came a wonderful journey. In that six months, Ag learnt very rapidly, much faster than anyone had anticipated. In several rounds of term review, all therapists and trainers were surprised of the speedy progress. In June 2008, they reckoned that Ag could start to mix with other normal children. At home, I observed Ag closely. I noticed that symptoms of "Asperger's Syndrome" was diminishing fast. There was still a little traces but Ag was changing into a NORMAL child.

On July 2, 2008 I returned to work. In the week after, Sue received a term report from Ag's kindergarten. Ag was awarded "Academic Merit". This was really surprising. Sue and I never expected this, not even in our dream. We kept muttering thousand times ourselves: "This is unbelievable". Seriously, this little award out weighted the total of Gi's six years academic achievement awards, plus all other awards and prizes together. The dedication input and income foregone together was nothing worth mentioning. The decision to take leave was the best ever in my life!

Initially, special training school advised that it would take two to three years to train my child. To me, this implied uncertain and unpredictable result. Surprisingly, in just six months, Ag had improved rapidly and all-rounded. Sue regained confidence and her happy face. We did something right, very right. Ag attended special training in several centers concurrently. In these centers, I met several Ag's classmates and their parents as well. From what I heard and what I observed, these classmates were not progressing as quickly as Ag. Their parents felt helpless, even hopeless. If I share with them my own experience, what advice I have got, what I have done, what books I have read and what I have learnt, then it will help these families a lot. If these children learn and progress merely a little bit faster, it will bring happiness, warmth and hope to these families.

I am not suggesting parents to copy or replicate what I did. There will be limited help because each and every child is different. I just want to encourage other parents. There is a way to overcome "Asperger's Syndrome", absolutely. Never give up. Please keep on educating and

encouraging these kids. Give them good care and love, always. In fact, during that six months, I had read a few good books, very touching and very inspiring. Let me introduce them.

I also like to tell my children that caring and accompanying is important, precious, and even miraculous. In Hong Kong, parents generally work very long hours to provide for their children, but overlook accompanying their children and moral education. It should be the other way round. I also want to teach my children not to give up. When there are difficulties, look for solutions, consult professionals, seek for advice, read and do their own analysis. Keep a positive mind. One day, they will overcome.

I believe that I was also a person with Asperger's Syndrome before, but I have never got any special training, guidance or counselling. How did I overcome? I had many sleepless nights and finally figured out an answer. It was a 20 years long journey to overcome. I pushed it through in a very hard way, but it was a not good experience. Anyway, I shall also present it. I believe that it is be a useful reference for teenagers, their parents and special education professionals.

Finally, I and my son have been impacted by this syndrome. What if my future grandchildren have the same syndrome? They will face it two or three decades from now. By then, I shall be an old man. I shall neither be energetic enough to guide the next generation nor be able to recall the details. Leaving them with a reference, giving them encouragement, demonstrating a positive and firm commitment definitely worth my time and dedication to write this book. Everlasting love and care will overcome any obstacles.

Aug 2008

Note 1 : It is a general practice in all Hong Kong primary schools to give awards to good students These include (1) "Conduct" award, (2) "Diligence" award and (3) "Conduct and Diligence" award. The third award is for the best group of students. Very few students get this award.

Chapter 1 - Family Education is Paramount

Sue and I had never raised any child with Asperger's Syndrome before. However, when I decided to take 6 months leave from work, I was very sure that I could help a lot. In the end, the outcome was much better than what I had expected. Why was I so sure before? It was all about my experience raising my elder son as well as my several firm beliefs.

Firstly, I believed that family education was paramount and should start early. Since I became a father, I began to read about child mentoring and education. I attended many seminars too. All books, teachers and experts talked about the importance of early family education i.e. before the age of six. It would be hard to change a child after six because his / her personalities were formed, actually solidified. The period before six was the "Golden Age of Education" which parents could not afford to miss. In early 2008, Ag was around five years old. I would regret if I did not grab this golden age.

Secondly, I believed that emotional quotient (EQ) was more important than intelligence quotient (IQ). Personality was more important than IQ too. Among all intelligences, creativity was the most important.

Thirdly, I believed that for family educating, a good start was winning half of the battle. When children were praised, they would be motivated. They would learn fast and happily. In return, there would be more applause and more motivation. This cycle would repeat and repeat. The children would become self-initiative, leading to a bright future. Parenting would be easy and enjoyable.

Once I was proud of the fact that my elder son, Gi, was gifted. I firmly believed that it was built on good family education. Several kindergarten teachers had said to us: "Mr. and Mrs. Lok, seeing what Gi has achieved, I'm sure you two have put in a lot of effect in family education."

Gi was indeed intelligent and articulate. He was able to recite Tang poems when he wasn't even two. He once joined a competition at a mall just by coincidence and won a prize. Since then, his

talent was unfolded. In kindergarten, he won story telling competition at K1 and K2. The school requested him to perform at the graduation ceremonies. Gi had no cold feet. He went straight to the stage and performed very well.

In K3, Sue and I stopped Gi from joining the competition again. We did not want him to win again and became arrogant. In that year of K3, he had got the “Conduct and Diligence” award for three consecutive years. He was nominated to join the “Outstanding Student” competition in the district and he won that too! Indeed, Gi got approval all the time. Sue and I just needed to help him a bit, making sure that he was on the track, then off he went his way and performed well.

When Gi was admitted to primary 1, he was immediately appointed the class monitor. He excelled in all subjects and won lots of awards. Sue and I did not push Gi. We just checked his homework and asked him to correct mistakes. We had never arranged extra tuition for Gi, but he did well. At weekends, he joined various activities and he enjoyed all of them. Every teacher and coach said that he was good.

In primary 2, the school teacher told us that Gi was gifted. Sue and I did not believe. We did not take any action. However, at the end of the school term, he was recommended by the school to attend an assessment by The Chinese University of Hong Kong and another university. As predicted, he was found to be gifted

I thought about this seriously. I was rather sure that Gi was not with an extremely high IQ. However, he was passionate about everything. He was eager to learn and paid good attention to the teachers and instructors. But why? Probably because he had a good start. He had received lots of applause since he was a little boy. This built his confidence and steady attentiveness to school. He had an inquisitive mind. We never forced him to do anything which he didn't like. All the activities which he participated in were within his capabilities as well as slightly challenging, which inspired him.

What Sue and I considered most important was Gi's moral education. Let me explain.

Our living quarter was reasonable comfortable. We owned a car and had a domestic helper at home. We insisted Ag to be polite with the helper. He went to bed early and got up early. He always greeted his parent goodnight before going to bed.

We seldom bought him expensive toys and instilled him “value for money”. We taught him not to be wasteful. When a toy was broken, we checked if the problem could be fixed. When a shoe was broken, I checked if possible to mend this using super glue. I asked Gi to observe so that he learnt not to waste.

In the McDonald's fast-food restaurants, we encouraged Gi to help himself, for example, getting paper towels, straws, spoon and fork himself. These were the best ways to train children. Gi was about four years old, but he handled all these well. Miss McDonald would not hesitate to praise. Gi heard this. He was encouraged and became more willing to try. When Gi was 4.5, we trained him to bath himself, tidy up and dress himself. We stopped our domestic helper from helping Gi.

It is not easy. If the parents both go to work and there is a good helper at home, then the child will have very rare opportunity to learn self-caring. In this case, how can the child become a class monitor?

I kept on instilling "Don't be afraid of difficulties. Face Challenges" concept to Gi. When Gi was five years old, I asked him to push a baby trolley up hill, with Ag in the trolley. It was a long walk. The sun was blazing. Gi sweated a lot. He face and his neck were wet. Sue and I did not offer to take over but we encouraged him all the way: “Good boy. Keep going. You can do it”. Yes, Gi did it. Once arriving home, our domestic helper greeted Ag with a big smile: “Good boy. Well done.” We enjoyed ice cream together happily. This happened more than four years ago but Gi still remembered this scene and laughed.

I took Gi to country side. On our way, a big cockroach somehow landed on Gi's shoe. I told Gi to shake it off and step on it. He was only 3 years old but he did it without hesitation. In primary school, all students were afraid of cockroaches. They screamed and fled except Gi. He stayed calm and stepped on the cockroach. All his classmates considered Gi as a junior hero.

Summer in Hong Kong is wet and humid. Our bedrooms are all air-conditioned. One summer night, I brought Gi to sleep on the floor in our sitting room. I did not want him to be spoiled. With this experience, he learnt to be adaptive to environment. Air conditioning was not a must. In primary school, he became a leader. He could adapt.

In primary school, all students were required to wear shoes with shoe laces. I taught Gi to tie shoe laces. I stopped our helper from doing this for Gi. In a parents' gathering, the school principal shared her experience. A year 3 student got his shoe laces undone. The principal was just standing by. This student asked her to help because he could not do it. I told Gi this story, reminding him to take care of himself.

I have many stories of this kind. I can keep going and write a very long chapter. I firmly believe that family education is the foundation to nurture a warm, polite, inquisitive, adaptive and well performing child.

Is it easy to teach? Yes, for each of these training independently, but no, when grouping them all together as one piece. This needs many years of commitment. In Hong Kong, many parents work long hours of overtime. When arriving home, it is time for the child to sleep. How to spare time for parenting? On weekends, parents are at home. However, it takes steady attention to cultivate. Parents must pay attention all the time. It is a lot easier to rest or play games or watch TV with the child, leaving all house duties to the helper. I was very fortunate that when Gi was a kid, my office work load was not very heavy. I spared time and paid attention.

I was once very proud of myself in good parenting. Now, I still have a sense of pride, but more modest. The journey with Ag to overcome Asperger's Syndrome has allowed me to learn much broadly. I know that there are still a lot to learn.

Let me share my journeys of overcome with you.

Chapter 2 - A Long Journey of Diagnosis

It may not be easy to diagnose that a kid is with Asperger's, even if the parents have extensively consulted professionals. It took my family 2.5 years.

Ag is not our first child. Sue and I are experienced parents. Furthermore, after Ag was born, Sue quitted her job and became a full time housewife. We had a domestic helper at home. Therefore, Sue could spend long hours with our children. Gi started to speak before eleven months old, but Ag did not speak, except "Mum" even at age 2. Sue and I knew something was not right. We paid more attention to Ag. We had consulted lots of professionals, nurses, family doctors, therapists and trainers but nobody had ever mentioned Asperger's Syndrome. Eventually, when Ag was 4.5 years old, we took him for a very comprehensive assessment. Then we were informed of the diagnosis. This did not make sense. Sue and I did not neglect Ag and we indeed started consulting professionals quite early yet it took 2.5 years to get diagnosed. How could this have happened?

In Hong Kong, there are Maternal and Child Health Centers run by Department of Health. Parents can take new born there for health check, free of charge. This is normally done by a registered nurse. If the nurse finds any problem, the baby will be further examined by a physician. When Ag was 1.5 years old, we raised for the first time that Ag was late in speech learning. The nurse advised: "Don't worry. Ag was just behind a little bit. Please continue to observe." From then on, we got the same piece of advice in every follow up visit. When Ag was 2, we consulted a family doctor. We still got the same piece of advice. I would not say all those clinical and medical staff were ignorant and unreliable, but they could have been more serious when examining Ag.

Down's Syndrome was never a concern for us because we did proper examination when Sue was pregnant. From the day to day observation, we knew that Ag did not have hearing impairment. We tested this several times by speaking to him from behind and he had reaction. Ag could not be deaf. He could understand instruction, but he was just speechless.

Slowly, Ag exhibited some unusual behavior. He liked jigsaw puzzles a lot. He could easily put together jigsaw puzzles of 70-80 pieces. This was very demanding for a toddler of just 2 years old. Ag seemed to enjoy it and assembled the same set of jigsaw repeatedly, day after day.

Ag liked to arrange his toys in a straight line, 0.5 meter long, then 1 meter 2 meters and so on. He kept lining up his toys daily. He also liked watching little train circling on the track on and on. He seemed to be obsessed, ignoring everyone and every matter. He did everything in silence.

We also tested him by touching his arms, his shoulders but he did not respond, not even raised his head or eye ball. There was no eye contact in any circumstances.

When taking his bath, he was very afraid of being sprayed head-on. He would attempt to avoid, occasionally even pushed away our domestic helper. He did all this in silence. We knew from his face that he was in fear. One day, I was at home when he took his bath. He stayed in the bath tub considerably longer than normal. Since it was time for dinner, I urged him out. Ag refused. Against his will, I and our helper pulled him out, dried him with a towel and dressed him. Ag struggled fiercely. Even we had completely dressed him up, taken him out to our living room, he still struggled hard, trying to undress himself and making way to the bath room. I and my helper tried to stop him. He struggled with all of his strength, violently and ruthlessly. After around ten minutes, I gave in. I knew either Ag or I would get hurt. Ag rushed back into the bath room and resumed his bath. In no second, he was as calm as a little sheep. In his tub, he kept head down, focusing on his little toys as if nothing had happened. He did not even raise his eye ball for a single moment. How could a young toddler, 2 years old, fight fiercely against two adults like a small tiger, but in absolute silence for more than 10 minutes? His face was red and twisted. He stared just towards the bathroom and never turned his eyesight to us. This scared me.

When Ag was 2.5 years old, we brought him to meet a speech therapist. I would never forget that assessment. In forty-five minutes, we heard just the assessor's instruction. No matter how hard she tried, using as many different methods or toys as she could get, Ag was absolutely speechless. The assessment result was obvious. Immediately, we arranged speech therapy for Ag.

We lived in Sai Kung district. Every Wednesday, Sue took Ag for therapy. My office was in Wanchai. Normally, I took half day leave and joined Sue in the clinic in every other session. To me, these training sessions were very important. Sue and I wanted to be there, to get involved, to assist, to understand the progress, to share with the therapist so that we could follow up at home appropriately.

I joined these training many times. I concluded that there was nothing wrong in the way which Sue and I taught Ag. However the speech therapist was even better. She had more and better training aids than we had. She was knowledgeable and professional. She explained to us the theories behind. She used a great variety of toys which are training aids. Each of these was for a particular training purpose. I noticed that in every session, she tried something new i.e. new method or new approach. In a few instances, she even made toys or tools for her own usage or goal. Clearly, she had an agenda.

Speech therapy was in term of three months each. In the first term, Ag started to speak, word by word. In the second term, Ag's speech ability continued to improve. Sue and I were happy and relieved a bit. We kept going for the third term. However, in the middle of the term, a senior therapist suddenly told us: "It is no longer necessary to bring Ag to clinic for further training. Ag has already developed ability to learn from the day to day dialogue." This remark was much unexpected. Could Ag really do this?

Indeed Ag could, but slowly. Other issues came up which drew my attention. He was three years old then. He behaved as below.

- He played in solitude all of the time and in silence.
- He hardly responded to people. Even he did, there was no eye contact. Actually, he never raised his head.
- His tone was flat, no variation. He uttered word by word at a constant interval. There was no affection.
- If he answered our questions, it was not up to the point. He was jumping around instead.
- He had no sense of danger. When we went shopping, we had to hold his hand all the time because once we released, Ag would keep going, going and going. Even if we yelled, he would not stop. Once we lost him in a shopping mall. We found him quickly. However,

no matter what Sue said, softly or angrily, he showed no sign of understanding. He was already 3.5 years old.

- He never had any facial expression. He often played alone, occasionally with Gi, but even then, I noticed that the two boys were together physically but there was hardly any communication. He never showed joy. He never laughed or gurgled.
- He showed no social etiquette. At kindergarten, he would never say good morning to other children or teachers even when Sue was next to him, encouraging. He never grinned to anyone.
- He scribbled a lot of drawings but nobody could tell what he sketched. It was messy. I asked but his description made no sense. He seemed to have no idea of the real world.
- He was afraid of height. If I held him up to my shoulder level, he screamed and kicked fiercely. When we brought Ag to a playground, he was afraid of going up a slide or a swing. If we pushed him, he yelled and struggle in despair.
- He could not spit. When washing hands, he simply stretched out his hands under running water. He could not rub his palms interactively.
- He could not hop with both legs. Body balancing on one foot was very difficult. He was unable to ride on a tricycle, because he could not control the pedals.
- Ag did not show any affection to people. My elder son, Gi, wanted Sue every moment when he was an infant. He wanted Sue to accompany him every night, otherwise he could never fall asleep. This lasted until Gi was four. To the contrary, Ag never requested for company, not even once. Initially, I was happy because Sue and I did not need to bother. We were free. Today, however, I would say that if an infant never pleads for company of parents when going to bed, this is not a good sign, might even a symptom of Asperger's.

When Ag was 2 two years old, Maternal and Child Health Center referred his file to Social Welfare Department Early Education and Training Center (EETC) for assessment. There was a long waiting list. The estimated waiting time was around one year. Seeing Ag's abnormalities, Sue and I checked with nurses, speech therapists whether Ag was autistic. Everyone replied "Does not seem like". I could not leave it so I started to read. I found more than 60 symptoms on the list. If an infant exhibited 30 or more, then it was considered autistic. In my opinion, Ag was showing 10 or a bit more.

In August 2006, Ag finally undertook an assessment in an Early Education and Training Center, EETC. Sue and I brought him there. I observed and recorded down as much as I could. Today I still have it in my file. The outcome was bad, very bad. Everything was behind. Gross motor, fine motor, language ability, self-care capability were behind normal by 1 to 3 years. Self-esteem was behind by two years. Cognitive ability was behind by 6 months. In no area Ag reached the norm. But the report did not mention Asperger's Syndrome or Autism or any comment close! EETC started to schedule training. We did not wait long this time. At age 3.5, Ag started special education. There were two training sessions per week, including speech therapy, occupation therapy and physiotherapy. In addition, there was a monthly training session. A group of kids came together to learn basic social skill.

In one year, there was considerable improvement in gross and fine motor, just slight improvement in language ability and cognitive capability but almost no improvement in social skill. He still ignored the outside world and had no interaction with people around.

Other than EETC, I also enrolled for Ag training courses run by another non-profit making organization. I showed the report of EETC. This organization took Ag in without further question. Once a week, Ag attended one hour training together with a group of children who were also behind in development. The course focused on mainly social etiquette, body balancing, gross and fine motor. The trainers were experienced therapists. Ag was there for approximately one year, yet no trainer had ever mentioned Asperger's Syndrome to Sue or me.

The first person mentioning Asperger's Syndrome to me was my sister. One of her friend's son was suffering from dyslexia. This lady mentioned the syndrome to my sister. She urged me to bring Ag to private clinic for further assessment. In her opinion, governmental clinic did not have enough resources and the assessment was not in-depth. Initially, I resisted. Ag had undergone assessment by specialist several times. He was undertaking training conducted by specialist and was improving. Why bother to do another assessment? Furthermore, my sister did not know the exact term 'Asperger's Syndrome'. She just knew that there was such a syndrome but was not able to explain further. I was not persuaded.

My wife Sue worried about this more than me. She urged me several times. Seeing that Ag was indeed behind the peer and the big disparity between Gi and Ag, I changed my mind. In July 2007, we brought Ag to a private specialist. Initially, the assessment was scheduled for 3 hours but we realized that it was not enough. So we did a further assessment of additional 3 hours.

One month later, when receiving a report, we were told, for the first time, that Ag was with Asperger's. I was very angry, upset and disappointed. I brought the report to Early Education and Training Center. The Center arranged a clinical psychologist to assess Ag quickly. The result was mild degree of autism. Immediately, EETC arranged additional training sessions.

Even today, I still find it regretful. Irrespective of the fact that Ag had been assessed many times, from age 2.5 to 4.5, by qualified specialists, yet no therapist had ever mentioned Asperger's Syndrome or Autism to Sue or I! I had no doubt that all these specialists cherished our son. However, how could this have happened? I could think of two possibilities. First, Ag was quiet and calm at centers. He hardly created any trouble and appeared to follow instruction, but was very slow and speechless. In general, therapists and trainers did not have any chance to see his behavior at home, those icy behavior which made Sue and I shiver. So they did not consider Ag very poor, just behind in learning and development but not autistic. Second, Ag was trained by multiple therapists in each respective discipline; speech therapy, occupational and physiotherapy etc. There lacked a comprehensive cross domain assessment. In such circumstances, it was very difficult to identify the real issue. Behind in a few areas such as speech ability, gross motor and fine motor, would not necessarily mean autism, hence invoke clinical psychologist. I believed that this was the root cause.

When I became anxious, I arranged assessment by a private clinic. There were two specialists throughout the entire assessment. In between, additional specialist joined. All together it was a 6 hours assessment. How about the assessment committed by governmental agency? It was led by one specialist, normally 45 to 60 minutes. There was a big difference.

I had no intention to blame anyone. I understood the limitation of resources and the complication of ASD diagnosis. It was not an easy job. On the other hand, I was grateful to EETC which provided training to Ag since he was 3 years old. These services were of high quality and

great value-for-money. It costed me virtually zero, while the service fee of private clinic was much higher.

In Hong Kong, people know about Autism, but Asperger's Syndrome is not a term that people generally know. All my friends are university degree holders or experienced parents. When I mentioned this, none of them knew, not even had heard this before.

I write a lot of details of this long journey of diagnosis because I want other parents to be aware of Asperger's Syndrome. In my case, because of lack of knowledge, I lined up for years until a point I turned to private clinic, until then I found out.

How about myself? I never knew that I was also with Asperger's until I reached my middle age. If I had got some kind of guidance or training, I could have had a more pleasant childhood or youth, a happier social life and less difficult experience. I shall describe it in a separate chapter.

Not long ago, I was listening to a radio program about ASD. There were ASD children diagnosed at the age of 6 or 9. I wondered how hard it would be.

Chapter 3 - Playgrounds, Overcoming Sensory Integration Dysfunction

Children with Asperger's Syndrome often have sensory integration dysfunction. If I remember correctly, in every 10 children in Hong Kong, there is one having a certain degree of this dysfunction.

What is sensory integration? The best way to explain this is perhaps by giving an example. A person throws you a softball and you want to catch it. Observing and judging its speed, direction, attitude, you move, make a big step, raise your arm, reach out, then you catch the ball. Actually, from your very first sight of the ball, your brain is transmitting commands to your body, your limbs, your hand and fingers. Every part of your body works together and you catch the ball. This needs an organized and integrated body sensory system. Human beings sense in several ways, seeing, listening, tasting touching and smelling. These sensing abilities are well known. Sensory integration experts will tell you more, i.e. proprioceptive sense and balance sense. Kids run and jump. They do not fall easily. It is because they can balance. When going up and down stairs, we don't need to watch our steps, but we manage. When a boy rides on a bicycle, his feet rest on the pedals, but the boy does not need to watch. These are all controlled by proprioceptive sense. If this sensing system misjudges, we shall fail to align our body, our limbs and fail to balance ourselves. Kids with an under developed sensory integration capability will have difficulty in body balancing and other body motion control. They may even kick themselves without any reason, slip or fall.

Sensory integration dysfunction impacts a lot more than one can imagine. Children who do not have good control of their fingers cannot write neatly. In kindergarten, they don't sit up straight. They often rest their bodies on the desks or sit with strange postures, behaving as if inattentive. They are hesitant to play with other kids. They don't mix with other children and form group. They don't hop or dance, don't know how to throw or catch a ball. They are afraid of height. If you hold them up, they will be scared and may even cry. When stacking small blocks, they are unable to position the pieces properly. They need help to button up, to zip and unzip and to tie shoe lace. From a teacher's perspective, these kids are inattentive, behind in development and need help all the time. From time to time, they even exhibit weird behavior.

I first found Ag a bit unusual when he was about 2 years old. I took Ag to a community center for group activity. The instructor led the kids to warm up by stretching their legs and arms. Every kid was happy to follow, except Ag. He stayed in my arms. No matter how much I encouraged him, Ag declined. After warming up, other children participated in activities and enjoyed, but Ag never joined. If I pushed him, he was scared. There was fear on his face. He shrieked. When I took Ag to a playground, he never enjoyed. He was afraid of going to the merry-go-round, or swing, or slide. He yelled and struggled if I took him up. By that time, I did not know sensory integration. I thought that Ag was afraid of height, and was a bit behind in development. There was nothing to worry.

Unfortunately, I was wrong. There were more and more issues.

- At age 3.5, Ag still had never hopped. He could not control the pedals when riding on a tricycle. He did not know how to throw a ball because he could not swing his arm. He grabbed it, pushed and then released. When asked to walk along a straight line marked on the ground, he swayed and went out of the line. When stacking small blocks, he could not stack one on top of another precisely.
- At the age of 4.5, Ag could not balance when standing on one foot. He had difficulty to catch a ball of 8-inches in diameter. When practicing this at home on in the center, he failed often. He would never move his body or his steps. Working with both hands simultaneously was a problem for Ag. Lastly, he could not bend his thumb.
- When I taught Ag to put on socks, he could repeat my instruction precisely. However, he could never got his sock up his foot in the right position.
- At age 5, it happened a few times that when Ag put on his underpants, he took the front to the back, but he did not know. He did not feel any difference!
- He was unable to follow what I was pointing to even if the object was within ten feet.
- When washing hands, Ag just let water running through his hands. He could not rub his hands. We demonstrated repeatedly but Ag just did not get it.
- He could not spit. He could not blow his nose.
- He was very afraid of showering on his head. He resisted vigorously, yelled or pushed me away.
- He had difficulty to button up. He needed help.

I was unable to judge if these problems were caused by sensory integration dysfunction, yet beyond doubt, Ag was way behind other children of the same age. He was not confident. He did not want to join other children for activity.

If parents do not know sensory integration dysfunction, they may misjudge their children as stupid, stubborn, slow learner, inattentive.... These comments hurt the children. Once the children look down on themselves, it is very difficult to rebuild self-esteem. In special education center, Ag attended two training sessions per week, taking part in a variety of activities and exercise. Furthermore, the therapist recommended Ag to do 'home work'.

Initially, Sue guided Ag to do 'home work'. It helped but just a little bit. At home, there was very limited exercise or activity that Ag could do. For example, Sue and Ag practiced to catch a ball. They did this in our sitting room and repeated the same game daily, at the same place. This was actually very boring for a young child. Even worse, Ag failed to catch the ball in most of the time. Ag was made to practice again and again but he did not like it at all. This was no good. This actually undercut his confidence. Both Sue and I understood that we should encourage Ag, but no matter what we said, Ag knew that he could not do it. Gradually Ag became incorporative. He evaded, resisted or escaped. Sue started to lose her morale. During weekend, I took over but it did not help. Ag still refused to co-operate. He was 5 years old. There was not much time left to catch up, because in around 1.5 year, Ag would start primary school. It was also critical to catch up and close the gap between Ag and Gi. If not, this gap would be a long nightmare for the family. Finally, I decided to take no pay leave, and helped Ag personally. I brought him to playgrounds for exercise and activity as a daily routine.

The mission was to change the very boring 'home work' to interesting activities, which Ag enjoyed and had fun.

All therapists recommended Ag to go to the swing in children playground as this would help a lot. Merry-go-round was also good. I turned the merry-go-round as fast as Ag could balance on it. I took Ag to the top of the slide and let him down. Therapist told me that if Ag was not afraid, it would be even better to slide down with head first. Of course safety was the first priority. Parents should seek advice from therapist. I was very surprised that it was not easy to find

swing in playgrounds. There were just a few and they were short. It was not easy to swing high up. It was never comparable to those swings in special education center which was made to swing in all directions as well as to turn simultaneously. It was also not easy to find merry-go-round in public children playgrounds. Surprisingly I found it in the children playground of two government housing estates i.e. Choi Wan and Choi Ha respectively.

It became my daily routine to bring Ag to playgrounds, to play and to have activities. I ignored 'home work'. I did not set any target for Ag. I never pushed him to go to the highest slide in the playground. I allowed him to do whatever he liked. No matter what we did, it was absolutely just for fun. Otherwise, Ag would not go and it became a failure. From time to time, I asked my Filipino helper to join us too. It was because I hurt my back some years ago. I could not do very vigorous exercise. My helper played with Ag, so that I could rest. During weekdays, there were not many children in playgrounds. Sometimes, it was very quiet. With my helper there, Ag had a playmate and was happy.

This turned Ag around all together. At home, he resisted training. However, he would never refuse going to playgrounds. He enjoyed the activity, which from my perspective was training. Relative to two hours of training weekly, ten hours weekly in playgrounds were 5 times as much. I knew that Ag improved quickly.

Going to the same playground day after day would not be interesting. So I brought Ag to different playgrounds within eastern and central Kowloon such as Tseung Kwan O, Hang Hau, Kowloon Bay, Kowloon City, Lok Fu, Morse Park, Ping Shek, Lok Wah and Sau Mau Ping. I had a car. I drove to a playground even it was a bit far away from home, such as Shatin, Tai Po and Sai Kung. Actually, we had been to all playgrounds within 20 minutes by driving. What's more, since Ag attended special training in Wanchai, I even brought him to Victoria Park. Other than public playground in large parks, I also brought Ag to children playground of governmental housing estates. The one in Sau Mau Ping was large. We had been there several times. Both Ag and I enjoyed our time there.

I found slide in almost all playgrounds, but they were short. Hardly there were any slide tall. In Ping Shek Children Playground, I found a slide with two levels. When Ag was there for the first time, he was afraid to go up to the higher level. Since Ping Shek Playground was close to our

home, we went there very often. In just 3 months, Ag changed a lot. He overcame his fear and insisted to go up to level two. I also found a two levels slide in Shatin New Town Plaza Playground. These slides were tall. When coming down, the momentum generated good stimulation for Ag. Therapist also suggested to bring Ag to children rope courses. However, it was surprisingly difficult to find any, except in Victoria Park, Shatin New Town Plaza and Choi Ha Children Playground. I started my leave in Jan 2008. We went to Choy Ha every week. At first, Ag was afraid to go up the rope course. I did not force him. However, every a few weeks, I encouraged him to try. With lots of exercise day after day, he improved very quickly. In around Sep 2008, i.e. 9 months after, he overcame his fear. He climbed to the top and waved to me with a big laugh. This was an important milestone. Not only he became energetic, aerobatic and confident, he also wanted compliments. He had never exhibited this behavior before. In the past, he just played himself and had never asked for company or compliments. This was a good sign.

If it was a rainy day or was too cold for outdoor activities, I brought Ag to indoor children playgrounds. We went to Lee Yu Mun, Shek Kip Mei, Tai Kok Tsui, Sham Shui Po, Ho Man Tin and even those on Hong Kong Island, such as Java Road and Lei King Wan indoor playground. These indoor playgrounds were all run by Hong Kong Government Leisure and Recreation Department. In these indoor playgrounds, there was no slide, no rope course and no climbing rack for children. It was not an ideal place for exercise. However, when weather was not good, I could only bring Ag to these indoor playgrounds to stretch his limbs, to run around or just to enjoy. This also provided him with opportunity to meet other kids and socialized.

No matter in any playground, I never sat down in a corner. I worked out some activities for him. In any indoor playground, there were usually many exercise mattresses. I asked Ag to pile up the mattresses as a way to exercise his arms. I also asked him to place these mattresses apart, then jump from one to another. If he could manage, I pushed the mattresses further apart and encouraged Ag to try again. I put candy or small toy under a mattress and asked Ag to search. This was interesting. What's more, I wanted to teach Ag "Do not give up easily". If he could not find the candy and intended to give up, I gave him a little bit of help, then encouraged him until he found it.

I never stopped proposing new games to Ag and encouraged him. I never limited Ag to do exercise within parks or playgrounds. In country side, I asked Ag to climb up trees. When strolling along pedestrian walkway, I asked him to climb up lamp posts. At hill slope, I told him

to run uphill then come down. To encourage Ag, we competed, to go up and come down. I suggested him to jump from a piece of big boulder to another, as long as I considered it safe. As far as Ag was concerned, these were all for fun. He enjoyed and laughed, and so did I. To me, it was a success to make him exercise. I knew that his sensory integration capability was improving quickly.

In Shatin Central Park, there was an unusual slide. It was built on a natural slope of boulders, reinforced by concrete. There was no staircase or handrail. Children stepped on the boulders to go up. We went there first time in April 2008. This caught all of Ag's attention. Ag could step freely on any boulder to go up. In other words, Ag chose his route, any. He was very excited. He dashed to the slope and went up straight. I worried that he might slip so I followed him very closely. In an hour, Ag just kept going up, sliding down again and again. He never missed any step. He was agile and energetic. He was totally differently from what he was 6 months ago. He went up swiftly and decisively. His sense of body balancing was very good. I never needed to give him a hand. One hour was over. He sweated a lot, more than ever I brought him for exercise. His T-shirt was wet, probably his underpants too. He was tired. He stopped yet he had a big smile.

That night I spoke to Su. "It is no longer necessary to bring Ag to playgrounds for sensory integration training". I did not mean that Ag caught up all together and had overcome this dysfunction. There was still further room for improvement. However, bringing Ag to playgrounds for exercise would not help a lot any more. He needed other stimulations. After a few months, I arranged him to practice in-door rock climbing and roller-skating. These were very good activities. Unexpectedly they helped to build up Ag's confidence.

In my opinion, two hours of training weekly in a special education center was not enough for Ag. Exercising in a playground helped tremendously. All therapists and professionals recommended me to bring Ag to swing, to climb rope courses, to enjoy merry-go-round. We did. We went daily and exercised for two hours. It increased training hours by 5 times. Ag had great fun, instead of doing 'home work' which was boring. I brought Ag to different playgrounds. We played different games. We did all these for fun. These joyful activities had turned Ag around within just six months.

Timing is important. Bring kids to exercise, to have fun when they are still studying kindergarten. They can spare time. Once in primary school, they attend full day education. There are a lot more homework. It becomes much more difficult for children to spare time. Most importantly, if the children still have problem in sensory integration, they will have difficulties at school. They may look down on themselves. Then, it becomes an issue.

At the age of 5 years and 8 months, suddenly Ag managed to blow his nose, first time ever. Although he could not do it each and every time, it was still a big progress. When Ag was 4 years old, Sue and I knew for the first time that his inability to blow his nose was a matter of sensory integration dysfunction. From then on, we had never complained. I just brought him for activities as frequently as possible. Then he made it one day!

I did not mean that Ag had fully overcome sensory integration dysfunction. I would only say that he had improved significantly. He had caught up a lot. He was no longer very behind other children of the same age. He still did not co-ordinate very well in certain body movement. Nevertheless, he was willing to participate in the activities at kindergarten. This was a big change. Relative to what he was at age 2, a kid resisting any group activity, he was totally different.

No matter a child is gifted or with Asperger's, please bring him/her to playgrounds and enjoy. Let the child do whatever he likes and have fun. This helps their development tremendously.

Chapter 4 - Bakugan Balls, From Icy Silence To Happy Communication

I read several books about Asperger's Syndrome. Generally speaking, children with this syndrome do not have problem in speech capability. All therapists in various training centers also made the same comment. However, Ag had problem and needed speech therapy.

This was extremely disappointing to Sue and me. In both my family and Su's family, no child had ever undertaken speech therapy. I checked with my father. I did not have any problem when I was a little boy. Furthermore, our first child, Gi, started to talk when he was only 11 months old. He was ahead of other children. Sue and I were very pleased. When Ag was born, Sue quitted her job and became full time at home. Ag was taken care of by Sue from birth. He had even more time with Sue than Gi, who was taken care of by our Filipino domestic helper from birth to age 4. In other words, Ag had more chance than Gi to learn Cantonese, yet he was absolutely speechless before two year old. I observed Ag closely. I knew that he was not deaf. However, he just did not talk, not a single word before age two, absolutely.

Finally, we took Ag for speech therapy. I could see four distinct phases of therapy.

Phase One. From age 2.5 to age 3.25, Ag undertook speech therapy. There was good improvement. He started to talk. Very soon, he was able to communicate with us about his basic physiological needs.

Phase Two. From age 3.5 to 4.5, Ag undertook training in Early Education and Training Center (EETC). Speech therapy was part of the program. His speech ability improved steadily but not as quickly as phase one.

Phase Three. At age 4.5, Ag was diagnosed as with Asperger's. The training program was changed immediately. He was given more training hours with focus on tackling autism. His speech capability improved faster.

Phase Four. I started my leave. I accompanied Ag to attend all training classes. I arranged exercise and activities for Ag, giving lots of new experience to him. Ag enjoyed. He became a lot more social and confident to express himself. His speech capability improved very quickly.

Let me describe these phases in details.

Phase One

Since birth, we have brought Ag to Hong Kong Governmental Child Care Center for regular check-up. I raised my concern several times that Ag was behind in speech ability. Every time, the duty officer answered: "Don't worry. Please continue to observe it." At around age 2, the duty officer replied: "Let us schedule an assessment". However, there was a long waiting list. When Ag was 2.5 years old, Sue and I decided not to wait and consulted private speech therapists. I learnt from our friends that Speech Therapy Department of The University of Hong Kong (HKU) offered a special service. Therapy was conducted by university student, under the guidance of professors. Ag undertook speech therapy there for a total of approximately 8 months.

Sue took Ag to these lessons, once a week. I took leave and accompanied every two lessons. In that period, Ag started learn to speak, first by single word, then by short phrase, then extended to simple dialog. I really admired these student therapist of HKU, because I did not see many training aids, as compared with other speech therapy centers which I visited subsequently. These students bought or even made training aids themselves, specifically for Ag. I guessed HKU did not provide training aid deliberately so that the students needed to solve their own problem.

Training aids were small toys such as small chair, small table and small cars. The student therapist trained Ag word by word e.g. a chair, then phrase by phrase e.g. sit in a chair. Gradually, Ag learnt and started to speak. In fact, Sue and I knew the tactics. We taught Gi before in the same way and Gi was very articulate. We trained Ag also in the same way, but we were just unable to make Ag speak.

Speech therapy center encouraged Sue and I, or at least one of us, accompanying Ag. To me, the focus was not to learn how to train Ag but rather to have a clear understanding of Ag's progress so that we could do corresponding training at home.

We carried on with the therapy in HKU. The student therapist told us that Ag was doing well and improved steadily. I agreed. By the end of the eighth month, the professor guiding the student therapist suddenly came to Sue and me. She told us that Ag had possessed the ability to learn speaking at home. It was no longer necessary to bring Ag to HKU for therapy. This was a big surprise. I could not tell how the professor got this conclusion. From what I observed afterwards, the professor was right. Nevertheless, it did not mean Ag was all right. He had problem in speech and verbal communication, in many other dimensions.

Phase Two.

Ag started to line up for Early Education and Training Center (EETC) at age two. Just a few weeks after stopping speech therapy in HKU, we received a notification from EETC to bring Ag for assessment. The result was bad. He was behind the average for 1-3 years, in various child development such as fine and gross motor, speech ability and self-care ability. Within two months after this assessment, we received a notice. Ag started special education in EETC.

This training center was near to my home, but far away from my office. I could no longer join and observe on site. Initially, Ag undertook two training sessions per week, which included one hour of speech therapy.

Ag was approximately 3.5 years old. He spoke to us only about his physiological needs, for example, "hungry", "eat", "rice", "noodles", "drink milk" and "T shirt". He never said anything other than these needs. He would never greet other people. He ignored other people's greetings. He was cold to people and stayed alone. Sue and I had to repeat and repeat our question, only then he responded. He answer was very short. He used the same word and his tone was absolutely flat. It was just like replaying from a voice recorder!

I discussed with Sue many times. I told myself not to worry. Mr. Albert Einstein was behind other children for years in speech ability, but he was the great scientist of centuries. Subconsciously, I was afraid of facing the reality. Fortunately, I turned and changed my mindset.

As Ag undertook speech therapy. He started to speak. However, it was very weird that Ag liked English more than Cantonese, our mother language! Sue and I read story books to Ag, knowing that this was a good way to teach him. However, Ag liked very much English stories but did not like Chinese at all. He wanted Sue or I or our Filipino helper to read English stories, again and again. If we switched to read Chinese stories, Ag was unhappy. Occasionally he stayed with us until we finished. As soon as we finished, he insisted to switch to English story. If we refused, then he turned and left. Ag was about four years old. His favorite was a book series "Thomas, The Little Train". This was a series of short story books, each in the range of 15-20 pages, 70-80 words a page. Ag had a very good memory. We read the book a few times, say 7 or 8 times. Ag could remember every single word. If I made a mistake when reading, he pointed out immediately. I found it weird that Ag could point out our mistake only with English story book. He could never do this with Chinese stories. Why? Furthermore, Ag wanted us to read. He never read himself. Sue and I tried to persuade him by every means but we never succeed. If we insisted, he simply left. At age 5, Ag's kindergarten asked each child to read a story in class. Ag was excited. He practiced at home. That was his first time ever to read out loudly. He kept practice and practice. We did not need to persuade him at all. I reckoned that by that time we had read 3-400 books to Ag, 90% was English.

At home, Ag started to communicate with our Filipino helper in English, and only in English. There were lots of grammatical mistake, but he was very confident. He never hesitated. Gradually, I noticed that his proficiency in English was a lot better than Gi of the same age. At approximately the age of 5.25, Ag started to mutter to himself. This was a good sign because all children went through this before speaking fluently. What surprised me most was that Ag muttered in English, even when he was dreaming and talking to himself!

At home, Sue, I and Gi all spoke Cantonese. Even our Filipino helper spoke a bit Cantonese. Why Ag liked English better and learnt English quicker than Cantonese? I had no clue but I worried. I started to do some research. We consulted Ag's trainers and other speech therapists. We even consulted the governmental Child Development and Assessment Center. We did not miss any opportunity to consult but to no avail. I was sure that this would slow down Ag's learning of Cantonese.

In a meeting with a clinical psychologist, a proposition came into my mind. In general, children with Asperger's had good memory of text. When I read an English story book to Ag, I read the text. When I started over again, it was the same piece of text. Cantonese, however, is a local dialect. When I read a story, I was not reading the text. I was reading the content in Cantonese, a dialect. In a sense, I was translating the written Chinese text to a spoken dialect. Each time I repeated the story, I was doing another round of translation of the content. The translated piece was not exactly the same as the previous one. This confused Ag! He did not enjoy. He liked exact. Children with Asperger's did not like ambiguity. This was the reason why Ag liked English story. The above was my own proposition. I had no proof. I had never discussed my idea with any expert. I asked Ag many times: "Why do you like English story better?" He never gave me an answer. Anyway, I would like to share my proposition.

At the age of 3.5, Ag started special training. Gradually his body co-ordination became better. He had better control on gross and fine motor. However, there was not much improvement in social skill and speech ability. Actually, he still did not have social interaction with people.

Ag never said good morning to other children, no matter how much we encouraged him. He never greeted the teachers at kindergarten. He ignored Sue and me at home. He hardly responded to anyone. It was more precise to say that Ag had "social barriers" rather than speech incapability.

Finally, at age 4.5, we brought Ag to a private special education center for assessment. The result was that Ag was with Asperger's Syndrome. EETC arranged a clinical psychologist to assess Ag quickly. The result was "mild degree of autism".

Phase Three

The private training center did not conduct speech therapy for Ag. They believed that it was a cognition issue, rather than a speech ability issue. Ag never said: "Good Morning". In his mind, he did not have any idea of human interaction and social etiquette. So he did not say: "Good Morning". If Sue and I encouraged Ag, he greeted other people occasionally, but never out of his own initiative. His cognition was limited to physiological needs such as food, drink and body

feeling such as coldness. He knew his parents, brother, Filipino maid, teachers and classmates but did not have a good understanding of the relationship. Of course, there was no social interaction.

Private training center took Ag onto swings in the center. There were many different kinds of swings, all very different from those in children playground. They were specially built for training, to stimulate the development of speech ability.

Frankly speaking, I did not understand how swinging a child could help. I was also not happy that private training center did not conduct speech therapy for Ag, but I did not oppose. I had no knowledge to challenge the professionals. Moreover, therapists of other centers also mentioned that going onto swings would help speech development. So I just kept paying attention. In a few months, Ag's speech ability improved steadily. I was happy. I could never tell whether Ag had benefited from the training or whether it was the Ag's natural footstep to start talking. Anyway, Ag started to speak more and in Cantonese. Then, the real big progress came after I took leave.

Phase Four

I started my leave when Ag was 5 years old and accompanied him every day. At that time, Ag could speak in full sentence, but it did not mean that he could communicate. He had the following problems.

1. Ag was a cold person. He hardly responded to parents, teachers and classmates. Even if he responded, his tune was flat.
2. When he spoke, there was no any facial expression. He hardly laughed.
3. He never formed group and played with other children. In his classmate's birthday party, he did not join other children. He stayed alone in a corner even Sue and I encouraged him repeatedly.
4. When conversing with Sue or me, he side tracked from time to time. We were not sure whether he did not understand the topic, the conversation or whether he was not attentive.

5. From time to time, he used expression or phrase which nobody could understand.
6. He spoke rapidly and focused on his own interest. Once finished, he turned and left. Sue and I advised him repeatedly but he simply ignored us.
7. If he finished his own topic on phone, he would hang up abruptly, in a poor manner.
8. In special education center, there was a monthly training session on social skill. Each participant was asked to introduce oneself. Ag managed but he repeated exactly the same piece of introduction ever and ever. It was like replaying a recording.

I knew nothing about speech therapy. I tried to research in the public library but to no avail. I could find books about sensory integration and play therapy. I read and I could follow. However, I could not find any book on speech therapy! This was a surprise to me. I could only seek advice from therapists. Some told me that it was a cognition problem, in particularly social skill and social interaction.

All therapists encouraged me to chat more with Ag, to inspire him, such as telling stories, playing games, reading poems or even singing. Sue and I had attempted all these but not successful. He was never motivated.

I borrowed sets of story cards, or “scenario” cards from EETC. There were 6 cards in a set. Sue and I interpreted these with Ag, telling him the story. He followed us to repeat the story once or twice, maximum 3 times, then never again. In my opinion, these story cards were too easy or not interesting enough for Ag. His favorite was “Thomas, The Little Train series” which was in English. Of course I read the story in English. Sometimes I deliberately interpreted it in Cantonese. In either way, Ag just listened. He refused to read. I tried with other Chinese story books, but to no avail. All these helped just a little bit i.e. he listened only but refuse to read or talk. None of the training aid was powerful enough to inspire Ag. I looked for other methods.

One day, Ag’s cousin came to visit us. He brought some toys. Gi, Ag and their cousin started to play together. Suddenly, Ag started to talk and talk, much more than usual. I was amazed. Then I found out why. There was a cartoon series “Bakugan Battle Brawlers”, being shown on TV. Ag’s cousin brought several pieces of Bakugan ball. The boys played together. They were very excited and started talking to one another. Subsequently, Ag and Gi asked me to buy “Bakugan

ball” for them. I did. From then all, they started to speak with jargons which I did not understand at all: “Shoot, Bakugan Ball, Explode...”, “Crab Beast”, “Holy Light Fighting Tiger”, “Evolved Warrior”, “Gate Card”, “Three thousand drops of blood” and many other phrases

All of a sudden, it enlightened. This was the right training aid to inspire Ag to speak. Since I was on leave, I started watching this cartoon series. I learnt the story, the characters and the jargons. I started playing with Ag. He was very happy. We conversed as we played. Very soon, we had a lot more topics. “Where to shop for Bakugan ball?”, “What model to buy?”, “Which one was a good buy?”, “Which one you like?”, “Which Bakugan ball is powerful?” Bakugan balls were cheap, just Hong Kong \$10-\$15 each. They were available for sale everywhere. No doubt these little Bakugan balls increased the dialogue between Ag and me as many as TEN folds. Furthermore, the dialogue between Ag and Gi also increased enormously. These little balls were 10 times more powerful than any other training aid or media to trigger Ag to talk! This solved all my problem.

Later, I even used ‘Bakugan ball’ as an incentive to teach Ag, e.g. to do a little bit of housework, to have courtesy, to exercise a bit more in playgrounds, to behave well, to be a good boy etc. Ag learnt very fast and changed. Actually, in these respects, Ag had never paid so much attention to Sue and me before. It was amazing.

In EETC, Ag was undertaking speech training with a girl. Two of them practiced to have conversation. One day, I purposely took several pieces of Bakugan ball to the training class. Once I took the balls out, the two kids started to talk and talk. They both watched the same TV cartoon series at home. There were many topics between them! Normally, these kids followed the therapist, strictly phrases by phrases. They were not motivated. However, with Bakugan ball on the table, they behaved as if they were two different persons. They kept talking and talking until the therapist told them to STOP! What a big difference it was? Then the therapist began to ask the children what that little thing was. Of course, she did not know. During day time, she worked in the center and had never watched the series on TV. When the class was over, I recommended her to get Bakugan balls to the lesson.

I kept using Bakugan ball as an incentive to motivate Ag until the end of the TV series. Then, Bakugan ball was sold out in market.

In the fourth month of my leave, Ag started to mumber, telling stories to himself. This was a good sign. But his stories was extremely short. He stopped quickly. I wanted to help.

Ag played himself with toys, such as little tiger, little deer, little sheep etc. His story was brief. A tiger approached a little sheep from behind. It ambushed, caught the sheep, end of story. It was very simple and short. Ag did not have much imagination. I wanted him to keep going. So, when he began his own story telling, I joined. "There is a little sheep grazing. A tiger approaches quietly from behind. It ambushes but misses. The little sheep escapes.....", "An elephant comes. The tiger is taken aback. It retreats....", "A lion comes. Both the tiger and the lion hunt for the sheep. They fight....." When I joined Ag for stories, we kept going and going. I could easily extend the story much longer. This helped Ag to speak more as well as enriching his vocabulary.

With little toys on hand, I could easily extend the story with Ag. However, it became very difficult once there was no toys around. For example, if I said: "It starts raining..... The wind is strong....." Ag stopped right away. In reality, there was no rain, no wind. He could not imagine. I said: "Little sheep runs away and hides behind a tree....." I moved the little sheep behind an object e.g. a stool, a book, whatever I could grab easily, or just behind my arm. However, Ag would also stop talking, because there was no tree. There was just a stool or a book but no tree. He was extremely short of imagination. The only thing which I could do was to keep more small toys at home. As soon as I said: "Little sheep goes behind a tree, " I immediately took out a toy tree from my collections. Then Ag would continue the dialogue with me.

As I kept talking and playing with Ag, his weakness of lacking of imagination diminished slowly in around 6 months. I said: "Little horse runs up a hill...." I took a chair and moved the toy horse up the chair, as if it went uphill. Ag started to accept and continued the story with me. This was good, indicating that he started to have imagination. At that time, he was approximately 5 years and 9 months old.

During the period I took leave, I helped to bath Ag daily. I did not want my Filipino helper to do this. I wanted to accompany Ag as long as possible. When Ag was taking his bath, I looked after him as well as talked to him. One day, he had a plastic doll with him in the bath tub. We took it as if it was water skiing. An idea came to my mind. I named the little doll with one of his

classmate's name. Ag was inspired. He took it as if his classmate was water skiing in the bath tub. Ag and I started to make up a story. His classmates was water skiing. "Oops, he loses balance and falls into the water...", "He submerges, but comes back up...", "Another classmate joins. Two of them start to race. More and more join. It becomes a racing event, first heat, second heat.... then final", "The runner up is The winner is" Ag was extremely excited. We kept on talking and talking. We had never had a dialogue so long, actually made up such a long story in his bath.

On the following few days, Ag insisted to bring that little doll to his bath again. Obviously, Ag was excited with the story that his classmates were water skiing with him, racing in the little bath tub. This was a very good experience. Naming the little doll with his classmate's name inspired Ag a great deal. His story telling time tripled at least.

Ag never sang. Sue and I knew that he had learnt a few songs in kindergarten. We asked him many times to sing at home, but he refused. We kept trying, but never succeed. One day, our elder son, Gi, got a piece of home work to do. He needed to do recording, using our computer at home. After Gi had finished, I had an idea. I asked Ag to sing and record it with the computer, and then replay. He did without hesitation! That was the first time that he ever sang at home. From then on, whenever he learnt a new song at school, he would record it into our computer. Obviously, Ag was excited to use the computer, to do recording and replaying, not singing! To me, it was fine. It made Ag having conversation with us. It was a kind of speech therapy as well as a training to make Ag more social. Years later, Ag exhibited very strong interest to operate our computer at home.

Playing or having fun with Ag was not the only way to inspire Ag to speak more. There were many other opportunities in the daily routine. From time to time, we asked Ag to do a little bit of housework. For example, after dinner, we made him responsible for taking his bowl and his own pair of chopsticks to kitchen for washing. After bathing, we made him to dry himself, to dress himself. When teaching him, we had a dialogue with Ag.

When we shopped in supermarket, we asked Ag to pay by presenting our electronic payment card. Ag found this interesting, so he did and we had a conversation.

On minibus, I trained Ag to tell the driver where to drop us off. When we had lunch in a fast food restaurant, I trained Ag to take care of himself such as to order food, to pay money. I even purposely missed to get paper towel. Then I encouraged Ag to get it from the service. At first, I accompanied Ag and let him ask. After a few times, I encouraged Ag to go himself. Further on, I asked Ag to get folks and spoons. When he could manage, I got him to ask for drinking water from service. The tasks which I assigned to him became more and more demanding. Actually, getting a glass of water from the service counter to the dining table was a good training of social communication as well as body co-ordination. This trained Ag to hold and balance the tray with a glass of water on.

Were these easy? Yes, each was easy. However, it was even far easier for me if I made Ag to stay at his own chair and I did all these myself in a restaurant! These are nothing for any adult. I suspected that the majority of parents would choose to do all these for their child with Asperger's. However, I chose my way, the difficult way. I had to spend more effort, not only to train Ag but also to observe closely, day-after-day. Once Ag managed, I worked out another task, another training which was right for him. I dedicated to help my child through.

When I arrived home, I commended Ag before Sue. Sue knew my purpose and encouraged Ag too. In about 3 months, Ag built up his confidence. He managed to do a lot by himself in fast food restaurants.

It would be an easy life for me if I had made my Filipino domestic helper to bath Ag. I could rest. However, I decided to take this up instead. Then I could chat with Ag. Honestly, I struggled when I first played Bakugan balls with Ag. I had to watch the TV cartoon series and learnt all those terms and jargons. These terms were nonsense in real life. Was I silly? Could what I do help Ag? Fortunately, very soon Ag spoke more, and more, and more. No doubt, I was right.

I recommend parents to spend time with their child. When playing with him, please forget that you are his parent. Make sure that you become your child's playmate. It is not easy. I tried it before. Once you become your child's playmate, it helps significantly. Please consider this "When you have fun with your good friends, you become talkative, right?"

Do whatever you can to bring him fun. Give him good experience. Bring him good memories. Money is never a concern. It costs very little to buy several pieces of Bakugan ball, or pieces of small toys, such as small animals, small car, small aircraft. Use computer recording to induce him to sing. All these help the children to talk. The most challenging piece is to be with your child all the time and figure out a way. If I had not taken 6 months leave off duty, it would have been very hard. Sue and I had a lot of time with Gi and he learnt fast. If we did not have those good experience in educating Gi, then I would not have the courage to help Ag.

At the end of my 6 months leave, it was just Ag's quarterly review. Ag showed very good progress. He spoke to people in a more organized way. When having a dialogue, his points were more relevant. When speaking over the phone, he had slowed down and started to listen. He also started to have eye contact as he spoke. Furthermore, he became more ready to respond when Sue or I talked to him. Of course, there was still room for improvement. Overall speaking, we were happy.

After another 3 months, there came the following assessment. Ag's verbal communication ability improved again. According to the therapist, he was able to 'associate' and 'categorize'. He exhibited ability to 'classify', 'group' and 'deduce'. In all these aspects, his ability was quite close to the children of the same age. His use of vocabulary and phrases was rated as 'more or less sufficient'. Given a series of story cards, he could deduce what had happened. He could tell the complete story. After taking part in a game, he could recollect and told us very briefly what he did. However, he could not tell what his partner or other participants were doing, not even how many participants there were. Strictly speaking, this was not a problem of speech ability. Again it was a social skill issue, i.e. not paying attention to other people. Irrespective of this, Ag's verbal communication skill had improved a lot. Sue and I were very pleased and satisfied.

Ag will never be talkative. He will not be good at debate. He will not be a good Master of Ceremony. Nevertheless, he will be able to make friends and communicate with one another. He can do it.

Chapter 5 - Play Therapy, A Joyful Experience

This was a wonderful experience which I would never forget. Towards the end of my leave, by chance I brought Ag to “Play Therapy”. It was marvelous. Ag became a lot more confident. He learnt to do role playing. Even more importantly, he started to care for other people. This was a major milestone of overcoming the syndrome. I learnt a lesson too, that is, to ‘respect’ my child. It was a great lesson for me, as a parent.

I met a good social worker. She taught me a lot. She also introduced a book to me. It was a good book, very easy to read and very informative. It explained the power of Play Therapy. I recommend it to all parents, no matter your child needs special education or not.

What is ‘Playing’? There are 5 key points. First, it must bring happiness to the child. Second, it is not for an objective, but just for fun. Third, it is self-motivated. Forth, it is led by the child, not by parents, not to mentioned trainer or therapist. Lastly, it is full of imagination.

I had lots of discussion with many professionals and therapists. They all emphasized that when I conducted training at home, I better treated myself as a ‘Playmate’, not a father. As such, I would get the best out of the activity or training.

During my leave, I brought Ag to children playground daily. My goal was to help him to overcome sensory integration dysfunction. I kept reminding myself to make it joyful for Ag. However, one day, Ag said: “Dad, you don’t have to take care of me every day.” I was taken aback. I knew that Ag did not want to go. He wanted a rest. What should I do? I was running against time, to help him to catch up. It was early summer. The weather was becoming hot and humid. Mosquitos were around in the playground. It was no longer very pleasant there. After all, Ag had good progress already. It was time to have a change.

Clinical psychologists and early education experts kept telling me: “Let Ag explore more. Try different activities as much as possible.”

Following these recommendations, I kept exploring for Ag. I happened to find that there was a children 'play room' in Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) Lok Wah Estate. They offered Play Therapy. It was conducted by a trained social worker.

According to this social worker, this service was to help children to relief their stress. She emphasized a lot that this service was not training, but allowing the participating child to play. I explained the background of Ag. She took down notes very seriously. Then she scheduled 8 sessions of play therapy for Ag. It commenced in May 2008. Ag was around age 5.25 then.

The responsible social worker did not allow me to join the play therapy sessions. She even advised me not to ask Ag what had happened in the session. I was very surprised and confused. In the past, I joined every training with Ag or at least observed in the room. I wanted to know how the training was as well as Ag's progress, so that I could do the right thing at home. Every trainer or therapist allowed my presence, some even asked me to join. But this time, I was recommended not to present, not even to ask: "Ag, what did you do in the session?" I was not happy.

The social workers explained that this arrangement was to give Ag total freedom. In the session, Ag would be allowed to play any toy he liked, any game he wanted and in any way he preferred. She would not intervene at all, even if Ag played in a 'wrong' way. For example, if Ag did not put a mini-train on the rail but used the train as a hammer to knock, she would not stop or intervene, unless Ag hurt himself or caused damage in the play room. Ag would be allowed absolute freedom of choice. If she saw Ag behaving in any way abnormal, she would inform me after the session.

This social worker also told me the following principles when conducting play therapy.

- First: Do not disturb the child. Allow him to do what he likes.
- Second: Do not teach the child to play in the "right" way because this will undermine child's creativity.

- Third: Do not ask questions such as, "Why do you hit this person (the doll)? Do you hate him?" This disturbs the child. Then, he will not show his mind, his feeling and his will.
- Forth: Do not show appreciation, because appreciation constitutes a target or a goal which defeats play therapy. For example, if a child makes a good shot with a basketball, then it is no good to commend. Good shot becomes a standard thus creates an expectation. Instead, therapist should encourage: "You are focus. You don't give up. You keep trying" Praise the good behavior, not the success.
- Fifth: Pass on the responsibility to the child. For example when the child asks for help to do a task which he/she is capable of, then encourage the child to do it. This nurtures his sense of responsibility.

The first and second points were self-explanatory and not difficult. However, the third, fourth and fifth points were not easy. I tried at home. When paying attention, I managed to do the fifth. However, if Ag was doing something silly, how could I keep quiet? How could I refrain from asking? Interruption and inspiration was only a line apart. I could only remind myself constantly.

The social worker was professional and enthusiastic. She told me her observation at the end of each session.

Session 1: At the beginning, Ag was nervous but soon relaxed.

Session 2: Ag was comfortable.

Session 3: Ag enjoyed completely. However, the social worker observed that Ag was quiet. He seldom talked. He never laughed. This was exactly what I had observed. Trainer and therapist in many centers gave me the same comment.

Pieces of good news came steadily. In one session, the social worker told me that Ag started to murmur, telling story to himself. These stories all had a positive ending. For example: "A little rabbit was playing. There came a tiger. Little rabbit dashed behind the bushes and escaped." "A child started a journey, firstly on a car. The car broke down midway. This child took an aircraft. However the plane ran out of fuel. The child went on board a ship. The ship was slow. Eventually the child arrived his destination safely." Notwithstanding the hiccups, Ag's stories ended positively. According to the social worker, if the story ended in a negative way, then it

was a bad sign. For example, the tiger killed lots of prey. There was serious casualty or tragedy in the journey. In these cases, there was something wrong in Ag's mind. We would need to help.

Obviously Ag enjoyed these sessions. The stories which he murmured to himself became longer and longer. At home, the same was happening. There was good, better than I had expected.

We did not have any doll at home. In one session, Ag picked up a baby doll. He bathed the doll and dressed her with care. This was a surprise to me. Later, Ag even asked to borrow a doll in another early education center. It showed that he started to care for other people.

In the last section of play room, Ag suddenly gave recommendation about the setting of Play Room. Both the social workers and I were very surprised and pleased. This implied that Ag started to pay attention to what was around. He was willing to present his idea, to start communication. This was a good indication that he was on the way of overcoming autism.

According to the social worker, play therapy is a way to help kids to 'speak', to show their feelings and present their ideas. Children have a limited vocabulary, hence not expressive verbally. Their behavior exhibits their affection and their mind. Therapist observes and find out. This helps adults to understand the children, those ideas hidden in their mind. I have learnt a lot in these 8 sessions of play therapy.

In addition, these sessions helped to build up Ag's confidence. In the first lesson, I told Ag that I would leave him alone in the center and came back after one hour. It was clear on his face that he did not feel very comfortable. It was the first time ever that we left Ag alone with a stranger. It was a good experience for Ag.

After each lesson, I had a time with the social worker. I knew the progress. I could make corresponding training at home. The fact that Ag liked to have a doll was a good example. It was just the moment that Ag started to show that he cared for other people. At the end of every session, Ag reminded me to buy afternoon tea and refreshment for his brother, Gi. He would also hold the lift for other passengers and let them exit first. Of course, I took this

opportunity to praise him. In the mid-term report of Ag's kindergarten, the teacher wrote 'Ag is a helpful boy'.

'Role Play' was a good way for Ag to learn social relationship. It was an excellent time to have play therapy. Ag started to try role playing. For example, he held a toy taxi in his hands and imitated himself as a taxi driver. Children with Asperger's are weak in imagination. At home, with toys around, Ag could imitate. However, once without any toy on hand, he could not. Unexpectedly, play therapy helped me a lot. In the play room, there were far more toys and varieties than what Ag had at home. As such there were more roles that he could imitate himself easily, a doctor, a cashier, a builder, an astronaut etc. Furthermore, every session was 7 days apart. It became an attractive event which he looked forward to each week.

Even better, there was absolute freedom in the sessions. Ag chose his favorite, did whatever he like and in his own way. There was no 'the wrong way to play'. Ag was free. This enabled Ag to develop his imagination.

In all special education centers, trainers told me unanimously that for little kids, the best training were built on games and activities. They did everything possible to make the training interesting. Having said that, the trainer was the leader in these activities. In the play room, however, Ag was the leader and the only one. It was another world for Ag. In addition, this social worker was a charming lady. Her care and patience helped Ag to relieve and be home in the sessions. All of these together brought a joyful time to Ag.

Before this play therapy, I was in a bad mood. It was the fourth month of my leave. Ag was no longer eager to go to playgrounds. At home, he even declined to join me for various activities, which were actually training. These had become too easy for Ag but I could not figure out anything else to inspire him. I had several sleepless nights. It was by chance that I found play therapy in YWCA Lok Wah. This turned around the situation immediately. After two sessions, Ag kept saying: 'Great fun. Must go again'. As such, I resumed a good relationship with him. We were fortunate to meet a very good social worker. Ag got along with her very well. In the following Christmas, Ag insisted to send her a Christmas card. It was a very pleasant experience for Ag.

This was a joyful experience. Was it by chance? Was it fortunate? Was it due to the fact that I took expert's advice seriously? It was the perseverance to search for the right activity that made this good journey. I learnt a lot, not just play therapy, but more importantly to respect my child, to turn and find the most suitable activity for Ag. This was the only way, the right way to overcome autism.

Chapter 6 - Never Give Up, Motivating Myself

During my leave, I kept pushing himself. I was racing against time. There were three reasons.

- First, I took 6 months leave. I gave up income. It was a serious matter. If I could not achieve what I targeted for, then it would be very bad.
- Second, my company granted me 6 months leave. It would not be easy to extend further.
- Third, Ag was five years old then. In the following year, he would start to attend full time primary school. Time was running short. If I could not help him to overcome, it would become more and more difficult.

In the course of training, there was setback from time to time. For example, Ag had little progress. He did not follow instruction. Therapist and I had different opinions. Sue and I had different views etc. All these created stress. I needed a way to cope and kept positive. I read books.

I read a book “Dibs in Search of Self”, Chinese version, by Virginia Axline. This book fascinated me. I spent just two nights to finish reading more than 300 pages.

In kindergarten, there was a boy, Dibs. His intelligence quotient was extremely high, but unknown to anyone. Dibs was speechless. He never smiled and joined any activity. He ignored other pupils and teachers. He stayed at a corner or under his table. If he was pushed to join activities, he resisted violently. He yelled, struggled, pushed away or even bit others. His mother came to pick him up daily in a car driven by a chauffeur, but she was always late, seemingly to avoid other parents and students on purpose.

Dibs was calm only when the teacher was reading a book. Dibs isolated himself by sitting or lying on the floor, away from the group, but not too far away from the teacher, within listening distance. He was in silence. Nobody could tell whether Dibs was paying attention or day dreaming by himself.

Dibs' parents were wealthy. They donated large sums of money to the kindergarten. As such, the chancellor instructed to accommodate Dibs. Allegedly, Dibs' father was a famous scientist. His mother was a well-known cardiologist. She described Dibs as "having an emotional and cognitive disorder" because there was a problem in his brain. The kindergarten arranged medical doctor and psychologist to examine Dibs, but all to no avail. Dibs spent two years in the kindergarten until one day there was a strong complaint from parents of other children. Dibs bit another student badly. It was time for decision and action.

Why Dibs behaved this way? He was born and brought up in a seemingly impeccable family. Both his dad and mum were extremely well educated and had big achievements. His mother even gave up her job and took care of Dibs full time at home. What was the cause of the problem, Dibs' seriously bad behavior? Dibs had a sister, who was 'perfect', in the opinion of the mother. However, Dibs hated her sister. Why? Why Dibs' sister did not have any abnormal behavior? Why they were so different?

Finally, the kindergarten invited a top American clinical psychologist Ms. Virginia Axline to help. In 34 weeks, a miracle happened. Ms. Axline corrected Dibs' behavior. She rescued this very smart boy, turned around his parents, restored peace and happiness in the family and the kindergarten. Finally, Dibs became a happy student. Several years later, he was assessed as highly gifted, scoring 168 in IQ test. He was admitted to a school for gifted children and excelled.

Ms. Axline did not instruct Dibs or his parents. She arranged play therapy with Dibs, on weekly basis. In the book, Ms. Axline described these thirty-four sessions with lots of details, what she arranged, what the boy did, the interaction and conversation between the therapist and the boy, how the boy took it and finally how Dibs parent reacted and changed For each of the play therapy session, she substantiated by giving her intent, the theory behind and Dibs' reaction. To me, this book was full of insight, experience and wisdom. I was touched, affected and motivated.

Dibs' story fascinated me greatly. It displayed the great importance and power of family caring. Dibs was highly gifted, but his parents made a big mistake in his early childhood. Dibs was not autistic at all but he chose to isolate himself subconsciously, to protect himself. He developed very serious social behavioral problems too. Ms. Axline was great. With her top professional

skill, she changed Dibs. She unfolded the true cause i.e. his parents did not want to have a baby from the very beginning! She did not tell Dibs' parent upfront. She let the mother discover and speak herself. As such she turned Dibs' parents around and rescued the whole family. My child was with Asperger's. His situation was very different. Nevertheless the story of Dibs motivated me. With the help and advice of a group of the first class therapists, I kept pushing on with no fear. I believed that I and my child would overcome.

Every psychologist, early education expert, social worker know "Dibs in Search of Self". They are all touched too. It is actually on university required reading list for undergraduates. It is translated and published in many languages. Please don't miss out this book. It is very easy to read, somehow like a novel with a surprising and marvelous ending.

'A Smile as Big as the Moon' (Chinese version) by Mr. Mike Kersjes with Mr. Joe Layden is also a great book which has inspired me enormously. Dedication, care and love is magical.

In Alabama, there was a 'U.S. Space & Rocket Center'. The Center ran a weekly 'Space Camp' once a year. Student astronauts, joining this Space Camp, would undertake very intensive training. Then they would board a simulated space shuttle for a space mission. Whenever a problem happened, student astronauts would have to deal with it as a team, make their judgement and solve it. This Space Camp, of course, were designed for the gifted, talented and the best students.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, there was a special education school, Forest Hills Northern High School. Mr. Kersjes was a teacher, as well as a football coach. By chance, Mr. Kersjes read an article about Space Camp. A very unusual idea came up. He wanted to bring his students to Space Camp. Mr. Kersjes and his co-teacher, Ms. Robynn McKinney, were responsible for teaching students with different learning disabilities or disorder, dyslexia, Down's Syndrome, Tourette syndrome, ADHD, ADD, autism and eating disorder etc. Many of these students came from broken families. They had serious emotional or behavioral problems.

These students were labeled as behind, sub-class, stupid, lack of learning ability, troublesome and unable to take care of themselves. However, Mr. Kersjes thought that bringing these

students to Space Camp was a good move. It would enable these students to learn the knowledge of rockets and space, mutual respect, team work and regain self-esteem. They would not abandon themselves.

The first person who agreed to support Mr. Kersjes was his co-teacher, Ms. Robynn McKinney. Since summer 1987 to 1989 until the students completed Space Camp, the two teachers spent 1.5 year to overcome countless big obstacles. With a strong belief, they finally attained incredible achievements.

The first one against Mr. Kersjes' idea was the school principal. He described it as 'crazy'. The second person who objected was the school inspector. With the objection of direct senior, a normal person would retreat, but Mr. Kersjes did not. He escalated to the president of the school board. The president admired his guts and hard work, thus gave Mr. Kersjes his support.

Mr. Kersjes sent a letter to the director of Space Camp. There was no reply even after weeks. Mr. Kersjes did not give up. He sought for help from the Congress man. It happened that this Congress man was the chairman of The Committee on Science, Space and Technology in Washington which had a partial jurisdiction on Space Camp. The Congress man gave a phone call to Space Center. Only one day after, Mr. Kersjes and Ms. McKinney were invited to Alabama to explain their proposal.

The Director of U.S. Space & Rocket Center was full of questions and suspicions. On the following day, he was straight: 'Space Camp is for the best and gifted students. This is silly to bring twenty students who needs special education to Space Camp'. The two teachers strived. After the interview, the director suggested to the Head of Space Camp Program: 'Please have breakfast with the two teachers tomorrow morning.' In the breakfast of the following morning, the Head said: 'I checked. You two are not here to gather glory for your resume, but for the children's well-being. Therefore, I recommended to enroll these students and the Director has approved'. She added very solemnly: 'I make a pledge with my career. You two must guarantee to do a good job'. This was an unparalleled demand. Mr. Kersjes and Ms. McKinney almost fainted.

Contrary to the belief of everybody, entry to the Space Camp was a big surprise. It became a hot and big topic for everyone. Special needs students needed to learn and undertake training seriously. They would be responsible to conduct mission in a simulated space shuttle. They would compete with many other teams of gifted students from all over United States. Could they managed?

The first challenge was to find appropriate teaching material. There was none, of course, designed for special needs students, not even in the Space Camp. After checking around, the two teachers sought for help from Space Center Houston. This center was not attached to the center of Alabama. Entry to Space Camp did not mean anything to Houston. Perhaps, sincerity of the teachers touched the head of Houston Space Center. He generously promised to provide teaching material, free of charge.

These materials were for normal students. How to make these material suitable for students with special needs? It was another big challenge for the two teachers. They had no knowledge of rocket and space shuttle. They had to learn too!

These students had different degree of learning disabilities. Teaching them was not easy. It was necessary to convert or reform the teaching material from Houston Space Center to fit these students. Generally speaking, these students were weak to learn by listening. They needed images. They learnt through other means, such as practicing with their hands, trial and error etc. Mr. Kersjes and Ms. McKinney deserved great respect. They created games for their students so that they learnt how to operate space shuttle. They made cardboard games to simulate space missions. The students then learnt fast.

Another good way was to build models, so that the students picked up the design and operation of rockets, space shuttle and propulsion theory. It cost a big sum to buy rocket models, more than 4,000 US dollars. Fortunately, the model manufacturer offered help, sponsoring all models. Once with models on hand, Mr. Kersjes made an attempt to assemble. At first, he had difficulties. He did not make any progress even after one whole day. Suddenly, a boy volunteered to help. He took a box of model home. On the following day, he came back with a good rocket model. The two teachers were amazed. This boy, once assessed as IQ below

normal, became a leader of the team in model building. His long neglected talent became dazzling.

These rocket models were real. They could be launched. Mr. Kersjes and Ms. McKinney arranged a public launch. They first got approval of the Fire Department, who sent fire fighters to stand by. They invited teachers, principal, parents of these students. They invited the media too. Everyone was glad to come and with respect. The special needs students had been neglected for years. They were regarded as sub-standard, slow learner, unsocial, lack of communication skill and motivation. After 1.5 year of hard work, they became confident, cooperative and self-initiating. They showed their good knowledge of rockets and the related science. They launched the model rockets successfully. They were comparable as any outstanding students.

Fund raising was the most difficult of all. Bringing twenty students to Alabama one week would cost a lot. It was estimated to be 50, 000 US dollars. Mr. Kersjes sent out dozens of letters but to no avail. Time passed quickly. Gradually, the students became demotivated. Their will was shaken. Then, sponsorship came suddenly. One of the students worked part time in Big Dan's Burger Shed. Somehow, the owner learnt about this. He liked to help the weak class, to see them win. He promised to sponsor. The largest hurdle was removed.

One of the training was to conduct mission in zero gravity. To simulate this, the students would need to go underwater, in a swimming pool to assemble a structure of tetrahedron. Forest Hills Northern had no pool. Again, after asking around, YMCA offered to help, providing their pool for practice, free. Another hurdle was overcome. Gradually, parents of these students changed their attitude, from laughing, snorting and questioning to believing, encouraging and giving support. After all, this was an exceptional opportunity.

There were always good people around. They came when the students needed encouragement. A famous retired astronaut heard the story of Forest Hills Northern. He came to visit. He even joined the training with the students together, under water in the pool. His participation was a very big support. After the training in the pool, the retired astronaut remarked: "These are the best student astronauts. They were ready for the Space Camp."

In 1989, Mr. Kersjes, Mrs. Kersjes who came as helper, and Ms. McKinney set off with 20 special needs students. Before this trip, these students hardly went out of Grand Rapids, and never boarded a plane. They would meet in the Space Camp two hundred elite students from US as well as from France and Puerto Rico. There would be intense competition. These special needs students would have to prove themselves.

Space Camp activities started. The special needs students won in two non-scoring events. These surprised all students from other schools, camp staff and the two teachers who had never expected the students to win. However, the students proved that they were as good as elite students.

Scoring events started. The first was to design a shoulder badge, to show their team name as well as to highlight the spirit of cooperation. Time was short. The students were given this assignment after dinner but they needed to submit the design in the following morning. Among the team, only one boy was good at art design. The whole team rushed to give ideas but not in an orderly and organized way. After an hour, there were just dispute. It became chaotic. The designer suddenly went out of control. He swept the paper, the sketch, the crayons and everything to the floor. He yelled: "I quit. I want to go home". Then he ran out of the room and started to cry. All students were astounded. After a few moments, Mr. Kersjes rose: "I'll take him back." This was part of his job whenever there was any trouble. All these students had been relying on their teachers to handle this. However, suddenly two elder students came forward and blocked Mr. Kersjes. They said softly: "Coach, we don't need you." In a second, Mr. Kersjes knew that his students had grown up. They were able to deal with interpersonal problems. In about 10 minutes, all students were back to work. They completed the design and won an award afterwards. In the past, these students were trouble making. They had bad temper. They accused each other but this time, they cooperated. They had a common goal and solved their own dispute like mature adults.

The remark "Coach, we don't need you" was just too sharp and too harsh for Mr. Kersjes.

The most important events began i.e. to operate a simulated space shuttle and to complete two missions in space. This was not just a test of the students' understanding of space science and their skill to control space shuttle. Most importantly, it was teamwork, co-operation and

the right judgement to cope with unexpected problems. All twenty students had to work together as one team and made no mistake. If failing the mission, the shuttle might not return to Earth and all astronauts within neither.

After the mission was over, the retired astronaut showed up unexpectedly. He volunteered to come, with one purpose only, to support these special needs students! He delivered a piece of speech. It was really motivating. 'Remember this. Don't be afraid to go for your dreams. May be you need to work very hard, but as long as you are willing to sacrifice, there is nothing cannot be achieved'. This speech was dedicated to students of Forest Hills Northern.

I hope that every readers and parents please remember the above piece. I am also going for my dreams too, writing this book and helping the needed.

There were four awards in the program, three for the team and one for individual. Before arriving Alabama, these special needs students were content to just participate. Winning was not their goal. However, in all the events, they performed as well as other elite students and they knew. Any award? Yes, they won an award in each and every team event.

Best Space Badge Award – Third place

Best Space Station Award – Second place

Best Mission Award – Third place

It was really commendable. These students were competing with the best students from all schools within US, France and Puerto Rico. They should be proud of themselves absolutely.

The greatest honor of all, "The Right Stuff Award", was for the individual who exhibited the best characteristics of a true astronaut. No matter how tough the situation was, he or she never complained and was always supportive. He made great contribution to the mission and was invaluable to his/her team. He respected staff of Space Camp, his team and all contestants. The award went to The Mission Commander of The Special Needs Students! It was surprising, motivating and touching. A special needs student excelled among two hundred gifted students, won the title and the respect of contestants.

Arriving home with dazzling achievements, the entire Forest Hills Northern and Grand Rapids came to receive and celebrate. Parents, teachers, principal, sponsors and media were all in the airport. After the plane had landed, Mr. Kersjes rose from his seat. He wanted to help and lead the students. Suddenly, Ms. McKinney stopped him: "Let them take care of themselves. They can do it!" Sure enough, without any assistance, these the students led the way, before their teachers, to disembark the plane, to accept their well-deserved congratulations, appreciation, honor and respect, for the first time in their lives.

This book was truly inspiring. It moved my inner most feeling. I could not withhold my tear drops many times. Mr. Kersjes and Ms. McKenny were great role model of teachers. Their dedication moved everybody, the special needs students, Congress man, school principal, president of the board, Head of Space Camp, parents, media, retired astronauts and finally the whole community.

This story is truly a milestone of special education. I believe that any child, no matter gifted or autistic, needs an opportunity and a goal, even if it seems out of reach. With care, encouragement, guidance and training, the huge potential will surface. Please keep it in mind that each and everybody is different. Each child has his own learning method and journey. Mr. Kersjes and Ms. McKinney used cardboard games and models, which were right for Forest Hills Northern students. These students learnt as fast as other elite students who learnt by attending classroom, reading books and other means. We, as parents, have to cherish our children and find the right way for them and explore their talents. If still in doubt, please read the story of "Dibs in Search of Self" again. The contrary is there to prove.

'A Smile As Big As the Moon' is quite long, but missing it is a big loss.

Chapter 7 – Skating, Rock Climbing, Confidence Building

Roller Skating

In the fourth month of my leave, Ag had great progress in both sensory integration and verbal communication. He was energetic in any playground. He was no longer afraid of going high up, yet therapist still recommended Ag to have more activity, a more vigorous one i.e. roller skating. "Make Ag to run after people, but not to chase an object". The idea was to make Ag focusing on people. After checking around, I found that YMCA offered roller skating courses for children. I decided to give it a try. In a few months, it turned out to be an excellent training, exceeding my expectation a lot. Ag built up confidence. He became more willing to express himself. More importantly, he learnt that "Success comes with Hard Work".

Ag started with the elementary course. There were nine kids. Ag was the youngest. Two boys did the same course before. They had the basic skill. They could balance quite well with their skates on, and even could skate forward. All the other children joint the course for the first time. Once with the rollers on, they could not even stand. Ag was helpless with rollers on too. Every time he attempted to stand up, he slipped, then fell in a second. I worried that he might give up.

At the end of the first training class, Ag was sweat to his skin. However, he voiced out loudly: "It is fun. Must come every day." This was a big surprise to me. My worry was all gone.

There were a total of 10 sessions. At the end of the third sessions, Ag was obviously behind other children. He was one year younger than all the rest and was not as strong physically. The last session was assessment. If pass, Ag would be qualified to do the intermediate course, then the advance course, and eventually in-line roller hockey course. I knew that if Ag failed the assessment, it would be a blow to him. It would not be easy to persuade him to re-take another roller skating course again, which was actually the best training to "chase people, not to chase an object". There was no easy substitute. I had to help Ag to pass the assessment.

I bought a pair of roller-skate for Ag so that he could practice. It was easy to say “Practice two hours a week”, but actually it was not simple. The first issue was to find a venue for practice, then to encourage Ag.

In Hong Kong, there were not many roller skating ring. I spent some time on internet to search. There were skating rings not far away, at Shun Lee, Kwun Tong, Tseung Kwan O, Sai Kung and Kowloon Tsai. These were all within 15 to 20 minutes by driving. However, they were all outdoor. It was mid-summer, too hot to practice under strong sunshine. Moreover, the skating ring in Tseung Kwan O and Shun Lee were far too small. Ag needed a big ring so that he could accelerate and go in big circle. Only this would give him enough stimulation. I happened to find a basketball court at Choi Wan Estate. It was covered and large enough for Ag to speed up. This became the main practice ground.

By that time, Ag had changed quite a lot. He enjoyed skating with other children, running and chasing one another. He did not enjoy much to practice alone. To encourage him, I brought water, mosquito repellent, towels and his favorite chocolate beans. After each practice, I bought him ice cream. The biggest encouragement, however, came with the people passing by, who might gossip in a distance “See that little boy who is skating ... He manoeuvres and is fast.....” This inspired Ag most.

From the fourth session onwards, Ag practiced once in the middle of the week. His skill improved steadily. At first, he landed all his body weight on his left leg and used just his right leg to push forward. He was unable to cross his legs to push himself forward. It was a problem of body co-ordination. After practicing several weeks, he managed eventually. This was a big success and Ag knew. He realized that his skating skill improved. He was in midstream among all the children. This was very good, considering that he was only 5.5 years old, two years younger than the best in the team. I was very proud of Ag.

A few days before the assessment, Ag became very eager. He practiced hard and wanted to be qualified for intermediate class. His strong desire surprised me since he had never shown this before. On the assessment day, he asked to go one hour early because he wanted to practice. Sue and I admired his positive attitude. This was actually what we had been cultivating. Assessment was not my worry because I talked to the coach two weeks in advance. Ag should

have no problem. Ever since Ag was born, he had undergone numerous assessments, by many special education trainers. Ag was never aware of these. This assessment was the first one that he knew, the first one which he had to prove himself. He was very excited when he passed. He ran to Sue and me to show his certificate. We were excited too, because this was the first time Ag showed his feeling and his success voluntarily. Children with Asperger's hardly seek for sharing. This was a break through. The whole family went out for dinner for a big celebration.

This roller skating course was not just a training to improve Ag's body co-ordination. It built up his confident quickly. Roller skating was not popular in Hong Kong. When the security in our housing estate learnt this, he would compliment Ag: "Good boy. Roller skating is difficult. I can't do it. You are better than me!" This was flattering but it did boost up Ag's confidence.

I explained to Ag that he was the youngest in the class. He noted and was happy with his qualification. Even more importantly, he knew that after the first 3 sessions, he was behind other children. However, after practicing hard, he became qualified. I reminded Ag many times his journey. "Ag was first behind. We took actions. We bought a pair of roller. We searched for the right place to practice and found a sheltered basketball court. Ag practiced every week, then caught up...."

He learnt the golden rules. "Hard work brings Success....", "Keep trying....", "Don't give up easily..." He learnt an important lesson.

Ag never knew that his brother, Gi, was assessed as gifted. But he knew that Gi was good. This time Ag was ahead of Gi because Gi had not taken any roller skating course. Later, Gi wanted to do roller skating too. I asked Ag to explain how to skate. Ag was very serious. He kept talking and explaining details. I had never seen Ag so eager to speak and demonstrate. It was because Ag considered himself leading his elder brother! This experience boosted Ag's confidence. In the end, the two boys skated together. This brought the whole family a joyful topic and endless conversation which had lasted for a very long time.

In the training class, Ag sweated a lot. I made Ag to take care of himself. When he finished his bottle of water, I showed him how to refill. Then he did it himself. After the course, I wanted Ag

to remove the rollers and put on shoes himself. Taking care of oneself was part of the training offered by special education centers. I made use of the opportunity. In the group, there were children older than Ag. However, they were taken good care by respective domestic helper, even to dry the sweat by a towel! When the coach witnessed Ag doing all these himself, he came upon and complimented Ag. This was good. Ag was encouraged. He was happy and he learnt.

Roller skating opened up Ag a great deal. He learnt a lot and became confident. It happened that we did it at the right time. After months of activities in playground, his body co-ordination had improved so much that he was ready to do vigorous exercise. He could balance well and he was strong enough for skating. I was on leave. I helped Ag when he fell behind. I accompanied and encouraged Ag to practice. Moreover, his language ability was good enough to communicate with the coach when he was alone in the ring. Parents were not allowed to enter the ring! If I had arranged Ag to attempt roller skating a few months earlier, then he would have failed. It would be a totally different story.

Indoor Rock Climbing

Other than roller skating, I also took Ag to do indoor rock climbing. By chance I found that Heep Hong Society at Choi Ha Estate offered indoor rock climbing course to children who needed special education. So I registered. Three months after, Ag began to attend a course at Choi Ha center. The first lesson took place in September 2008.

There were two instructors on site, teaching and guiding children to climb up a wall of about 3 meters high. Each child took turn to go up. Ag succeeded to reach the top in his first attempt! What a big surprise! Hurray, everybody including all eight children, their parents and the instructors gave Ag a big applause. This was the first instance ever that everyone in the scene applauded Ag together. This was of course the best opportunity to encourage Ag. Once I arrived home, I asked Ag to share the experience with Sue. He did. He kept speaking!

Ag and I did not know that there were a few different 'routes' up the wall, some easy, some difficult. In the second session, the instructor told Ag to attempt a more difficulty route. He

could not reach the top. This was good. It became more interesting. In these 8 weeks of rock climbing, Ag had fun. In the last lesson, Ag tried an even more challenging route. I really had no idea how many different routes there were. I was just sure that Ag enjoyed rock climbing. So I enrolled the same course for him repeatedly, 3 times all together, until it became very easy for him.

Ag had benefited from rock climbing course a lot. He did it at the right time. On the other hand, some children in the same course clearly had difficulty. They panicked, yelled, struggled hard and refused to climb up the wall. A few even cried. I fully appreciated that their parents were anxious to help. However these kids were obviously not ready physically. They were scared. Pushing them up would not help. In my opinion, the parents were creating 'defeat' to their children! It would just drive the kids away! In a few times, I wanted to share my view with those parents, yet finally I refrained myself. Why not bringing these children to a playground and allow let them to run around? They would enjoy and stay close to their parents. Attempt rock climbing only when they became ready. Young kids would not be able to judge. It was the parents' responsibility to observe and determine the right time. If I had taken Ag to rock climbing a few months earlier, Ag would have panicked and struggled too. We both would be frustrated and disappointed. Since I did this when Ag was ready, he was delighted and motivated. Ag was the best in the group. Although he did not say anything, I reckoned that he knew. He was among applause. When arriving home, Ag was happy to tell Sue. He shared his experience and became more social.

Ag's experience in roller skating and rock climbing changed him a lot in just a few months. He became confident rapidly. The taste of success motivated him. Ag was eager to go to both courses. He talked about the course, his goal to pass the assessment and his wish to join the next course. He became lively, energetic and enthusiastic. He was quite happy to share his 'success' even with strangers. He was no longer the same boy who exhibited typical Asperger's behavior a year ago.

I read a book before about nurturing gifted children. I was impressed by two main points "Don't repeat what you have taught the child" and "Always bring the child new challenge, but within his/her capabilities." I believe that I did it right for Ag. When the activities in children playgrounds became too easy for Ag, I switched quickly. I brought Ag to skating and rock climbing. These were new challenge for Ag, yet within his capabilities. He knew that these activities were a lot more demanding than going down a slide or going up children rope courses.

He was happy and became confident. Most importantly, Ag learnt through his personal experience “Work hard, practice a lot, don’t give up, then it brings success.”

Chapter 8 - Social Etiquette Training, Timing is Important

Ag did 3 training courses on social etiquette. He learnt quicker than what I had expected. He was very happy in these courses. However, some of his classmates did not enjoy the course. This did not just waste time but also undercut these classmates' self-esteem. In my opinion, the issue was not the course itself but rather the readiness of the children.

Since Ag was 2.5 years old, he started attending special education. Most of the training was one-to-one, except a monthly group activity arranged by Early Education and Training Center (EETC). Six to nine children participated in this group training. I observed the group activity a few times. It was all right, but once a month was not enough. Furthermore, it spanned too long apart.

When I started my leave, I was in no hurry to arrange social etiquette training for Ag. He was not ready. The first priority was speech and language communication training. The ability to understand and follow instruction was fundamental. Having said that we did not leave this kind of training entirely out. Sue checked around and found two organizations offering training courses. They were The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong (BGCA) and Heep Hong Society. There was a long waiting list for either course. Sue registered first and waited. Incidentally, both organizations started a new course in the fifth month of my leave. Ag was fortunate to get a place in both. By that time, Ag had already made great progress in his language communication ability. He had some eye contact with people and his answer was much more to the point. He started to socialize with people around. In short, Ag was ready.

Commencing at the age around 5.5, Ag had attended 3 courses, spanning 7 months, with a short break in the middle.

All these courses were specifically run for children with Asperger's Syndrome or with mild to moderate degree of autism. In each class, there were six to eight children. Both organizations insisted that at least one adult accompanying the child throughout the training or stayed around in the center.

The trainer of both organizations asked Sue a lot about Ag. One of them even asked Sue to bring Ag there for a meeting. The purpose was to make sure that children-to-be-admitted possessed the basic communication skill i.e. understand simple instruction and complete accordingly. The training courses of these two organizations incidentally ran in the same period, but on different day of the week. Ag attended both. We were lucky.

There were many group activities in the courses, introducing social etiquette as well as teaching the children to cooperate, to share and to help one another.

Ag attended these courses just at the right time! Even though all the participating children had undergone a selection process, Ag was slightly more mature than the rest in either group. Before doing social etiquette training, Ag had undertaken 2 years of special education, those basic trainings such as language and sensory integration etc. By no means that I could foresee in advance Ag's progress. Would he do well in those basic therapies? When would he be ready for social skill training? Furthermore, there was a waiting list for each of the courses. Sue and I could never tell when Ag would be admitted. We were very fortunate that Ag was ready.

Why was I very sure that it was the right time? The respective instructors of each training course commented that Ag was the leader. The attending clinical psychologist also said that Ag was more mature and was willing to share. Ag did not hear these compliments. Only I did. I discussed with the instructors quietly. From what I observed, Ag was indeed more mature.

The instructors were professional. They never said openly that Ag was better than the others. I noticed it strongly. In one session, the children were given a break. The instructor asked Ag to remind the other children to resume. Ag did it in a very appropriate manner. He was polite. He reminded all children one after another, without missing out anyone. I was very amazed. "Well done", said the instructor softly. This was a very powerful compliment. Ag got it. When we arrived home, I deliberately described this to Sue in front of Ag, to encourage him.

In the training course, there were many activities. From time to time, the instructor asked Ag to take the lead or to serve as a demonstrator. She also asked Ag to help packing up. Ag finished

these without problem. I reckoned that Ag also realized that he was leading. He got applause and appreciation from the instructor, which became a powerful motivation. He paid good attention and learnt quickly.

On the other hand, there were children who were not happy to join the course. One of them was even reluctant to come in, struggling with his mother at the entrance. He came in eventually, but refused to join the activity. His mother was very sad and frustrated. I noticed that this child missed many sessions subsequently. It was a waste of time and opportunity. To me, this child was not ready. Even if his parents enrolled the course for him again, would it help? A few other children obviously had problem in sensory integration. They joined the group activities. They understood the instruction. However, they often had problem to do well in the activity. They would get more benefit if they joined the course later.

I don't mean to boast myself. I just want to emphasize the importance to be ready. If I had brought Ag to do these courses four months earlier, he would not have got much benefit. It would have defeated his self-esteem. Imagine that if Ag failed to catch a ball every time it was passed to him by the team, how badly Ag would feel?

Ag started to exhibit a good grasp of social etiquette as from June of 2008. He demonstrated caring for other people. The following were some examples:

- When taking elevator, he would hold the lift for other people, in particularly for the elderly. He was polite.
- In Heep Hong Society, he would hold the door for his classmates, until everybody had passed through.
- He cared for his brother, Gi. When we went out for activity, he reminded me constantly to buy refreshment for Gi. In library, he reminded me to loan books for Gi.
- In children playgrounds, he behaved well. He showed courtesy to younger toddlers.
- He had courtesy in his dialogue with other people.

One day, Ag and Gi were playing “Bakugan ball” at home. Gi shot Ag carelessly. It hurt Ag. He cried. Sue and I worried. Gi apologized and Ag said “No problem”. Then they continued. Sue and I were relieved. Ag behaved appropriately. He knew what to do.

Ag learnt social etiquette quickly. Right timing was one reason. Ag was also fortunate to have attended training in both BGCA and Heep Hong Society within the same period. Even though the activities in each organization were different, the themes were the same i.e. to teach the children sharing, caring, co-operating and mutual respect. Attending social training in these organizations concurrently, Ag was reinforced of the right social etiquette.

Social etiquette was not a topic which I could train Ag alone. It was necessary to have a group of children together. I relied on these organizations. To me, both were good. The question became how to determine the best time for the child. It all depended on the parent’s observation, but it was not easy. First, parents were not professional of special education. We could not tell. I could not, until Ag had started the course. Second, even though these organizations pre-printed course leaflet, one or two pages could never explain the whole course. Pre-course screening interview helped but not was 100 percent accurate. Third, there was a long waiting list in each organization. Nobody could foretell when a place would be offered. It was beyond parent’s planning and control. I really believed that it was fortunate for Ag.

Having said that, the participation and willingness of the child was the best indicator whether this was the right time. If the child refused or failed to follow the instruction or was not happy, then it would not help. It just undercut his happiness and confidence. Under these circumstances, if the parents still kept pushing, then it would drive the child away. That would even hurt the relationship, in the same way as described in “Dibs in Search of Self”.

I asked Ag repeatedly: “Are you happy? Do you like these activities?” From the very first session, Ag kept saying that he liked it and wanted to attend every week. When he arrived home, he was very eager to describe to Sue the activities. This was a good and strong indicator that it was the appropriate time.

Heep Hong Society offered two courses, actually phase 1 and phase 2. When it was time to enroll for phase 2, I checked with Ag a few times. He wanted to go again. I called the instructor and consulted her. She commented that Ag did well in phase 1. He was happy and devoted. So, I enrolled for Ag again. It was the right move.

Looking backwards, there were a few important points.

First, please don't leave this to your domestic helper. I accompanied Ag. BGCA demanded an adult to join. In Heep Hong, there was a CCTV. Parents could observe their children throughout the entire session. When each session was over, the instructor had a meeting with parents. In some sessions, a clinical psychologist was there for meeting. Domestic helper could never discuss with the instructor and the psychologist on behalf of parents. If parents do not accompany their children, it will be a big loss. It will certainly slow down the progress of the children.

Second, social etiquette is a day to day matter. It is not right to just rely on the training courses. When I brought Ag to fast food restaurant, I asked Ag to take paper towel, forks and spoons etc. When taking a lift, I told Ag to hold the entrance for other passengers. At home, Sue and I wanted Ag to share house duty and to take care of himself. All these day to day routine and practice helped Ag to learn social etiquette, mutual respect and sharing with the others.

Third, don't miss the child's golden age of learning. I see that many of these social etiquette training courses are for young boys and girls. Make use of the opportunity. Once passing the golden learning age, the child has established his own view of the world, of himself and his own judgement of good or bad behavior. The child is molded. It needs double effort to change them.

On the day Ag attended his last social training in Heep Hong Society, I left my office early so as to discuss with the instructor. When I arrived, Ag was playing with a group of children. He was giving instructions and assigning tasks to the rest! He was the leader in the group. I admired. To take leadership, the child had to know the game, the rules, the tasks and the process flow. Furthermore, the child needed to assign confidently. If there was counter proposal or other opinion from the team, the child needed to listen and then handled it in an appropriate manner.

It was not simple. These were the fundamentals to become a leader. A year ago, Ag was quiet and hardly communicated with other people. He was a totally different boy, a junior leader.

The instructor came upon. She spoke softly to me: “Actually, you no longer need to bring Ag to Heep Hong for training. You should bring him to join other boys and girls.” This was a statement which I had longed for and a statement matching my observation too. I had a very good sleep that night.

Chapter 9 - PDA, A Special Experience of "Non Traditional" Training

I have written a lot of training which Ag had undertaken, including speech therapy, sensory integration training, play therapy, social etiquette training etc. Let me describe these as 'Traditional' training. Ag needed these. He undertook lots as from age 2.5. To overcome Asperger's Syndrome, Ag needed more, to make him understand the mind of other people, to become social and to enjoy meeting people.

When Ag was 4.5, we began to bring Ag to Potential Development Association Ltd, PDA, for training. Little by little, I found that PDA's training was different from what I had expected. PDA emphasized more on training Ag to focus on PEOPLE, to enjoy meeting with PEOPLE, to understand that the world was CHANGING. Ag undertook training in PDA for two years. I heard many new ideas and new theories which I had never thought of or read before. I like to describe these in more details. Let me call these as 'Non-Traditional' training. However, I must emphasize that I am not professional. The terms 'Traditional' and 'Non-Traditional' are just my personal opinion.

PDA emphasized "CHANGE". Therapists reiterated again and again to Ag that "Things Can Change". How did PDA get the message across? In PDA, therapist guided Ag to stack and assemble blocks. These blocks were colorful and large. Stacking just 4 pieces together, one above another, was as high as an adult. Therapist also stacked paper bricks with Ag. The paper bricks were the same size as concrete bricks. I had never seen these kinds of block and brick in any other centers. While doing this, the therapist kept on reminding Ag "There is another way to assemble these. Now they are different." PDA wanted Ag to learn "CHANGE".

In PDA, there were a lot of swings, more varieties than I had seen in other centers. This was a just small difference. The main difference tied with when and how to train. Other centers considered that it was no longer necessary to put Ag on swings but PDA continued, and swung him vigorously. These swings were very different from those in any children playground. They swung in any direction as well as turned simultaneously. Other centers changed to do speech therapy. PDA did not believe it was the right time for speech therapy, but kept putting Ag on swings for another 6 months before starting other training.

I had no expertise to judge the right time to stop and start another kind of training. I let each center to make their decision. Anyway, this illustrated a 'non-traditional' training. In PDA, there were many other trainings which were new or even surprising to me. PDA wanted Ag to focus on people.

A therapist brought Ag into a small tent. However, she brought no training aid, nothing. In other words, there were just the therapist and Ag in the tent. They were isolated, thus Ag would not be distracted. The whole purpose was to make Ag focusing entirely on the therapist, to interact with people.

There were around ten rooms in PDA. A therapist hid herself in one of these rooms. Ag was told to look for her. This activity was again to make Ag focusing on people.

Ag and the therapist each held a small stick and waved to each other. The therapist moved around and asked Ag to follow. This was to make Ag paying attention to people too, not to toys or objects.

All special training centers made use of toys in various training and activities, PDA too. However, therapist there steadily and purposely reduced the use of toys. The objective was to bring Ag's attention to people. I witnessed once the therapist brought just a piece of scarf to training, but nothing else. She asked Ag to suggest activity using just this piece of scarf. In the session after, she did not bring anything and insisted Ag to propose. Ag had to figure out an activity without any object on hand. This made Ag to focus on people, people and people but not on object.

In another session, the therapist communicated with Ag with just gesture, body language and facial expression. She kept silent all the time. This was to make Ag focusing on her alone, and learnt non-verbal communication.

In a small room, the therapist pushed Ag to the wall by her own body. She kept quiet. She scratched Ag by her fingers, making Ag itchy. This forced Ag to speak, to show his feeling and idea and ultimately to communicate.

I considered all these to train Ag to focus on people, to induce him to communicate with people. To me, all these trainings were very unusual which I had never come across anywhere else. There was a speech therapist in PDA, but she did not conduct any training session with Ag. I was puzzled so I asked the consulting therapist. She replied: "Ag is not ready. Better focus on other training first". This was a surprise, but I decided to follow.

These unusual training methods kept coming up one after another. They brought me new perspectives. To me, they were all "Non-Traditional", but the explanation sounded right. Was there a set of guidelines, program or methodology to follow? I had several rounds of discussion with the consulting therapist. The answer was "No". I was disappointed. If there was, I would like to learn, to see if I could do something at home. Ag was in PDA for more than 2 years and I had observed as long. In the end, I believed that there was indeed none. There was no fixed rules or methodology.

To me, PDA was very conscious of the child's cognitive capability. Ag was weak on this. For example, Ag was asked to lead a game with the therapist. Ag set the rule of the game. He took an object, passed to a second person, then to a third person. Game was over! It was simple. There was neither win nor lose. There was no fun. There was NO POINT! Ag took out bits and pieces of his past experience from his memory but these pieces did not add up together to form a proper game. Ag did not understand. He just copied. There was no cognition.

If your child has cognitive difficulty, please do not label him as "stupid". Please be patient. I had no clue how to help Ag to overcome his weakness in cognition. I checked in library but I could not find any readings, except 'Theory of Mind'. I had a very vague idea what cognition was. I could only rely on PDA.

Below were part of what PDA advised me to do at home.

- Every night, I massaged Ag. Ag was overly sensitive to touching of other people. Massage would help. However, I was advised to keep silent in the entire massaging period, because this would distract him.
- Took Ag for a stroll. Held his hand and kept silent. He would be touched.

- When teaching Ag anything from books, treated Ag one year older than his real age. When teaching him anything regarding social interaction, treated him one year younger.
- Brought Ag to a zoo and watched the mother animals taking care of their offspring. When watching birds, pointed out to Ag: "See the mother bird? She is feeding her little birds. She takes care of them."
- Bought a baby doll for Ag. Encouraged Ag to take care of the baby doll, bathed it, combed it and dressed it. It had never occurred to Sue and I to buy a doll for Ag. He was a five years old boy. This did not sound appropriate. However, after we bought Ag a doll, he indeed spent quite a period of time to take care of it. His concern for people became more prominent.
- Made Ag excited. Had vigorous exercise or activity with Ag, such as chasing people. This could trigger his empathy and affection.
- Played less intellectual games such as solving puzzles. Had more role playing games with Ag. Encourage him to imitate a doctor, a cashier, a bus driver, a cook, actually any role. Played games which required Ag to use his imaginations.
- Emphasized "Change" to Ag. Took Ag to a sandy beach. Wrote or drew on the sand. Built sand castle. Guided Ag to see the changes. At home, cut meat into small pieces and seasoned it. Showed Ag that when the meat was cut, the size, the shape, the appearance of the piece of meat was changed. Mixed crayon and showed Ag the change of color.
- Encouraged Ag to run after people, not object. Ice skating was good. Skated fast in big circle or in figure of eight because Ag would have to focus on other skaters. t. Another good activity is to play on trampoline, bouncing up and down quickly.

I got these pieces of advice in a period of two years. Each and every time I heard these, I had question in my mind "Will these help at all?"

Ag had be undertaking speech therapy in Early Education and Training Center (EETC). I considered this "traditional" training and Ag improved day after day. At home, I also motivated Ag to speak more. PDA did not object but did not arrange speech therapy for Ag. PDA considered this more a cognition issue rather than a speech capability issue. The focus of training was to make Ag more social and to pay attention to people. In several training sessions, the instructor conducted training within a small tent. Ag had to focus on the instructor, nothing

else. When I first heard this proposition, it was odd and a bit weird. Would it help? The only way to prove was to try.

I once asked Ag to draw several pictures, the theme being "Skate", "Tap Mun Island", "New Year". I was taken aback to see that in all Ag's drawings, there was no human beings. There were landscape and a lot of other details. I showed the drawings to a clinical psychologist. He advised: "Ag did not pay any attention to people. His focus was only landscape, nothing else." This matched with what PDA advised me i.e. there was no people in Ag's mind.

Ag had 3 years in kindergarten. He could never recollect and tell us what happened in school, what he did and whom he met. PDA did not consider speech capability was the main issue, but rather Ag never paid attention to other people. Ag enjoyed handicraft very much. I arranged him to do small handicraft in a community center. When returning home, he was very happy to show us and describe his handicraft. We asked Ag: "How many children were there?" Ag could never tell, not even an approximate number, more boys or more girls! He was about six years old but he still never paid attention to people or his playmate. Therapist in PDA trained him by playing a game with him for 15 minutes, and asked him to recall and describe immediately. Then, they played the same game, but this time the therapist made Ag taking the lead. This trained Ag to pay attention to people and understand. It also instilled the idea: "Different people have different way to play a game."

Please do not under-estimate this issue. If a child does not observe and cannot recapitulate, he/she may be labelled as "stupid". How to train? One of the 'traditional' training method is to use a series of story cards. Train the child to interpret and describe. I did this with Ag at home too. In fact, all research and study indicate that children with Asperger's syndrome tend to learn fast by interpreting images, drawings and pictures. PDA had no objection either, but therapist there did not using story cards to teach. They mentored Ag one-on-one, in order to stimulate his attention to people.

PDA emphasized to arouse Ag's interest in people. Their explanation and theory were new to me, beyond what I could image before. I listened carefully and took down notes. From time to time, I was skeptical first. At home, I thought about these seriously. It sounded right. I decided to follow.

The development of the brain has big impact on the behavior of children with Asperger's. The brain controls body balancing, co-ordination of eyes and limbs, verbal communication and cognition too. If there is no cognition, of course there is no communication. Before 5 years old, Ag had never asked our domestic helper to get him a glass of drinking water. He did this himself. In his mind, he never had the idea of "asking dad, mum or domestic helper for help, then he will get water". Without knowing the role of everyone, the relationship and the process, he would not ask. It was a matter of cognition, not speech ability.

The clinical psychologist of Social Welfare Department once arranged a test for Ag. It was found that Ag used his right brain a lot more than other children. He was six years old, but his ability to analyze two dimensional geometrical graphics was as good as that of 10 years old, only 1 in a hundred.

I was convinced that Asperger's Syndrome was an issue of development and functioning of the brain. Please don't label the child as "stupid". This would merely hurt the child but not help in any way. Parents should follow the advice of therapist, to train and educate. I sent Ag to undertake both the traditional and non-traditional training. The result was excellent.

Chapter 10 - Overcoming Asperger's Syndrome, A Wonderful Journey

I try to answer three questions with this book.

1. Is there a way to overcome Asperger's Syndrome?
2. If yes, what to do? When to do?
3. If the golden opportunity of early education is missed, what may happen to the child? What journey the child may go through? Is there still a way to overcome?

In the case of Ag, he had overcome. This was not just my personal view. Clinical psychologists, early education experts, therapists of different centers all had the same conclusion. It was no longer valid to regard Ag with Asperger's.

The second question is how to overcome? Similar to Ag, many children sought help from special education center. I met Ag's classmates many times in many different centers. The parents of these children did the same as I did. Why Ag turned around much quicker and overcame successfully? This question has been in my mind for almost one year. It is not a good idea to write a summary of all activities and trainings. I want to analyze it in a holistic view. I want to figure out a perspective or a new horizon whereby the concerned parents can follow as a good reference.

I have never invented any new therapy. All those mentioned in previous chapters were the advice of professionals, therapists and trainers. Nevertheless, I managed to consolidate their advices and put through all these training thoroughly, orderly and timely. These training added up and fit together extremely well. It formed an integrated training program which was unprecedented. Moreover, this program was tightly coupled with Ag's day to day routine. Ag had never realized that he was undertaking special training. He just took part in these activities happily. After years of special education and activities, Ag has changed and overcame the syndrome.

Since every child is different, copying and applying the same training program will not help! In this case, the most important question becomes: “How to work out and fit together various trainings to form the most suitable program?” In fact this is my ultimate goal of writing this book.

The Program Features

Let me first outline the features of this integrated program.

- A. Very long hours of special education
- B. Very high quality training
- C. Ever coming up new activities with fun
- D. Coupled with day to day living

A. Very Long Hours of Special Education

How many hours of special education per week is enough? There is no hard-and-fast rule. For Ag, he had undertaken two categories of special training.

The first category was formal training or therapy conducted by professionals. At 4.5 years old, Ag was diagnosed. Since then, he undertook special education continuously in several centers, including EETC of Hong Kong Christian Services, Heep Hong Society and PDA. He also did a training course in The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong. He took play therapy in YWCA. In a period of 2 years, the number of formal training per week was maximum 5 sessions, the minimum was 2, majority of these sessions being 1 hour each.

Is this a good rule of thumb? I cannot tell. I quote it as a reference for the concerned parents.

Since Ag was attending special education at different centers, the training courses were for different purposes i.e. speech therapy, sensory integration, social etiquette, play therapy etc. I considered this a “mixed” mode of training program with different theme and focus. This mixed

mode of training was good. It offered varieties and opportunities to Ag to meet many people, which benefited Ag.

The second category was informal training. During that 6 months period, I was virtually with Ag all the time, except when he was in kindergarten. I took Ag to training centers. After training, I accompanied Ag all the time for many activities, each with a purpose. I boasted myself as good as professionals for certain activities. For example, I inspired Ag to have long conversation with me. I brought Ag to children playground. Many activities there were as good as those training in special education centers. Running around, climbing a tree, playing children soccer, jumping from on boulder to another and bouncing up and down a trampoline etc. had provided Ag with huge amount of good quality exercise. The effect, in my opinion, was as good as formal training.

At home, Sue and I guided and taught Ag to take care of himself which was also good training. I estimated that the total 'informal training' was 10 times as much as 'formal training'.

For Ag, adding all the above training together became adequate. How about other children? There is no rule of thumb. Parents have to judge themselves.

B. Very High Quality Training

First, Please do not leave your child to domestic helper. It will not help. I personally accompany Ag to all special education. I observed Ag's progress. I cherished every opportunity to discuss with professionals. I also made use of the time going to and returning from the centers. If I had left this to my domestic helper, I would have lost all these opportunities and education hours. According to the consulting therapist of PDA, children being taken care of by parents learnt two times as fast as those by domestic helper.

Second, I take the advice of professionals seriously. Following their advice, I conducted a lot of home training with Ag. Occasionally, I got ideas from books. These books were referred by or written by professionals. In other words, I learnt everything from professionals. As such, all special education fit Ag.

Third, Ag was ready. To illustrate, when Ag took indoor rock climbing course in Heep Hong Society, he was ready. Ag enjoyed every session. However, a few of his classmates were not happy to join the course. Some were afraid of climbing. They yelled, struggled and even cried. For them, it was a really scary and bad experience. When participating in the social etiquette training course, Ag was happy too. It was a pleasure for him. However, not every child enjoyed. One boy was very unhappy. In a few sessions, he even refused to go into the classroom. It is important to train the children step by step and at the right time. Yet it is easy to say but hard to put through. In reality, I saw parents too eager and kept pushing their children. It won't help. Time and money was wasted. Even worse, it hurt the children and they would go further away.

Forth, Please respect the child and become a playmate with him. For example when I played "Bakugan ball" with Ag, I became his playmate. I dropped my role as his father. It was not easy. I asked myself several times: "Am I stupid? Why I become so childish? Will it help to speak with Ag with those silly terms and meaningless jargons?" If I had not given up my entity as a father, I could never have become a good playmate with Ag. I would have failed to motivate him, made him enjoy and made him speak.

C. Ever Coming Up New Activities With Fun

Ag improved speedily in 2008. PDA, Heep Hong Society and EETC were unanimous that Ag was no longer with Asperger's at year end 2008. In year 2008, Ag participated in a great deal of activities, very diverse in nature. Actually, most were not formal trainings, but rather activities and games.

- In the first 3 months of 2008, Ag and I went to playground daily. All together, we had been to around 15 different playgrounds. From April onwards, the weather became hot and humid. We went to indoor children playground, at around 7-8 locations.
- Then, we started play therapy. Firstly, we undertook 8 sessions. We took a break and did another 4 sessions afterwards.
- In May, Ag started roller skating. He did the beginner course, then intermediate and advanced. Finally, he did hockey course in April 2009. It was a one-year-long activity.

- In early June, Ag started to participate in the social etiquette course of Heep Hong Society and The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong (BGCA). These courses lasted for 2 months each. After the beginner course, Ag had a break of one month. Then, he took the advanced course.
- In September, Ag joined the indoor rock climbing course of Heep Hong Society. He took 3 courses and stopped in early 2009.
- In addition, on every Saturday of 2008, Ag participated in a variety of activities in community centers, such as painting, handicrafts, mini-chefs and many other games. Ag enjoyed all these. He became more and more open and was willing to communicate.

Why Ag enjoyed all these? Sue and I kept arranging new activity for Ag. Furthermore, as soon as we found that the activity became too easy for Ag, we switched. Finally, we made sure that Ag was ready for each and every course. I brought Ag to playgrounds for activities first. Seeing that he became a lot more swift and energetic, we enrolled him to rock climbing and roller skating. I knew that Ag was ready.

D. Coupled With Day to Day Living

Ag never knew that he was undertaking training. He played. He took part in activities or games arranged by his parents. From his perspective, it is for fun, for leisure or to have exercise. Every day, every hour, every minute of his day to day living was enjoyable, and with people. This continuous enjoyable experience with people made Ag change quickly. He became social.

This was why Ag could overcome Asperger's Syndrome quickly. It was a high quality training program, conducted at the right time, step by step, very enjoyable and integrated with day to day living.

How to find the best fit integrated program?

Every child is different. There is no single training program which can help every child with Asperger's. The most important question then becomes how to identify the best fit integrated program. Let me recall Ag's training history.

- At 2.5 years old, Ag started speech therapy.
- At 3.5 years old, he started training in Early Education and Training Center.
- At 4.5 years old, he was diagnosed as with Asperger's / autistic.
- At 5.5 years old, I began to take leave. This was the turning point. Ag accelerated noticeably. Even after I had resumed work, he kept learning quickly. There was no sign of slowing down. He was happy to participate in other group activities.
- At 6, all professionals and therapists advised: "No need to consider Ag as a child with Asperger's". At 6.5, Ag stopped special training.

This was a four years long journey of training and special education. There was no such genius on earth who could pre-determine an integrated training program 4 years in advance. If there was one, this genius would definitely deserve a Nobel Prize. Actually, this integrated training program was the combined effort of 4 -5 special education centers, conducted by many therapists and professionals, not one single person.

How to work out this integrated training program? The answer was by "step-by-step exploration". Then, the question became how to explore it and determine the best fit program. Using Ag's case for example, it was the joined effort of myself, therapists, professionals and trainers together. They all devoted extra time and effort to explore the best training. Without their help, it would not be possible. How to do it? There were several pre-requisites.

First, I had a very strong determination to overcome. I accompanied Ag every moment. I observed. I discussed with therapist and I read a lot. What was the driving force of this powerful will? It was the successful education of my first child, Gi. The experience made me believe that good education was powerful. When I started my leave, I brought Ag to playgrounds daily. Very quickly, he made a sharp turn. His attitude changed and he improved quickly. This built up my confidence. On top of this, Gi was assessed as gifted. The big difference between my two sons

was shadowing me all the time. It was paramount to narrow the gap between them, otherwise, the whole family would suffer. Lastly, realizing that I was with Asperger's before, I knew what would be happening to Ag. I vowed not to allow my child to repeat my difficult footsteps and my bitter experience.

Second, I took leave for 6 months. This allowed me time and energy to focus, to strive for one single goal. Taking leave was surely the best decision in my life. When I looked back, could I have accomplished so much if I had not taken leave? The answer was negative. It needed huge amount of time and dedication.

Third, I was grateful to Sue. She took care of everything in the family. I dropped everything behind and focused just on Ag, nothing else.

Forth, All therapists and trainers had given me supports and encouragement. When I started my leave, nobody commented. However, within one or two months, everybody witnessed Ag's quick changes. Everybody, not just therapist but also social worker and kindergarten teachers, started to share ideas with me. Since then, they had never stopped to give me advice and encouragement. They introduced me readings. They recommended other special education or training courses. When I described what I did at home, they paid attention and then provided feedback. I was very grateful to Social Welfare Department and EETC for conducting additional assessment or training for Ag. At those days, I was ignorant. I did not know what was going on, what sort of assessment they conducted and why. After each assessment, they explained the result with a smiling face. It was the best motivation and strongest support. Trust, friendship and appreciation were built up in those discussion. Actually we became friends afterwards.

It was the joint effort, two years long, of all therapists, psychologist and trainers that eventually worked out the best program for Ag. I owe them a debt of great gratitude.

Fifth, I had repeated many times that Ag was fortunate. He joined several training programs at the best time e.g. social etiquette course and play therapy. There was a long waiting list for social etiquette course. I had no control on timing i.e. when a place was available. I took Ag to play therapy purely by chance. One day, I happened to read a YWCA member brochure and

found play therapy there. Ag was fortunate to have attended these training courses at the right time, the perfect time. He was ready, so he learnt quickly.

Sixth, For Ag, the most intensive training took place when he was 5 to 6 years old. This was the Golden Age of education. Ag was studying in a kindergarten. He attended school just in the morning. There was no homework. We could fit in special education in the afternoon. This was the best arrangement. In the year after, Ag started his primary school, which was full day in Hong Kong and with lots of home work. It would not be possible to spare time.

Seventh, Lastly, I was with Asperger's Syndrome before. From time to time, Ag's behavior suddenly invoked memory of my childhood. For example, in fast food restaurant, I taught Ag to ask for paper towel. He was five years old, yet he said frequently: "I am afraid." He repeated and repeated. Other parents might be disappointed and even frustrated, but not me, because Ag's answer reflected exactly my mind when I was a child. It took me many years to overcome. So I was very patient with Ag. I kept trying every possible way to motivate him, step by step, very small steps. I knew very well that children with Asperger's were fragile. It was very easy to destroy their confidence but very hard to re-build.

The above were the conditions which I rode on to work out a successful integrated program. Without these fundamentals, it would be very difficult. I made it and I was proud of myself.

No doubt it is the joint effort of parents and professionals together to work out a program. The execution, however, depends more on the parents. The program is bundled with the concerned child's day-to-day living, activities, special education, school life, family education etc. These are all day long activities, round the clock. Nobody, other than the parents, can have a chance to put them through. I was once listening to a radio program about autism. The clinical psychologist said: "Professionals can give advice, design program and conduct training, but the successful execution depends on the parents." This matched with my view.

The book is a complete record of the program for Ag and how I make it. If I can, then other parents can as well. It is a matter of dedication, care, trust and co-operation with therapists and professionals.

A Special Dialogue

In June 2008, Ag suddenly had a dialogue with me.

Ag "When I grow up, I shall get marry and have children."

I asked "How many children do you want to have?"

Ag "I want to have three."

I asked "Why?"

Ag "If more than three, the mother (i.e. meaning his wife) will have too much to do."

Two days after, we had another dialogue.

Ag "When I grow up, I want to have a car."

I asked "Why?"

Ag "I want to get marry. I need to pick up mom (i.e. his wife) and the children."

In another day, Ag asked.

Ag "When I grow up, how can I marry a woman?"

I said "You first need a job and have the ability to take care of your family"

Ag "Urrrr....." He paused for a moment, then closed the dialogue.

Ag was 5.5 years old. My intuition was telling me that Ag was considering. He started to notice the role and relationship of family members. Though just a little bit, it was a big step forward.

That night, I said to Sue: "I think that I have done what I should do in this leave. I can resume my work without worries." I did not mean that Ag had overcome completely. He had opened up.

He no longer needed a close accompany all day long. He could march on without me alongside every minute.

My conclusion was right. I resumed my office work shortly after this conversation. Two weeks after, Ag was awarded "Academic Merit" by his kindergarten.

I went through a wonderful journey to help Ag overcoming ASD

Chapter 11 - Let Go, The Child Will Run Fast

I was very fortunate to have worked with a group of professionals to turn my child around. On top of this, I learnt another insight from them, i.e. to accept children with Asperger's, to let them go their way.

Social Welfare Department assigned a clinical psychologist to Christian Early Education and Training Center. It happened that this psychologist handled my case. He was very experienced and insightful. I sensed that he was not handling a case of one child with Asperger's, but rather of one family. He did a lot of extra work. Once I did not know that these extra were special and invaluable. I realized only when I began writing and recollected.

Even in our first meeting, I started to admire this psychologist. In the end of the assessment, he said softly "Mr. and Mrs. Lok, I have to write down an assessment. If I don't do this, I cannot arrange any special training for Ag. I am going to write "mild degree of autism". Do you have any concern?"

I understood that he did not want to hurt Sue and me. In fact, I was there throughout the whole assessment. My heart was sinking. My mind was losing. My body were trembling. I almost fell. I did not have any courage to face it. I just nodded blankly. In a few years, we became friends. When we had lunch, I mentioned the assessment. We grinned. Both of us understood each other.

After the assessment, Ag started special training in EETC. In that 2 years, there was a periodical review in every 3 – 6 months, depending on how well Ag did. Sue and I of course attended the review and paid good attention. In the review, this psychologist taught us a lot. I learnt how to analyze Ag's drawings. I learnt the basics of 'Theory of Mind'. I also learnt to see children with Asperger's from another perspective. Let me list some points.

- Children with Asperger's liked exact answers, black or white. There was no grey. If there was no exact answer, he would be confused.

- They did not understand jokes. If you joked to them, they would not be happy. They would question why you make jokes.
- Ag liked sketching and included lots of details. However, there was no human beings in any of his drawings. This proved that Ag paid attention to a lot of things, but no man!
- Ag would be a good boy at school because he followed school discipline and teachers' instruction strictly. Ag would become a gentleman.
- Ag had good memory of what he read, a kind of photographic memory. However, this memory power was for information, data and facts only. He would not be interested in social matter.

I paid attention to all the above remarks. To me, these were lessons for the concerned parents, not for the child. Parents should learn these and accept their child.

The above remarks were straight forward. Let me turned to some advanced topics. In the second time we met, this psychologists asked me and Sue: "Do you think that Ag is happy?" I answered without hesitation: "Ag is not unhappy." Actually this question had been in my mind for a long time. I observed and kept asking myself. I knew that Ag did not have unhappiness. However, I could not determine whether he was happy.

Since then and in the subsequent two years, the psychologist repeated this question a few times. Why? Because he wanted to bring out an important point. This question changed my view on children with Asperger's. We need to accept them. There is a limit of what parents and therapist can do. As long as the child is happy, we should not push too hard.

In another review meeting, he asked: "Do you agree that children are born with an intuition to find their best talent and their best way to go forward?" By that time, Ag had undertaken training for quite a long time. He had improved considerably. However, I had not thought about this yet. I replied: "I was not sure." Today, I believe that every child indeed will make use of his born ability. Concerned parents should give their children freedom and they will learn very fast.

In another meeting, this psychologist suddenly switched to career development i.e. the type of job Ag would be suitable for. “He would do well in research. He would not perform if a lot human interaction and communication was required. If he became a doctor, the best would be a pathologist.” It was weird. Ag was only a small boy and was undertaking special education. Why jumped to the topic of career? I was not even sure if Ag could do well in primary school, not to mention university education. Why jumped step to discuss career? Furthermore, this psychologist was very assertive. He was predicting what would happen 20 years in future i.e. what job Ag could perform well! In my mind, he was telling me: “Don’t expect to change Ag a lot. Career which needs a lot of human interaction does not fit Ag.” Why was he so sure? I had a lot of doubt.

Why did this clinical psychologist raise those questions? What was his agenda? What message he wanted to pass on? I did not know then. While writing this book, I re-consider. Now I know.

At first, Ag carried typical autistic symptoms. Nobody dared to say the possibility to turn him around. If Ag did not possess any learning power, it would be very bad. The chance of overcome would be zero.

After a year of training, special education trainers and therapists realized that Ag had learning power, actually a lot. He had very good memory with data. EETC arranged a test for Ag. He was outstanding in analyzing two dimensional geometrical graphics. He was six but his capability was equivalent to age 10. They tested Ag’s intelligence quotient (IQ). He scored very high marks. In one training session, the trainer was teaching Ag arithmetic. I was very surprised. When the class was over, I asked quietly: “Why don’t you teach Ag social skill?” She replied: “All training materials in the center are too easy for your son. So I am teaching him arithmetic.” I was amazed. I became speechless.

Everyone in the center, including the psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist and even the social worker involved in this case, realized that Ag was very intelligent. However, Sue and I failed to see this. We were obsessed by our preoccupations i.e. Ag’s autistic behavior when he was a little boy. We were overloaded and had been worrying for years. We failed to see Ag’s ability. Sue and I once asked a very stupid question: “Can Ag go to normal primary school after kindergarten?” From the trainers’ point of view, Ag was more than capable.

However, Sue and I failed to see this. We worried that Ag needed to join special education school.

The clinical psychologist was insightful. He knew that Sue and I worried too much. I explained a few times that Ag's brother, Gi, was gifted. The gap between them was very big. This was loading extra pressure on the family. I took leave for 6 months. He knew my target and what I was eager for!

I kept a file of Ag's special education. I collected all assessment reports, all my observations and my notes which I took down during review meetings. I also kept all training course leaflets, progress reports, instructors' comment as well as the report of kindergarten. I brought this file with me to all review meetings, so that I could refer whenever necessary. This psychologist welcomed and admired my effort. However, in the second last meeting, he suddenly ordered: "Enough. I don't want you to carry this file anymore." I was astounded and bewildered. That night, I thought about this seriously. The psychologist had handled my case for 2 years. He concluded that Sue and I had done what we should have. Ag had learnt a lot. The IQ test proved that Ag was very intelligent. However, this psychologist declined to disclose the exact score. He did not want to load more onto our shoulders. It was time to slow down, to relax and to let Ag go his way, to follow his natural talent. This psychologist clearly understood my obsession. He did not hard sell his idea. He just told me to stop bringing the file. He did it in a soft way.

Ag has largely overcome Asperger's Syndrome. He has been doing very well at primary school. He is a class monitor. He has won 4 times "Conduct and Diligence" award. He possesses basic social skills which is good enough at primary school. He is not talkative. He still needs to learn to communicate better. He does not enjoy himself in a large group. He likes reading. His favorite topic is dinosaurs. He keeps reading all the time. Once he gets up, he starts reading when taking breakfast. On his journey to school, he reads when taking Mass Transit Railway. In weekends, he reads when I stop my car at traffic light! He is very happy when reading. To me, this is not really a bad habit, so I let him do it.

As long as the child has a happy life, it is not a concern even if he has just very few interests. If he is not causing trouble to other people and himself, then I should not push him. If a child with

Asperger's has picked up the basic social skill, then the parents should let go. Help the child to explore. Once he finds his talents and his interest, he will learn quickly. He will be happy.

Ag will not be talkative. He will never be as articulate as his brother Gi. He will not become a good master of ceremony. He will not be a member of school debate team. Ag might do research or even become a scientist. He has repeated many times that he wants to become a paleontologist. I think that it is good. This probably suits him.

Having a child with Asperger's in the family is not the end of the world. Help him to overcome and develop his ability. Let him run fast in his own way.

Chapter 12 - My Own Journey, Push It Through In A Hard Way

When Ag was diagnosed, I worried a lot. I started to read about this syndrome. I read a book “The Complete Guide to Asperger’s Syndrome” by Tony Attwood.

The book described the difficulties and problems of children with Asperger’s. I was shocked. The description matched exactly the difficulties which I encountered since I was a boy and lasted until I became an adult, a period of more than 20 years. All those unpleasant and unhappy memories which had dissipated long time ago suddenly came back to my total recall. I was stormed by these bitter and hurtful memories. I had many sleepless nights. I was also a person with Asperger’s before!

Many years ago, a colleague criticized me openly: “Are you autistic?” I did not reply. More precisely, I panicked. Nowadays, I consider myself no longer a person with Asperger’s. However, I am not cured. I drop the impairments behind successfully. Asperger’s Syndrome has not posed any impact on my daily life for years. If I had not read this book, I could not have recalled those agonizing experiences.

I tried and tried, but I could recall just very little my childhood and mainly bad memories. Some of the unpleasant experience happened more than 30 years ago yet I could still remember lots of details. On the other hand, I could recall very little enjoyable memories. Even if I could, just very vaguely. Why? I could not explain. In this respect, I did not have a joyful childhood!

There was nothing to do with my family. My parents were kind to me. They took good care of all their offspring. When I was a little boy, I lived in a governmental resettlement building. In the living quarter, there was no sleeping room for me and my siblings. We shared one bunk bed. All my primary school classmates came from family of similar condition. I had no complaint. My siblings could recall the names of their best friends and lots of enjoyable moments. They could even tell me the name of my best playmates, but I could not remember. Why? My mother loved me. My siblings said that she loved me more. I agreed. Why was I unable to recall any ‘happy childhood’? It was not because of my parents or my family. It was my own problem!

Years later, I became an adolescent. I overcome, to some degree, my shyness and lonesome behavior. Only by then I started to have certain enjoyable living experience.

Having finished reading "The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome", I then realized why I had those problems. I was suffering from the same syndrome. My heart sank. I vowed not to allow Ag to follow my footsteps. From childhood to adulthood, I had more than 20 years of bad and bitter experiences. This was why I had the utmost perseverance to help Ag. Taking 6 months leave off duty was nothing.

My journey of overcome may be representative. There was once a child with Asperger's who had missed early special education and counselling. Subsequently, he had encountered lots of difficulties and hard times. This story will help the concerned parents to understand the importance of early education. I consider myself no longer with Asperger's. How did I overcome? Was I fortunate? Was it blessing? Was it due to? I shall never know. Is there anyone who can never overcome? How are they doing now? Today I have a family and a career. I consider myself in middle class. How about those who cannot overcome? I dare not guess. I leave this question to clinical psychologists and psychiatrists who may want to explore.

My Personality

Three to four decades ago, nobody in Hong Kong knew Asperger's Syndrome. When I was a little boy, I was very shy. My parents, my siblings and my teachers made the same comment. I was never social. During Chinese New Year, my mother brought the children to visit seniors and friends. I found it very difficult to say "Gong Xi Fa Cai" (meaning 'wishing you a fortune'). I had no speech problem but just found it hard to say. My sister and brother were younger than me, but they had no problem. They talked to people cheerfully. They played with our cousins or children of similar age. However, I kept silent and stayed away. My mother asked my seniors to excuse me, saying that I was shy. Year after year, I gradually disliked visiting seniors during Chinese New Year. I was then around 12 or 13. My mother let me do what I wanted.

I trusted everybody. I followed what people told me to do, even it was unreasonable. I never judged. Gradually, I became a targeted victim at school and was bullied. I never fought back, not even protected myself. When I was studying primary 6, the class played table tennis after lunch. It cost 30 cents per hour. My mother gave me 50 cents as daily pocket money. The bus

fare for return ticket cost 20 cents. One of my classmates asked me: "Do you have 30 cents?" I replied: "Yes". He asked me to pay and I followed. Every classmate took turn to play table tennis. I had no priority. For more than half of a year, I paid for the whole class to play table tennis. I never declined, countered or asked for priority. After many months, my mother asked: "Have you saved any money?" I told her what had happened. She was very upset and instructed me not to pay any more. She did not scold me stupid. From then on, there was no more table tennis game for the class. I was twelve years old. Why was I so foolish?

My parents and siblings commented that I never knew how to protect myself. I became a victim from time to time. However, I was intelligent. I did well at school, actually the best in the family. Throughout six years of primary school, I was either the best or the second best in school examination. In addition, I got "Good Conduct" award year after year. As a whole, I was a good boy, a good student, but stupid.

'Stupid' was with me from primary school, to secondary, to university and to the first few years of my working life. Classmates and working colleagues made fun of me. None of them really wanted to hurt me. Yet this comment "stupid" reflected literally how people considered me. I heard many similar comments e.g. 'simple', 'naive', 'honest', 'never tell lies', 'never joke', over and over again.....

When I was in primary school, I was the target of my classmates to make joke on. There was a very serious incidence when I was in primary 6. Somehow several schoolmates made joke on me. I was not happy, turned and walked away. It was an uphill walk outside my school campus. One classmate ran downhill towards me quickly and jumped high. He yelled to me: "Duck". He was expecting me to duck. He would jump over me and landed as a winner. Then everybody would have a big laugh of mock. However, I was over-carried by my anger. I did not hear him at all. I continued to walk up hill with my back straight. So, I was knocked down badly. "Bomb" the back of my head hit on the ground hard, very hard. My head was extremely painful. I felt as if it was pierced through by many arrows. This was all I could remember. I did not know what had happened afterwards. Did I stand up myself or did my classmates come forward to help?

There was mathematics classwork in the afternoon. I had a very severe head pain throughout the entire afternoon. I could not focus on the classwork. Normally, I could easily score over 90

marks. However, due to the severe pain, I did badly, perhaps 70+ marks. Only after school was over, I gradually felt better. My head pain had lasted for three hours.

It was a very bad hit on the back of my head. Actually, I should have gone to clinics for examination. The student who knocked me down should face disciplinary action. What he did to me was very dangerous. I could have been hurt seriously. However, I did not report to my teacher. I did not tell my parents. I did not complain. Nothing! I was twelve years old. I was indeed 'stupid'!

The above two were all my memories of primary school life. Both were very unhappy experience and I could recall the full story. On the other hand, I had very little memory of happy moments, but all very piecemeal. I had no happy story to tell, not even one.

With a few sleepless nights, I still could not remember any happy moment. So I dialed to my younger sister. Without any hesitation, she started to tell me her happy experience which both she and I were together! She went on and on, one story after another. I was stunned. I did not remember. She even recollected how my family moved to a new home when she was only 5 or 6 years old. She was very excited in her recollection. It was a very enjoyable moment for her, but I did not remember.

Then I called my elder brother. Also without any hesitation, he immediately told me a lot too, how I was bullied, one case after another! As soon as he told me the stories, I recalled a few, all quite bad. Someone pushed a burning stick onto my neck. Another wounded my waist with a chopper. A third knocked my head against a wall.... There were also many other cases, but not so serious. Somebody snatched my toys, my snacks..... My brother sighed: "You were a targeted victim...."

I was bullied frequently. I had a lot of bad experience. Why was I unable to remember any? Is this common to all children with Asperger's? They never know how to protect themselves. They do not even tell their parents. Their parents must worry.

When I was studying in my secondary school, my classmates called me by a nick name. I hated this nick name because it was bad. However, I took it. I never declined. From time to time, my classmates teased me. This nick name truly reflected how my classmates considered me.

I was very shy. I knew that it was no good. In secondary 4, I had a terrible experience, a total failure of myself. Since then, I determined to change myself. However, I did not know how. Without any counsellor or therapist, it was a long and formidable journey.

When I spoke with people, I was very afraid of eye contact. When I became an adolescent, I started to order myself “Don’t be afraid.” I kept reminding myself. It took me many years to overcome just this weakness. Nowadays, I am not afraid of eye contact in my daily communication. However, in case of confrontation or debate, I still feel very uneasy.

I was afraid to speak in front of a group, even in small team discussion in college. If my tutor asked me for comment, I kept saying: “No”. In university, presentation was unavoidable. It was part of the course work and was subject to assessment. To prepare, I wrote the script at home. Then I recited the script and rehearsed myself many times. On the day of presentation, I dressed up. When I came to the front of the group and tutor, I heart was pumping. I feet was trembling. I stood stiffly. I dared not moved my body at all. I ordered myself: “Keep eye contact. Don’t be afraid. Treat them as puppet.” I recited the whole script. When I finished, it was time for Question and Answer. I heart rate raised further as if I could hear every beat. When Q & A was over, it was a big relief.

After graduation, I started to work. I was scared when I needed to report progress or to present. After my first presentation, my boss asked: “Why was it during the entire presentation, you just stood in front of the projector and never moved at all?” I grinned but never replied. How could I say: “I was reciting”? I was scared to death! In many years afterwards, I continued to rehearse and recite all important presentation. In one occasion, I was particularly nervous and tensed. After the presentation, I found my back wet. I sweated uncontrollably! In the following ten years or so, I became more experienced and confident. Slowly I improved and no longer need to recite the script. It took me about 20 years to overcome my shortcomings. I was no longer afraid of speak in front of a group. I could present but I had little skill to make my presentation amusing and entertaining.

I was a lonely boy in my secondary school. It was a very well-known school with long history. The school campus was huge, actually the second largest in Hong Kong. My school was very rich in facilities. There were many extracurricular activities, more than most of other schools. However, in the entire 7 years, I had never joined any. My home was not far away. So I walked to my home for lunch in those 7 years. All other students went for lunch in group, either in the school canteen or in nearby restaurants. I was the exception. After school, I went home immediately. I never stayed in school for any social gathering. How could a teenager never have any social life with his classmates at all, in 7 years?

I was very stubborn and very rigid of what good or bad was. I never gossiped. I never made any jokes. If my classmates did, I would ask: "Why did you make joke? What didn't you say it seriously?" I made this remarks many times, at school and also in office. I considered making jokes a kind of inappropriate behavior.

I disliked solving riddles. I was very short of imagination. My brothers, sister, classmates were good at this game. They enjoyed but I failed it constantly. Even they told me the answer, I could not relate. From time to time, they laughed at me.

In my entire secondary school life, I did not have any good friend. How could I, with such personality? If I was unhappy, I would stay alone in a quiet corner in my school, and always the same corner. I was willing to talk to a few classmates who were also gentle, but I did not have very close friends.

After school, I spent my leisure time at home. I read. I assembled jigsaw puzzles. I enjoyed most assembling jigsaw of over 1000 pieces. My favorite was scenic landscape, actually exclusively. I was very patient. I spent days doing this. Once complete, I glued them on cardboard piece by piece. I liked building models, aircraft, vessels, tanks, artillery etc. I painted my models to perfect. As I had more and more complete models, I needed storage. I made myself a junior carpenter. I built cabinet myself. Nobody taught me. I practiced and experimented. I learnt how to use simple hand-tools, such as hammer, hand saw, etc. I had a strong mind. I did not have any wood plane, so I used sand paper instead to plane the board. Just this job took me a few days to complete. I used nails and hammer to get all pieces together. Then I painted it with

gross lacquer. Finally, after weeks of work, I made myself a cabinet. Then, with the help of my uncle, I nailed the cabinet to a wall in my bedroom. With this success, in the subsequent years, I built more cabinets or storage for my family. This was all my main leisure activity. In other words, after school, I stayed home all the time!

My mother noticed. She knew something was not right. She encouraged me to go out but I declined. My father worked 7 days a week. He never had time with me. Very occasionally, I went out to library, to swimming pool or to go fishing, all alone. I found it very hard to ask for company. This was all my 7 years of secondary school life.

I was very close with my mother. I was very willing to take up house duties. In the weekend, I helped cleaning and tidying up the living quarter. In summer and winter vacation, I helped massive cleaning and renovation. My siblings did not like these duties and slipped away. I stayed and I never complained.

In those days, glass windows were mounted onto casted iron frames which would rust slowly. I painted all window frames yearly. It was extremely tedious and needed a lot of patience. Furthermore, I painted all the walls, the front door and the back door. All these were very time consuming. Having said that I was very happy with the finished job. I was proud and I felt good. It was the same good feeling as I finished building my models, my cabinet and my other wood work successfully.

When summer or winter vacation was over, I returned to school. I told my classmates what I did. They looked at me with bewilderment, yet I thought that it was right. Not long ago, I read a book about Asperger's syndrome. If a child was extremely dedicated to house work, it was possibly a symptom!

I had problem in sensory integration. I could never swing myself. I tried this many times ever since I was a boy. Even in the period of 6 months off duty, I tried this again when I took my child to playgrounds. Still I failed. I was also poor in rope skidding. I hated playing basketball and volleyball because I easily had my fingers sprained. I played soccer at school. I ran to it and kicked it as hard as possible, but without a target. It was because in soccer field, I could never

read where my teammates and opponents were. I had difficulty to co-ordinate my two-hands-motion simultaneously. My siblings were a lot better than me and they mocked me a lot. This hurt me.

When I communicated with people, I could never read their mind. I interpreted straightly. If people made jokes on me, I hardly understood. Even I had worked for 20 years in 6 or 7 different companies, I still had this weakness. My co-worker said to me: "You are a very serious man." "You do not understand jokes" "Your EQ is very high. You can control your emotion." Having heard these comments year after year, I knew that I had a problem. I had made a lot of effort to change myself. Today, I can understand jokes if and only if I am in a very relaxing situation.

I did not have confidence, in particularly where I was young. I was very serious with criticism, even it was very mild. If I did or said anything foolish, my classmates laughed. My face turned red immediately. I had this weakness since I was a boy. It had lasted for many years, even until I had started working. My co-workers was very surprised. I was an adult but still I was very shy.

After my secondary school, I started college education. It was a totally new world for me. With my new classmates, I found it very difficult to join the conversation. The topics were new to be, about current public affair or news or city entertainments which I had no knowledge. I kept silent most of the time. If it was a topic which I happened to know, I jumped in. I wanted to show people that I knew. I had this problem for years. A few years after my graduation, I then realized the cause of my problem. I never read newspaper. I read just books and novels from school or college library. I never paid attention to the real world. I isolated myself. This, in effect, is "autistic".

After graduation, I started to look for a job. In my first job interview, I was very nervous. The interviewer noticed. She asked: "You were very tense." I denied, but it did not help. I failed to get the job. I knew my shortcoming. I ordered myself: "Don't be afraid. Stay calm. Keep eye contact. They were just puppet". I repeated and repeated these to myself. It helped a bit. After several job interviews, I eventually got an offer. I conquered my first challenge.

In the following 15 years, I changed to a new company approximately every 3 years. However, no matter in which company and which position, I still had the same problem. I was very rigid at work. When I read business correspondences, I was too serious. I might over-reacted and exclaimed at my desk. This annoyed or even frightened my colleagues sitting next to me. I worked hard. I talked about business all the time. Sometimes I pushed other people too much, but I was not conscious.

If I focused on work, I shut off myself from the outside world. If a colleague tapped on my shoulders, I exclaimed. This scared my colleague.

I was overly concerned about my performance at the beginning of my working life. I was so nervous that I started to have stomach ache. This lasted until I got my boss' first appreciation. In office, I muttered to myself from time to time. Many of my supervisors asked me why, but I never changed. Today, I still mutter to myself but a lot less than 40 years ago.

I never asked people to go for lunch together. If there was team lunch, I kept quiet most of the time. I found it very difficult to start a topic and join group conversation. I could not explain. So I stayed alone.

I followed rules and principles in office. I did not have my own idea. I just followed my supervisor's instruction and completed the assignments. I delivered all he/she asked. I was a very good co-worker. Occasionally, I took up tasks even if the request was from another team. I never challenged or asked why it was me to handle. I was 'stupid'. I did not understand the hidden message of conversation. I never paid attention to company business plan or business strategy. I never gossiped. I considered this disgusting.

My colleagues considered me weird. For many years, I have heard the same comments: "You are unusual", "You are different" and "You are a strange guy". Initially, I rejected these comments. However, having worked for years with them, some very kind people, I knew that they had a point. I indeed had a problem.

I once had a bad experience. My supervisor shouted to me openly in office: "Are you autistic?" I was afraid and did not respond. Thirty years ago, nobody in Hong Kong knew Asperger's Syndrome. My boss knew 'autism' and that was all. With my role in the company then, it was necessary to contact a lot of people. Furthermore, the contact changed every few months. I found it very difficult. I attempted to open up myself. Having said that, I knew the role did not fit me. I left my job in about 1 year.

Now, I am a senior manager in Information Technology Department. In this position, it is necessary to know computer processing and manage software development. There is no frequent change of working co-workers. It fits me a lot better. If I were given a sales job with plenty of customer interaction, I would have problems and struggle.

How did I overcome "Asperger's Syndrome"?

This was a long journey of over 20 years. There was no counsellor, no therapist and no trainer. I was alone all the way. It was very tough. ✓

How did the journey start? There were two turning points in my life. I was very fortunate to have picked the right course. Note that I did not find a way or a proven method. I overcame by chance. I happened to arrive at crossroads in my life long journey. I made a big step and turned myself to a new person. There is no guarantee that every adolescent with ASD will arrive at similar turning points. Even if they do, will they take the right course and endeavor? It is hard to tell.

The first turning point occurred when I was in secondary four, 16 years old. In one afternoon, I was doing homework. I needed a rubber eraser. There was a stationery shop nearby. I went there as usual. However, the usual shop keeper was not there. I saw a stranger. I was afraid to go in. Slowly, I passed the shop and walked to another shop further away. Upon arrival, I changed my mind and decided to return to the first stationary shop, hoping that the usual shopkeeper was there, but no, she was not there. I went back and forth a few times between these two shops. I never had the courage to go in! Then I talked to myself: "If the shopkeeper see me window shopping, they will be unhappy and scold me. I better go home and come later". That was a silly idea! But I returned home empty hand. My mum asked me: "Have you got your

eraser?" I lied: "The shop was closed". It was a stupid lie. My mum was busy and she did not ask further.

This occurred around 35 years ago. I remembered every details. I felt extremely ashamed of myself. How could a teenager, around 16 years old, fail this? A small boy of 10 years old could have done this better.

I hated myself. I knew that I would fail in the rest of myself. I determined to change, but how? It was not a matter of shyness. It was social inability syndrome. I needed counselling and expert advice, but from whom? My father worked 364 days a year, from 8 am to 8 pm. My mother took care of 4 children. She was busy for house work. Neither could spare time. At school, there were over 40 students in each class. Teaching alone was heavy enough for the teachers. In those days, there was no social worker at school. Asperger's Syndrome was unheard at all.

I totally relied on myself. I went through in a hard way. I commanded myself: "Don't be shy. Face it. Overcome it. Don't fail again." That was the only command in my mind. I had a very ugly lesson i.e. at the age 16, I failed to buy a rubber eraser. It was utterly very shameful. I would never allow it happening again. FULL STOP.

In the many subsequent years, with this command in my head, I had faced many challenges and many first attempt.

- The first time to attend an interview, when applying for university admission.
- The first time to do a presentation of study report at university.
- The first time to become a job seekers, to attend interview.
- The first time to invite co-workers for after office activities.
- The first time to debate with a sales person because of defect in the purchase.
- The first time to say my opinion in working meeting, to raise a different view.
- The first time to present my report to senior management in my company.

- The first time to chair a meeting at work.
- The first time to address all staff in company assembly.
- The first time to go overseas to do presentation.
- The first time to participate in press conference, as one of the managers to represent my company.

For all these “this first time”, I was afraid. I heart beat violently. I summoned my courage: “Don’t be afraid.” In many cases, I prepared script and recited.

My first resignation was a terrible experience. I was scared to death. I prepared my resignation letter several days ahead, but I did not have the courage to submit. Finally, I dropped the letter on the desk of my boss. I was shivering and uttered: “I resign.” Then I turned and fled back to my desk. I escaped as if I had committed a big mistake. My heart was beating fast. I knew that my boss would ask me why. I was 25 years old. I performed well and had good relationship with my boss. Why I panicked? I had serious problem in social skill.

What even more difficult for me was my first time to date a lady and to separate.....

For people who do not have social difficulties, these are all easy. But for me, all were terrible. My heart pumped fiercely. My face turned red. My throat was dried. I became speechless. In some cases, I managed to get the message across. In some, I failed. There was a long way ahead of me.

By self-commanding, I could force myself to beat shyness, but no other improvement. I was still a quiet person. I did not possess the skill to socialize, to meet new people. I did not have the initiative to participate in social activities, not to mention organizing and leading.

Six years after my failure to buy a rubber eraser, there came my second turning point. It was The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award (DEA) scheme. Today, it is named as Hong Kong Award for

Young People (HKAYP) scheme. At that time, I was studying year 3 in HK Polytechnic, today Polytechnic University of HK. I read the notice about DEA Scheme. I liked to enroll but was hesitant. I asked my good friend to join with me. He agreed. This was an extremely important question. I was no longer the same boy 6 years ago who was even afraid of shopping for an eraser. I had the 'courage' to ask for company.

It was one year from graduation. On the record, I did not have any extracurricular activity. I knew that it was no good for job seeking. I wanted to have something. With the company of my classmate, I was very much motivated. I want to thank my good friend herewith. If he had not agreed to join, most likely I would have given up. It had never occurred to me that DEA scheme would build up my confidence and open my social world. Actually it reshaped me all together.

Under the scheme, participants were required to take part in 4 sections of activity and completed them in 2 years. I enrolled in all 4 and aimed to complete them in one year, before my graduation. There were more than 40 participants. One year after, about 10 participants completed, including me and my classmate. I was extremely excited because this was the first award I got ever in more than 10 years. Furthermore, this award was not academic but extracurricular. To me, this proved that I was good. I was no longer a sheepish boy who just studied and stayed at home. I started to have friends.

Why was I able to get DEA award - Silver Medal in only 1 year? It was not just determination. I considered it very seriously. I concluded that teenagers with Asperger's Syndrome might have an advantage in some scheme sections. It fitted their talent. Participating in DEA would possibly be a good way to help ASD teenager to build up confidence and to have social life.

There were 4 sections in the DEA scheme then.

1. Field Expedition
2. Physical training
3. Interest Group
4. Social Services

Field Expedition. Participants, in a group of six, learnt map reading. The group would go expedition with an instructor. They needed to cook, set up tent and spent overnight in country side. I had never participated in any of these before. However, I found it very enjoyable as soon as I started. Moreover, I realized my map reading ability was superior, actually the best in the team. During expedition, I could easily point out on the map abandoned village, demolished old temple, streams, footbridge, power tower etc. Another team member was not bad at reading map, the others were fair and one of them was 'stupid'. I became a very important member because I was an outstanding path finder. Even though I was not an amusing person, sometimes even quiet, the team welcomed me. I started a new social life.

Today, I know ASD child normally is good at 2 dimensional graphical analysis. I guess that my outstanding map reading skill is related to this. I hope that experts and therapists to research on this. Perhaps it is a way to encourage and motivate ASD children, to uplift their confidence and to overcome the syndrome.

Physical Training. This was easy. DEA scheme made arrangement with the Physical Exercise Center of Polytechnic University. I simply enrolled a training course, then undertook training for six months. This was just a matter of perseverance and fitness training. There was no requirement on social interaction which was my weakness. Six months after, I took an assessment and passed easily.

Interest Group. Participants were required to take part in his choice of interest for one complete year. Within the year, participants were allowed to change once only. In the first six months, I took up boat building. It was not a model. It was a dinghy capable to carry 3 persons for sailing in coastal water! Six members, led by an instructor, built a 12-feet wooden dinghy. I was really lucky because I had a keen interest in carpentry when I was young. By the time we completed and launched the dinghy, I was extremely proud and excited. With this experience, I learnt the skill. I participated in building 4 or 5 more dinghies later. In many subsequent years, every time when I told my new acquaintances, they did not believe my story. Dinghy building was a very unusual experience which very few people in Hong Kong had. I wish that when my two children grow up, I will have a chance to build a boat with them, to share the fun.

After boat building, I started to look around for another interest. I found a Chinese Calligraphy interest classes in a Hong Kong public library. It was easy. I joined the class once a week. I learnt and practiced Chinese calligraphy in the library. By that time, I still felt very unease to have social activities with stranger. Practicing calligraphy was a real leisure for me, very enjoyable. Other than doing it in class, I even practiced at home. Six months after, I passed the assessment easily. For various reasons, I have dropped Chinese calligraphy. Perhaps one day, I shall do this again. I actually like this.

Social Services. This was difficult for me. Inevitably, I had to meet with strangers and would have a lot of interaction. I made this my last endeavor of the 4 sections. At those days, I was still quite shy and did not enjoy meeting new people. I had little social life. It would be a big challenge for me to find social services by myself. Fortunately, Polytechnic had connection with several social services agencies. Some wanted helpers. One service was to visit the elderly who were living alone on Chinese junks. Most of their next generation had moved away. They were quite happy to receive the visit of social workers. I did not have good social skill, but I decided to give it a try. I spent two days to visit the elderly in Aberdeen. I set off with a worrying mind. Why worry? What to worry? However, at that moment, I did worry a lot of unable to do a good job, to visit the elderly, to chat with them. I was simply not a matured person! I wonder if this 'challenge' is an unavoidable journey for any ASD teenager to overcome social barrier.

I managed to visit the elderly. If I was required to organize activities for juvenile or teenager and to lead them, it would probably be a messy experience for me. My social skill was not good enough then.

Joining DEA scheme re-shaped me all together. I became a lot more open. In my secondary school, I was in the middle academically. I did not have a high self-esteem. DEA Silver award rebuilt my confidence. To me, this medal symbolized my perseverance, determination and ability. It was a breakthrough. Furthermore, only one-fourth of the participants made it. I was proud of myself.

I started to get applause from my classmates, friends and family members, the first time in more than a decade. This was a big encouragement. I began to have social interaction. I enjoyed hill walking. I started to initiate, organize and lead the group. It was a big step forward

to build friendship and social life. After all, I like hiking a lot more than going to dancing party which to me was just noisy. After dinghy building, I started to learn sailing. I enjoyed sailing even more than hiking. Gradually, I made new friends with common interest. I started to have enjoyable social life.

Two years later, I took a course in Outward Bound School of Hong Kong. I went on board the school sailing ship "Spirit of the Wind" and sailed to the Philippines. I considered this a big challenge. My goal was simple i.e. I wanted to overcome challenge, to prove my ability.

I completed my trip to the Philippines. My family members, my co-workers and ex-classmates were all surprised and gave me big applause. My confidence rose to the top. Then I joined Outward Bound Alumni Association. Very quickly I became an active member of the sailing group. I made a lot of new friends. In the subsequent 6 or 7 years, hiking and sailing occupied all my leisure time, with friends. I was no longer alone. I dropped all my old interests and hobbies which I did alone before.

This was the most crucial turning point for me to overcome Asperger's Syndrome. Nevertheless, it took time. From DEA to Outward Bound, I spent two years. I opened up but there was still a long way ahead.

Even though I had slashed timidity largely, built up confidence and begun to have friends, my social circle was yet small, just sailing and hill walking. I joined 3 sailing clubs. I took part in sailing regatta. I practiced a lot. I studied aero-dynamics and read all books in library about dinghy racing. I wanted to win and I succeeded. I was superior in dinghy racing, and addicted.

Having said that, I had many years of happy and wonderful time in the country side or on the waters. I was no longer a lonesome person. All my good time and happy memories commenced with DEA scheme. I had none before, not any sweet memories of childhood. I wish that this is not typical to all children and adolescents with Asperger's Syndrome.

I still did not understand jokes and was as serious as before. I worked hard but I was far from a good management staff. Sales or marketing was not suitable for me either. I never asked around or paid attention to what overall was happening in the department or in the company. I was working hard with my head down strictly.

Working, sailing, hill walking were everything for me in the subsequent seven to eight years. I did not have any further breakthrough. I was an adult but I had no girlfriend. I did not know how to date. I did not like Christmas and Valentine. Even if friends invited me to Christmas party, I declined because I felt embarrassing without a girlfriend. I am wondering if this is common to all your adults with Asperger's or Autism.

For me, proposing a date to a lady was very difficult. I did not know how to approach a lady. Somehow, I had a girlfriend but we broke up in six months. My working hours gradually became longer and longer. In the next couple of years, this gave me an excuse not to find a date again. Was I stupid? Was I too shy? Was I really too busy for work? Anyway, I never made it to find a lover in Hong Kong.

Very fortunately, I turned this around when I left Hong Kong and moved to Toronto in the 80's. My lifestyle changed all together. Everyone worked 9 to 5, no overtime. On weekend, there was social gathering among friends. In those days, a lot of people from Hong Kong moved to Toronto. I was a bachelor. From time to time, my friends invited me to barbecue or pot-luck, to meet with lady purposely. I was very happy to join. I was a lot more mature than before. I felt a lot at ease to date ladies in Toronto. There were a couple of reasons.

1. In Toronto, life was easier to have a motor car. Single ladies from Hong Kong might not have a driver license or a car or were hesitant to go on highways. Then, the gentleman would serve as driver. It was a matter of courtesy, in particularly during snowy winter. This was a perfect way to start meeting ladies.
2. My parents were not around. Nobody would push me or made comments.
3. There was no need to work overtime. I was available. The ladies were available too.
4. We came to a new country. People of the same original would naturally gather together, to help each other. There was a need to meet, man or woman.

5. There was no more big party or noisy karaoke, which I never liked. Instead, the gathering took place in my friend's backyard, in the form of barbeque or a picnic. I liked these. Occasionally, I was even called upon as a helper. I met people, or ladies. This was also fine.

I met a lady in Toronto. We started to date, became lovers, later lived together and got married. I did not feel any pressure. Our parents came to meet us just a few days before our wedding. They had no friend in Toronto. I and my wife had the discretion to do whatever we wanted. We arranged a small and enjoyable wedding dinner party with our local friends. Honestly, I never liked noisy environment. I did not like Mah Jong. If my wedding took place in Hong Kong, it would be a big challenge to me.

The clock would never go backwards. I would never know that if I had not moved to Toronto, would I have got married? Everybody worked long hours of overtime in Hong Kong. It would be a very good excuse. Would I become single for the rest of my life? Frankly speaking, it was a question in my mind in the few years before I went to Toronto.

I became a lot more mature in that four years in Toronto. I had a happy marriage, several good friends. We helped each other a lot. I changed a lot.

When I returned to Hong Kong, I rejoined my previous company. My old colleagues were there. I had not heard anyone saying again: "You are a strange guy", "You are weird". At work, I was not as serious as before. I was easy going.

Two years later, I joined another company and became a manager. I led a small team. It was easy. In another two years, I was promoted to Senior Manager. Still I did not gossip but I paid good attention to the overall strategy of the company, what other departments and other people were doing. I could understand jokes. My colleagues commented that I was an honest person, with high integrity. Nobody said that "You are strange". However, they said: "You are special". I knew there was a certain degree of respect. I had no problem to present my own view or opposition, to chair meeting, to go overseas for business trip, meeting new people.

I still did not enjoy social activities with a large group. I spent time with my family. Everybody knew that I had two young kids. I did not join activities as often as other young colleagues, but nobody would find it usual. Who would bother to urge me to join karaoke or dancing party?

I was no longer addictive to sailing. There were a lot to do in the family. During leisure time, I was very content to just have a walk with the children along the family trail. I was still no good to amuse people around, including co-workers, friends and even my wife. It was very hard. Sometimes, my wife was not happy in this respect.

Summary

1. I believe that I was also with Asperger's Syndrome before.
2. I have never got any counselling service.
3. I did not have a happy childhood or teenager time. People teased me and joked on me. It was very unpleasant. I had sensory integration dysfunction, which undermined my self-esteem and deterred me from joining social gathering. If I had undertaken counselling, I might have had a more enjoyable adolescence.
4. I realized that I had a problem at age 16. It was very late. I fought my way through in a hard way. Sometimes I managed to move on, sometimes I dropped back. It took me six years to just make myself no longer shy. Fighting alone was never a good way.
5. Fortunately, I participated in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. My talent was unfolded unexpectedly. With DEA Silver medal, it boosted my confidence and I started to enjoy social life. I no longer restrained myself at home, alone.
6. Although I had built a very strong self-esteem, my social life was very narrow, just go hiking and sailing with a small group of friends. I took 'Self-Challenge' as the only personal goal. This was not right. My social skill was still far from adequate. There was a long way to become mature.
7. For me, dating a lady was formidable in Hong Kong. Moving to Canada brought me to a new situation and a new living. Finally I found my fiancée.
8. DEA Scheme helped me a lot. I discovered my talent in map reading. Children with Asperger's are strong in two-dimensional graphical analysis. Map reading is on this track. Why not give it a try, as a way to help the concerned children to build self-esteem?
9. Are there any other way to help teenagers? There must be. Concerned parents better seek advice from counsellors and therapists.
10. From my experience, it is paramount to build self-esteem. Please do not bother too much what kind of activity it is, even though it may be a bit unusual, hiking, camping, or even dinghy building. This is the cornerstone to open up, to make friends and to build a social life.

In April 2008, I attended a briefing session of a training course. There were many parents. One of them asked: "To my understanding, when children with Asperger's grow up, they will change. Problem will gradually disappear. Is the true?" I was taken aback of this expectation. It was the

fourth month of my leave. I witnessed Ag improving quickly. I knew my own journey too. This parent had a wrong expectation. Nevertheless, I did not speak up because I was there as a parent. I left this question to the therapist who chaired the discussion.

Ag had improved a lot. His self-esteem and his sense of humor were much better than what I had before. This was achieved by early education and training, caring, family support and expert advice. I am very positive that Ag will have a happier childhood than what I had. I hope that this chapter convinces parents the problem of delay treatment.

Is my personal experience indicative and typical? It took me more than 20 years to overcome. First, I was lucky. Second, I pushed it through in a very hard manner. It was full of up and down. Is there any other real case whereby a teenager with Asperger's pushed it through without the help of any counsellor? How did he make it? There must be a better way. Let us find it.

Epilogue One

A few years ago, I was quite proud of myself. I thought that I did very well in family education. Gi got “Conduct and Diligence” award yearly ever since in kindergarten. However, the experience with Ag has brought me a new perspective. With two children, one gifted and another with Asperger’s respectively, the concerned parents must learn. Even if not, parents still need to learn and there are a lot. Having said that, I shall give myself fairly high score.

"Every child is different". My two children are good evidence of this statement. Because of this, we, parents must be open and develop our children’s talent. Love our children, encourage them, give them time, give them guidance and allow them free choice. Steer them but not control. All the above are well-known. It is easy to say but execution is a different story. I write a long story. If I can help Ag to overcome Asperger’s Syndrome, then other parents can.

Now, what I care most is research and study of ASD treatment. Have any other parents tried a way similar to what I have done? Does it help? Ag undertook an integrated program of special education and training, or a journey. The result was much better than what I had imaged before. Can his journey serve as a model? How to use this model to help other children? Should any other special education be added and in what sequence? All these are worth studied and researched.

In USA, there is “Applied Behavior Analysis” (ABA). From what I heard, ABA needs many hours of training per day. It is effective to help autistic children. I took six months long leave to help Ag. I accompanied Ag many hours a day. Is this in principle the same as “ABA”? I wish that one day, I have a chance to meet with expert of ABA and share. Other than ABA, is there any other therapy or special training program proven effective?

Today, Ag hardly exhibits any behavior of Asperger’s. Only expert may see a little trace. Seeing that Ag is doing better every day, I no longer worry. However, it was indescribably difficult and stressful before. I had many sleepless nights. I wish that experts will continue to study and research, to find an even better way to help. It will benefit a lot of families. When I write this

story, I have made an effort to include as much details as possible. I list all special education undertaken by Ag, the date, the duration and his age. I hope that this helps.

I consider myself also with Asperger's Syndrome before. I determine to write my own story. I thought that it was an easy chapter but I was wrong. First, I had very little recollection of my childhood and youth. I spent many nights to recall. Eventually, I had to ask my siblings. Second, when I started to write, too many ideas came into my mind. It was very difficult to pick and filter. I was not happy with the first manuscript. It was messy. I rewrote the whole chapter. Third, I determined to figure out how I overcame the syndrome without any help from therapist. What did I do? How was the effect? What each step or event brought out next? I spent many nights to dig out, to filter, to analyze and to conclude. This is very important. I am finally happy with the story which I describe.

In the past few years, I read a few books on Asperger's Syndrome. These books target to help kids and of course their families. There is none to help youth or adults. I had never got any help from therapist or counsellor. Very fortunately, I overcame. Is there any teenager who has failed to overcome? Statistically, there must be. How are they doing now? Is there way to help them? I can only leave this to psychiatrist, clinical phycologist and special education experts.

March 2009

Epilogue Two – A Letter to My Two Sons

Sons, in a way, this book is for two of you. Dad and Mum often teach you: “When there is difficulty ahead, don’t be afraid. Overcome it.” We say it again and again. It is easy to say. Now, Dad and Mum have given you a demonstration. A couple of years ago, Dad and Mum heard the term “Asperger’s Syndrome” for the first time. We never knew this before. It was utterly confusing and difficult. From then on, Dad and Mum faced it and eventually overcame all obstacles. After you grow up, you two must read this book carefully and learn how to face difficulty.

Please keep in mind that both Dad and Mum love you two. Why did Dad take long leave to support Ag? Dad and Mum did not want to see a big gap between two of you, with Gi leading the way ahead and Ag falling behind. This will be very bad. It will cause big trouble to both of you and the family. This is why I have to put all my effort to help Ag to catch up.

In Sep 2009, Ag started to attend primary school, in the same school as Gi. Dad and Mum had a big question in our mind. Could Ag do well? Very soon, it was mid-term examination. Ag got almost full marks in all major subjects. Moreover, he won “Conduct and Diligence” award as well. It was a big relief. But then in Dad’s mind, I set an even higher goal. In spring 2011, we received the assessment result of The Chinese University Hong Kong. Ag was also gifted and admitted to the relevant training program. The goal is attained. You two have very different talents. Both of you have been making use of it appropriately and are splendid. I wish you two have many enjoyable years ahead.

March 2011

Epilogue Three

Ag completed his primary school education a few months ago. No teacher has ever suspected if he was with Asperger's Syndrome before. In all six years, he got "Conduct and Diligence" award and was appointed Class Monitor. In the final year, he was awarded "The Best Prefect". I valued this award more than any others. It had nothing to do with examination. Ag was voted by all students. This award served as the best evidence that he was a role model in school. Beyond doubt, Ag is no longer with Asperger's or Autistic. Today, I can make several conclusions very comfortably. These conclusions apply to Ag and other similar children.

(1) Children with Asperger's have great learning power. However, they learn in their own way, a very different way. We, as their parents, know very little. The general public regard these children abnormal, but I think this term 'abnormal' is not appropriate. In my opinion, they are 'different' and that is all. I consider myself fully qualified to conclude.

First, my two sons are extremely different. I witness their development. They are born with different talents yet both are doing extremely well at school. They both got "Conduct and Diligence" award, appointed as class monitor and school prefect year after year.

Second, Ag's journey of development and his change was extraordinary. At age 4.5, he undertook an assessment. He was behind a lot, ranging from 6 months to 2 years in each assessed area. However, in around two years, he has caught up, so rapidly that everybody amazed. In all subsequent years of primary school, he was leading in all subjects at school. This was a miracle, turning a stone to a ruby.

Third, I was with Asperger's when I was young. It took me more than 20 years to overcome. My story was a long journey of development, very different too. In the end, I became mature. I have a career and a family.

When Ag was a kid, he was a piece of ice. He secluded himself from the rest of the world. We lost him 3 times. When we found him, no matter we spoke softly or shouted angrily, he neither

reacted nor understand at all. He was 3.5 - 4 years old but was just a piece of ice. I was terrified. To me, he seemed to have no learning power. Those days were the most difficult time in my whole life. Today, I conclude very differently. Ag has great learning power. He has been learning fast all the time. However, his way is different.

- He learns by his own method.
- He learns according to his own footsteps and schedule.
- What's more, he learns only what he chooses.

When Ag was a kid, no matter how hard Sue and I did, he ignored our teaching. He focused on his favorite. Even more difficult, he kept everything in his own head, without showing any trace. Sue and I did not know, NOT when he was speechless from age 0-2.5, NOT when he was age 2.5-5 with a little bit of communication with us. When I took my leave, I started to appreciate that he had learning power. When I was writing this book, I knew he had GOOD learning power. When Ag was assessed as gifted in primary 2, I concluded comfortably that he had been learning very fast ever since he was a little toddler! However, even until today, as a father who was once very close to Ag, I still could not tell Ag's learning method and time table.

Ag's, or may be all similar children's peculiar way of learning could have caused big trouble or be disastrous. Ag did not know what was dangerous. We lost Ag before. What if we could not find him? What if he was injured seriously and became disable? What if he was hurt spiritually and could not recover? Today, fortunately, he is an outstanding student. He is a class leader. He has excellent memory power. He reads, then memorizes. He may be able to research well in university. I sincerely hope that this story will encourage the concerned families. With an autistic child at home, it is agonizing. It is a long lasting suffering. However, please don't give up. There is a proven journey to overcome. These children can learn fast, but their footsteps and methods are very different. With the guidance and care of parents, they can unfold their potential and have a bright future.

(2) Forty years ago in Hong Kong, nobody knew Asperger's Syndrome. It was unheard at all. Parents just considered their child timid, sheepish, quiet and introverted. Some people might comment the child 'stupid', 'silly' and 'laughable' and so on. It was very common to have 4 or 5 children in one family. Parents were busy for making a living, unable to spare extra attention to the kids. In ancient times, Asperger's Syndrome never existed. In a small village, even if a child

was speechless in the first 2 years of his life, there was no big deal. They played with their siblings in the field. Gradually, they started to help the family for livestock raising. When they grew up, they learnt to cultivate with hand tools. Then they became farmers. In a small village of this kind, the whole village people lived in a similar way, a simple way. They might be the descendants from one single grand ancestor. They were all related by blood. They were straight to each other with little hidden agenda. There was no school with classroom, and of course no kindergarten. Classroom reading and writing was not important.

Nowadays, it is very different. Technology is fueling economic development. Knowledge is important. In any big city like Hong Kong, kids start attending kindergarten early. Reading and writing ability become indispensable. Kids must learn school discipline, classroom order, social interaction and to communicate with people. Otherwise, they fall behind in learning. If children with Asperger's are unable to catch up, they will have a very hard time, years and years. Their future becomes dimmed.

Children with Asperger's have their own method and timetable to learn. We must guide them. Ag's journey proves that they can catch up. When Ag was assessed in kindergarten, he was behind a lot in all areas. With the help of therapists and trainers, he caught up in several years. In primary school, he overtook all his classmates and became a leader throughout. The way to assess a child should be reviewed and broadened. It is not easy but we should start. The story how Ms. Darlene Hanson assesses the autistic child of Ms. Elaine Hall is a great model. If you assess by asking questions, the boy is a piece of ice. He gets zero mark. If you write and show him the questions, the boy is smart. He scores full marks. Switching the way of assessment, an autistic boy becomes a genius. Multiple disciplinary education is important in modern society, because of division of labor and specialty. Every child is different and each has different talent. We care and support all of them. Children with Asperger's have talents too. They are very focus on reading. They can memorize lots of data. When they grow up, they are very suitable to take up research type of work.

I have searched on internet for celebrities with Asperger's or those who are suspected. On the list, there are Einstein, Newton, many great inventors, scientists, Nobel Prize winners, national presidents, great philanthropists and many wealthy people. They are all extraordinary. Reading this long list, how can we not treasure our children? I hope the general public understand children with Asperger's better and see them from a different perspective. They are born with a different learning method and steps. They have great potential. They are diamonds but

embedded in rough stone, waiting to be excavated and polished. Guardians and parents, please get support from therapists and professionals.

(3) I believe that I was with Asperger's before. I once said to a therapist who had helped me a lot: "No matter what difficulty Ag has in future, so long as I am standing by, there is a way to overcome." In the entire primary education period, Ag did not have any major issues, but just a few minor ones. Moreover, I noticed that he was learning fast in primary six. He started to read other people's mind, little by little. Today, I am even more comfortable: "As long as he continues to grow in a caring family, he will become mature. He won't need me to be around." Other concerned parents can make the same statement.

(4) In writing "My Two Wonderful Journeys", I attempted to include as much details of Ag's special education as possible (in the original Chinese version). In the past few years, several newly met few professionals told me straightly: "Your book is full of details". I like this compliment a lot. Also, I spent a lot of effort to compose the conclusive chapter. I deliberately focused on methodology, not summary. Up till now, I am still happy with this chapter. I rejoice even more that I had the courage to write this book. If I had not made an attempt then, it would never had happened.

Some books seem to have vitality. I wish that "My Two Wonderful Journeys" has. This book will have a long way ahead.

One day in the future, my two children will read this book. I hope that they will learn to stay positively, to strive, to overcome difficulties courageously.

November, 2015

Acknowledgments

Ag commenced his primary school education in 2009. From then till now, Ag has been doing very well in his primary school. He has got 4 “Conduct and Diligence” awards so far. I asked myself repeatedly: “What made this miracle? Why Ag overcame Asperger’s Syndrome quicker and better than other similar children?” I am just an average person. After graduated from my secondary school, I have never written any articles in Chinese in 30 years. How come this book is e-published in more than one web site? Why are there readers giving very favorable comments? To me, these are all big surprises.

In the community, everybody has a role to serve. Somehow, a group of professionals worked together whole heartedly for a child. They were not related to this child by blood. They did not know this child or his parents before. They were from different organizations. They did not know one another. Nevertheless, they all committed sincerely. They took extra steps. They got no extra rewards or payment, but all were dedicated.

When I brought Ag to the training lessons, I consulted these professionals from time to time. They were all very willing to give me advice, how to do better for Ag. They did not flatter or boast. Rather, I heard a few favorable comments, very factual, from time to time. These professionals helped voluntarily. They conducted the best training program for Ag. They put forward the best proposals and suggested the best further readings to me. At that time, I focused too much on helping Ag. I overlooked that these were all unusual and extraordinary. Years after, I started to write this book and recollected. Then I realized that these were unprecedented. The very sincere, infinite help and advice from these professionals had encouraged me to keep on and on. Bit by bit and little by little, the cumulated effect was huge. It slashed all obstacles before me and Ag. With all these support, my family went through this difficult journey with triumph. Realizing what had happened, the cause and effect, and the great power generated, I was overcome by affection. I can never explain how grateful I am to these professionals.

Please consider this. There was a group of professionals with different skills, different specialties and different aspirations. They were from different organizations or companies. Their therapy and trainings were different. They had never sit down together in a period of 2.5

years. There was no plan ever to fit together the training and therapy of each of theirs. However, there came a miraculous consolidation which yielded a marvelous result. How could this come true? I was proud to be a member participating in this journey. What's more, let me boast myself once. I was the center of this group, of this extraordinary accomplishment. I had a wonderful journey in my life.

Probably, none of these professionals expected to see a big accomplishment initially. They might not realize how much I treasured this very special journey. They might not understand why I worried such seriously. My first child, Gi, was extremely smart, ahead of his peer all the time. All indications were pointing to a bright future. However, my second child, Ag, was a piece of ice, showing no learning power at all. Whom should I help and give guidance? I was in fear for years. I feared that Gi became superior while Ag stayed in special care center for the rest of his life. This would be a life-long nightmare for me and the whole family.

Today, Ag has overcome the syndrome. He is a class monitor. He has got four "Conduct and Diligence" awards in the last two years. It can never be better. The nightmare is over.

Special education is not easy. It is difficult to help children to overcome disorders, disabilities and syndromes irrespective how hard a therapist has done. Perhaps Ag's story is one of the few exceptions which has brought job satisfaction and cheerful ending to therapists and trainers. I want to share my joy with all of them.

I owe Potential Development Association (PDA) a great debt of gratitude. Three years ago, I started writing this book. I knew that the chance of publishing it was zero virtually. This book is not for the general public. There is no market. This book is for practitioners of special education and the concerned parents or guardians.

PDA helps to turn my manuscript to an e-book, posts it to their web site and allows the public to download. I think that this is the best arrangement possible. I am even more grateful when PDA shares the e-book with other organizations.

Thanks very much to Ms. Li, editor of this book, the original Chinese version. I have not written in Chinese for more than 30 years. Who knows how many corrections she has made in my manuscript to make this book readable?

Thanks to Ms. Chen who has written an extra-ordinary introduction to this book. When I first read it, I was amazed: "How can it be possible?" If my book deserves such a high value, I must share the merits with all the professionals who have dedicated to help.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have helped me to go through a wonderful journey. I give my most sincere gratitude to you all.

Potential Development Association Ltd

Ms. Lo and her daughter, Ms. Ann Chen, Ms. Wendy Wong, Ms. Emmy Li

Social Welfare Department, HK Government

Mr. Eddie Lo

Hong Kong Christian Service Early Education and Training Center

Ms. Lam, Mr. Chu, Ms. Lee, Ms. Yip

YWCA Lok Wah Integrated Social Service Center

Ms. Jackie Pong

Heep Hong Society

Ms. Eva Ng

Aug 2011

My Second Wonderful Journey

All my good friends know what has happened in my family in the past few years. They also know that I have written a book. Some of them said to me: “You are a great father” or “You are a role model” or “I admire you.” I thanked them for the compliments and replied: “If another father had gone through the same experience, he would have done the same.” Please consider these. In Hong Kong, how many families have a child who is autistic or with Asperger’s Syndrome? How many families have two children, one assessed as gifted and another with Asperger’s? How many of these families, of which the father self-assesses himself as also with the syndrome? Probably there is just one.

When I was reading the book of Tony Attwood, 'The Complete Guide to Asperger’s Syndrome', I was overwhelmed even just half way through. My long forgotten bullied-childhood suddenly cut into my memory like a sharp razor. That was a terrible experience. No father would allow his own child be crowned as ‘stupid’ for the many years ahead, repeating his very hard journey. How could I leave it? Taking 6 months off-work was a normal decision, but also the best decision in my life.

Since then, I witnessed Ag changing rapidly. He learnt much faster than anyone, even professionals, had anticipated. I was more close to Ag than anyone. As such I had a stronger feeling than anyone. Furthermore, I was also the locomotive leading this spectacular change. How could any other father have better and more joyful memories? I believed that this journey was unusual and worth recording. Writing a book became a natural continuation. I made the decision as soon as Ag left his special education school. Any other father would have done similarly. I was the lucky one, to have these journeys!

It took me nine months of hard work. At office, I took lunch box every day. At home, I worked at my desk every night. At last, I had 250 sheets of manuscript, hand-written. What to do next? Would it be a useful reference? I would like to know the comments of professionals, so I presented my manuscript. Several weeks after, we met. “Very Touching”, so I was told. We reached an agreement quickly. I passed on the copyright. The organization turned the manuscript to an e-book and posted it in their website. My offer was with one major condition i.e. free download for the public.

Six months later, the e-book was first posted. There were just an introduction, a preface, chapter 1 and 2. Unexpectedly, within a few weeks, readers went to PDA to buy! Of course, there was none for sale. To me, this showed how eagerly and seriously the concerned parents wanted to help their children. Later, readers even asked to meet with me. I was taken aback. I had never considered myself a professional or an advisor. After deliberation, I gave them my apology.

The e-book was posted chapter by chapter. This was good. It gave me ample time to edit or even rewrite the chapters. The most difficult chapters were the conclusion and my own journey of overcome. I rewrote these two chapters all together. Finally, the project took years to complete. Within that period, more organizations joined the web posting. I welcomed and sent them my thankfulness. Upon posting the final chapter, Ag just received his forth “Conduct and Diligence” award from his primary school as well as the assessment result from a university. He was assessed as gifted. Sue and I were very happy and motivated. I sent an email to all those professionals who had helped me before, with my most sincere appreciation. Before, I learnt from them that in Hong Kong, it was unheard that a child with Asperger’s original became the best student. I wanted to share the success with these professionals. I believed that they wanted to know. Indeed they did and were delighted. Later, I rewrote the email. It became the acknowledgement of my book, dedicated to these professionals.

Many of my friends knew what I had done. They sent me congratulations, appreciations and suggestions too. I was delighted and encouraged. I thank them all. I also noticed that the higher degree of education level of my friends, the more they appreciated my book. Two of them were professors. They encouraged me more than anybody else but neither of them was engaged in special education. I wondered why?

By the end of year 2013, a magazine in Hong Kong invited me, via PDA, to write a ‘shorten’ version of my book. I liked the invitation but I considered it not appropriate to publish a shorten version on magazine. Instead, I delivered an article with reference to certain chapters of my book. Little by little, I gradually became positive that “My Two Wonderful Journeys” was bringing encouragement to the concerned families.

From the very moment I started composing in year 2008, I had never expected to paper publish this book. There was no market. Having got it posted in a website for people to download had exceeded my very first expectation a lot. I thought that this was the end of the journey.

On 2nd of April 2015, I read an editorial on a Hong Kong local newspaper. I learnt that United Nations had made the 2nd of April every year the “World Autism Awareness Day”. The editorial called for general awareness of autism. Early identification and early intervention could help the concerned children a great deal. I was touched by the editorial. I printed a copy of my e-book and sent it to the newspaper with a short letter. I did not ask for paper publishing but I wrote down my email address because the editor might want to verify with me. Two weeks later, I got an invitation email. It was a great surprise. I struggled a lot, eventually called back after several days. Within 15 minutes, we concluded. It was a wonderful conversation.

The idea of the press was the same as mine. We both believed that there was no market, but we wanted to help the concerned family, to encourage them and to show our care. The press recommended me to write a new chapter, with importance, so as to make the paper book more inviting. Since it coincided with Ag’s graduation from primary school, it was the perfect time to have a review. In several weeks, I finished the manuscript of a long new chapter, covering the major development of Ag in his 6 years of primary school as well as many interesting stories and happenings (see note 2). I submitted the manuscript to the press.

Taking a break, I suddenly had an idea. I searched on internet, the first time ever. To my big surprise, I found favorable comments on my e-book. These comments were posted within just a few months after the e-book was published in 2009, but I never knew.

Two weeks after submission of the manuscript, I met with the director of the press. I remarked: “After graduating from my secondary school, I have never written in Chinese for more than thirty years. How could I possibly have written a good book?” Before I could go on, he cut in: “This is not important. Empathy is.”

After the publishing of the paper book, there came a long series of surprises, one after another, endlessly. Many surprises were very unusual. I was bewildered. I considered each and every

invitation very seriously and carefully. I once met with a social worker. She told me straight away: “Mr. Lok, you don’t know what you have accomplished.” I was face to face with her, but I became speechless for a long moment. Perhaps she was right!

Among all the appreciations, I was amazed mostly by four. The first was the introduction by PDA. “This book is displaying two different ways, of two generations respectively, to overcome Asperger’s Syndrome. It should be the first ever in Hong Kong, and even be among all Chinese communities in the world.” The second was from a well-known special education institution, which I have never met before. The institute quoted my e-book as a useful reference. The third was a comment posted in internet implying my book as a good reference as ‘Dibs in Search of Self’. The fourth was a recommendation from a clinical psychologist: “Mr. Lok, I will recommend your book to universities.” As far as I am concerned, any one of these suffices an honor. All four together became an incredibly supremacy.

‘Dibs in Search of Self’ is a masterpiece. It is a must read in all universities in Hong Kong for student psychologist, therapist, educationalist and social worker. It is highly regarded by all related professionals. It has been published in many countries. Years ago, I read the Chinese version. I learnt a great deal and was strongly moved. I used half of a chapter in my book to adore this great piece. How could my book be on a par with Dibs?

The most touching comment came from overseas, very unexpectedly. A friend sent my e-book to a mother overseas. This mother’s child was autistic. She made a comment: “The author fights against fate. He never gives up!” Over the years, I got many comments, all about the book but none about the author. This was the only one. Suddenly, my tears came out uncontrollably. Yes, I vowed to lead Ag overcoming the syndrome. With an iron-strong determination, I have accomplished.

Six months after the publishing, the press suddenly informed me that my book had been sold out. What a big surprise? I knew that a speech therapy center, affiliated to a university, ordered a few copies directly from the press. My original plan was to introduce my book and the journeys to universities, step by step, but it became too late. I was very lost.

Nevertheless, within a month, I got another big surprise. An organization asked for permission to re-print “My Two Wonderful Journeys” (full Chinese version). It was also related to “World Autism Awareness Day”! The organization wanted to use this book for special training, education, discussion and sharing seminars, to arouse public awareness of autism, to promote early intervention and to help the needed. I had never expected this, not even in my dream. A few months later, the reprint was ready. All reprinted copies were labeled as ‘Recommended Reference: 2016 “World Autism Awareness Day” Greater China Region’! This was a big honor.

In 2009, I had a manuscript of 250 sheets, hand-written. Who cared? Unexpectedly, I got help from people with passion. Since then, it had never stopped. In 2010, it was e-published with the help of PDA. In the many subsequent years, PDA did a lot of extra work voluntarily. In 2015, it was paper-published by the press with their generosity. Although I knew nothing of publishing, I had a strong feeling that the whole team of the press was engaged in a project, very enthusiastically, not just publishing but also the subsequent marketing, promotion and distribution. The press did this just for one purpose, to help the needed. Profit was never a consideration. The reprint in 2016 was even legendary. How could it become the reference book of ‘2016 “World Autism Awareness Day” Greater China Region’? This was beyond my imagination, ever possible.

In all these 3 cases, people with passion came to help. They were very sincere. Everybody took extra steps voluntarily without any rewards or awards. It was just like those professionals who dedicated to help me and Ag in year 2008 - 2009.

A few months ago, I searched on the Internet again. “My Two Wonderful Journeys” (Chinese version) was kept by seven universities and several special institutes within or outside Hong Kong, one even in Canada. I am not a professor. What is happening?

The above were only part of a series of unexpected events. There were more, some very special. Herewith, I am giving my gratitude to all these good people and organizations.

In 2008, I determined to write a book so as to record a special journey. I spent 9 months to compose. However, I was not sure whether this record was done well, to motivate the needed.

After the e-book was published in full in 2011, I left it in PDA website, never bother to take further action. I had four long quiet years.

In 2015, I extended my book with a long new chapter. This was an outcome of a series of unexpected coincidences, (1) the 'World Autism Awareness Day', (2) the newspaper editorial on 2nd April, (3) my e-book was there ready to be printed (4) Ag was graduating from his primary school. Even so, I was hesitant to pick up a pen. "Should I accept the invitation from the press? Can I compose anything good? Is this worthwhile?"

Today, I am very sure that "My Two Wonderful Journeys" is a good book. It encourages. It proves that there are ways to overcome ASD. It sheds lights on the way ahead of the concerned families.

Since the reprint in 2016, I had several unhappy moments. By coincidences, it happened that I read a book, or listened to radio, or watched TV or just picked up "The Economist" to read. The topics were about ASD. University students looked down on themselves because they were diagnosed as with Asperger's Syndrome. Teenagers considered that they had no future. Youth and graduates in Hong Kong and USA respectively had big difficulty to find a job and keep it. Parents were in despair. There was a very heart breaking tragedy in Hong Kong. A father committed suicide with his two children, one normal and one autistic. My heart was sinking. I yelled in my mind: "Please don't give up. Please follow my footsteps. There are ways to overcome the syndrome!" I wish that I were with the father or teenagers or graduates, to have a good chat with them.

I had a few long discussion with several professionals of special education. I met with concerned parents too. My mind was triggered. I picked up my pen and wrote again. This time, I was fully confident that it was right to extend my book. I have written another two new chapters, very important chapters. One is dedicated to parents, to answer an important question raised by them. The other chapter is dedicated to teenagers and graduates, to encourage them. With these new chapters, this book will become an even better and more complete record of overcome.

Years ago, I was very unhappy. Why fate was against me? Why my first son was gifted and my second son was with Asperger's? I hated this. Today I have a very different view. I am a lucky father. I have a better opportunity than many other parents. Having guided and helped my children, I have learnt a great deal. The stories described in "My Two Wonderful Journeys" are wonderful, remarkable and influential.

Sometimes, I re-read my book. The difficulties and moment of despair came back to my memories. I fully understand the feelings of the concerned families, the parents and the adolescents. I went through the same hard time, in either role. It was indeed very stressful and I did feel hopeless at certain moments. Nevertheless, today, I am well qualified to conclude loudly: "There are ways to overcome ASD. An ASD child can become the best student one year after another. An ASD youth can have a good career and a happy family." So, please don't give up.

In Epilogue One, I wrote: "Now, what I care most is research and study of ASD treatment." I was very serious. There are two reasons. First, Ag has overcome the syndrome. I don't need to worry any more. Second, I believe that the journeys described in this book worth reference. Research and study is never easy. There is a huge amount of work to collect data and information, to observe, to analyze and to experiment and then to conclude. For many research topics, scientists and scholars can do experiments in a laboratory. However, for ASD treatment, there is no laboratory. Can researchers find a real case? May be, but it is not easy. Even if found, it is difficult to have pro-longed observation. It needs years of work, very close to the child, to witness the behavioral change. My book is a record of this kind. It may help to provide clues. More importantly, I hope that special education experts discover better training and therapy. I have not yet disclose all my knowledge and observations because there are a few very sensitive information. It is not appropriate to publish in a book.

I had an unusual journey. Starting from Ag's diagnosis, I took long leave, accompanied Ag, had fun together, slashed all obstacles ahead, composed, published a book and got it reprinted. It was wonderful. In my mind, this journey will still go on in a very constructive way.

'Dibs in Search of Self' is a powerful piece. I have benefited a lot from it. This book is influential. It has been translated to many languages. A few years ago, I had an idea to translate "My Two

Wonderful Journeys” to English. Now I have done it. This is a condensed English version of the e-book, the best I can do for now.

I must thank PDA again to post this English version in their web site for public to download.

2nd April 2017, World Autism Awareness Day

Note 2 : This long chapter is not included in this condensed English version.

Appendix

List of Assessments, Activities and Training Courses

Age	Assessment, Activity or Training Course
0 year	Born
2 years and 6 months	Assessed in Speech Therapy Department of The University of Hong Kong (HKU)
2 years and 8 months	Started speech therapy in HKU, one hour per week
2 years and 10 months	Started speech therapy in another center, stopped 3 months after completion of the course
3 years and 4 months	Following the recommendation of HKU, stopped speech therapy there
3 years and 7 months	Assessed in Early Education and Training Center (EETC), behind the average by 6 months to 2 years in respective assessed area
3 years and 8 months	Started special education in EETC, two hours per week
4 years and 2 months	Started to participate in group activities in Heep Hong Society, one hour per week. Continued until 5 years old.
4 years and 5 months	Assessed in Potential Development Association Limited (PDA), Ag exhibited symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome
4 years and 6 months	Assessed by a clinical psychologist of Social Welfare Department, Ag was diagnosed as having 'mild degree of autism'
4 years and 7 months	Started special education in PDA, 90 minutes each week
4 years and 11 months	I started my leave and accompanied Ag
5 years and 3 months	Started Play Therapy in YWCA, one session per week, total 8 sessions, one hour each
	Started doing roller skating courses in YMCA, including Beginner, Intermediate, Advance and In-line Hockey course. Each course lasted for 3 months. Stopped at 6 years and 3 months old.

5 years and 4 months	Started “Social Etiquette Course – Phase 1” in Heep Hong Society, 90 minutes each week, total 7 weeks
5 years and 5 months	Started “Social Etiquette Course” in The Boys’ & Girls’ Clubs Association of Hong Kong (BGCA), 90 minutes each week, total 7 weeks.
5 years and 6 months	I resumed working
5 years and 7 months	Started Indoor Rock Climbing course in Heep Hong Society, 1 hour per week, total 5 sessions. Took a total of 3 courses. Stopped at 6 years old.
5 years and 8 months	Started “Social Etiquette Course – Phase 2” in Heep Hong Society, 90 minutes each week, total 10 weeks
5 years and 10 months	Took part in Play Therapy in YWCA again, one session per week, total 4 sessions
5 years and 11 months	Assessed by EETC, Ag’s ability to analyze 2 dimensional graphics was equivalent to age 10
6 years and 7 months	Assessed in Pamela Youde Child Assessment Centre (Kwun Tong), Ag exhibited reasonable good language capability and very good ability to analyze, memorize and describe stories in animation series
	PDA recommended to stop special training
	Reached the exit age of EETC
6 years and 8 months	Started primary school education, appointed as class monitor in the second week
Age 7 till 8	In primary 1 and 2, got 4 “Conduct and Diligences” awards

My Two Wonderful Journeys of Overcoming ASD is the condensed English version of the Chinese book “攜手同心——兩代亞氏保加兒的越障路” written by the same author, Lok Quan Heung (樂君享)

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Online Publisher: Potential Development Association Ltd.

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Phone: (852) 2528 4096

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Website: www.pdachild.com.hk

Cover Graphic Design: Onyee Lo

English version first published (online) in September 2017

Chinese version first published in 2009. Second and Third versions (增訂版) published in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

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