

## **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. The 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.

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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.