

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.