

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.