

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.

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