

EMBRACING THE
WORLD OF AUTISM
WITH MY
AUTISTIC SON



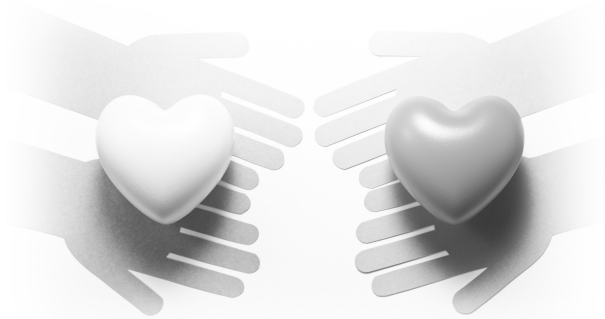
Pearl Bong

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Embracing The World of Autism with my Autistic Son
By Pearl Bong

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Author: Pearl Bong

Editors: Bentley C.F. Chan and Pearl Bong

Cover and interior design: Bentley C.F. Chan

Website: www.christiandc.org

Contact email address: biblicalmonotheism@gmail.com

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Contents

Foreword		ix
Chapter 1	A Special Gift From God	1
Chapter 2	Spiritual Lessons Learned in Raising an Autistic Child	17
Chapter 3	A Miraculous Journey to Israel with my Autistic Son	31
Chapter 4	Embracing the World of Autism With My Autistic Son	67
Chapter 5	Braving Through the Covid-19 Pandemic Together With My Autistic Son	107

Foreword

Bentley C.F. Chan

The stories that speak most powerfully to us—and stir our hearts most deeply—are often stories of human suffering on the one hand, and of God’s help in the midst of the suffering, on the other. The story that immediately comes to mind is that of the biblical Job, even if the intensity of his sufferings may seem unrelatable to us.

I think Pearl Bong’s story will likewise speak powerfully to us, even if her story is not the equal of Job’s. For one thing, whereas Job lost his children (Job 1:18–19), Pearl and her husband kept theirs. Yet it was the survival of their son, who was born prematurely and later diagnosed as autistic, that has made possible a poignant story of a mother’s self-giving love for her autistic son, and of God’s unmistakable love for both.

While you are reading this book of five chapters, please keep in mind that there is an 18-year gap between the first two chapters and the last three. This book was not written in one sitting, but is a compilation of Pearl’s sharings

written at various points in her life, and published at www.christiandc.org.

Sister Pearl welcomed my suggestion of compiling her five sharings into a book, arranged chronologically. As the editor of the book, I did mainly light editing and made zero changes to her story.

In the course of my editing work, something wonderful happened to me: Doors were opened wide for me to glimpse into the mind of an autistic person, *yet I was only looking at him from the outside*. Here and there in the story, I would see bright sparks of humanity that genuinely startled me (in a breathtaking sense), and made me realize that a person with autism *is truly and fully human*.

The book's outlook is not negative or melancholic but positively God-centered, at times cheerful. And the story is not yet finished, for Pearl's autistic son is alive and well, and the family will certainly experience new happenings from God in the years to come.

I am confident that Pearl Bong's story, born of suffering and helplessness, yet also of God's sustaining presence, will inspire many to seek after Yahweh our loving God and Father.

Bentley C.F. Chan
Montreal, Canada
July 27, 2022

A Special Gift From God

Pearl Bong, March 2002

Beginnings

My husband and I, together with our ten-month-old daughter, moved from Jakarta to Singapore in July 1990. We were as aliens in a strange land for we did not know anyone in Singapore. Three months after settling down on this island-nation, I discovered that I was expecting again. It was God's will for us to have our second child for we did not plan for that at all.

Towards the seventh month of pregnancy, I was suffering from some physical discomfort, and was told that the baby will arrive sooner than expected. Indeed the baby arrived prematurely. On the day of his arrival, I could barely hear his faint cry. Later we received the news from the doctor that the baby's lungs were not fully developed.

There was an infection in his lungs and he was unable to breath normally. The doctor told us that the baby had to be placed in a ventilator until he recovers, at a cost of about S\$1000 per day to keep the baby alive.

I saw my baby in the intensive care unit. There were so many tubes going through his nose and mouth, and he was crying in pain. I longed to hold my baby in my arms but I could only stroke his head gently. Fear began to creep into my heart. I began to doubt, and said to myself, “Will my baby survive this ordeal?”

Day and night I wept before the Lord, pleading with Him to save my baby. A week passed and the doctor finally managed to cure the infection in his lungs. She gave the green light for my baby to be transferred—finally!—to the incubator. That was the first time after his birth that I held my baby in my arms. I cannot describe the joy of my heart at that moment. All I knew was that God had heard my plea, and I was grateful to Him.

During that time, my husband and I were not attached to any church, for we were in search of a church where we could worship the almighty God Yahweh. Beyond that, we were seeking God’s will for us here in Singapore. We did attend one of the Baptist churches, but we were not regular members yet. No one in that church got to know us, for there were about 400 people attending the Sunday Worship Service. At that juncture, we did not get support from anyone, and all that we could do was to pray that God

would have mercy upon us and help us through that difficult moment. Indeed God was good to us, and finally the long awaited day had come for us to bring our baby home after ten days of treatment in the hospital. Praise the Lord for His mercy and love!

On the day our baby was discharged, he looked so tiny. I could see that he was reduced to skin and bones due to the pain and suffering he went through. It really pained my heart to see him in this state. Nevertheless I thanked God for letting him live. God knew the limits of how much I could bear, and He would never allow me to be tested beyond that. Indeed this baby brought joy to all of us at home. I thanked God for allowing me to experience the power of His love.

We named our baby boy Brendon. As I observed Brendon, he was a cute and quiet boy who was very adorable, and had big eyes. Most of the people we met could not stop admiring his adorable face. We delighted in God's gift to us. Brendon was a quiet boy and seldom gave us problems.

A most crushing news

On his third birthday, something unexpected happened. Looking back, I thank God that in His timely intervention, we discovered that our son was not what we had thought

him to be. A psychologist confirmed that our son is suffering from a lifelong psychological disorder called “autism”. We had no clue as to what autism is all about. After we were given a detailed explanation, we were shocked to learn that it was an incurable psychological disorder. An autistic individual lives in a world of his own. He cannot socialize, and may have severe speech disorders. We were told that he would have to attend a special school for an intervention program, which would cost about S\$1600 per month.

It was as if my beautiful dream was shattered. I burst into tears at that instant. It was the darkest moment of my life. I returned home that day in a state of devastation. I stared at my son for as long as I could remember, yet I saw no traces of abnormality in him. He was very handsome and did not have any abnormal features. It cannot be true that he is autistic! I wept and mourned before the Lord.

I was caught in a dilemma, and could not accept the fact that he is autistic. Many questions and doubts came into my mind. I could not eat my meals and was totally listless for about two weeks. I remember that my husband was in a state of depression, too. Our daughter Sharon was five years old at that time, and was too young to understand what was happening.

Nevertheless, I thanked God that we found Christian Disciples Church that year (1994). I was facing an intense struggle between God’s will and my own will: I could not understand why God had given me three wonderful years

of raising up my cute little boy, only to discover he was not a normal kid three years later. Was God playing a prank on me? It was very painful for me to accept what was happening. I could not submit to God's will at that moment for I did not understand His will for me. I wanted to give up my Christian faith and return to my old way of life.

I blamed myself for what happened to Brendon because I was the one who gave birth to him. On the other hand, I could not understand how a God of love could inflict so much pain on His loved ones. It was difficult to see that He is a God of love who will never forsake us.

God's reassurance

I earnestly prayed that God would reveal His will to me, and He did. Lo and behold, I chanced upon an article in a newsletter which had a story about the angels of God discussing with God as to whom they should give a special baby. God's reply was that the special baby will be given to the one who can shower him with special love and care.

Immediately I understood that Brendon is a special gift from God, and that God will enable my husband and me to raise him up in accordance with His will. The Spirit of God led me to study the account of Job's life. Job suffered not because he sinned; all the evil things that happened to him were within God's control. Although Job suffered, he did not blame God.

The Word of God spoke to me at that moment and I was lifted up by the power of His love. I was deeply touched by His concern for my plight and I knew He cares so much for me. As it is written in Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those ... who are called according to His purpose.” (NASB)

I thanked the Lord for enlightening me. I then decided to follow the Lord no matter what happens. Deep within my heart, I believe that God’s grace, power and strength will enable me to press on. As Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” I was determined to live a victorious life with His strength.

However, I realized that I had not died to the old man completely, which means I must say goodbye to my old way of life (Romans 6:6). As a result of that, I constantly faced a struggle over the thought that Brendon is autistic because I sinned. I earnestly prayed for assurance from God. Once again God heard my cry, and one day He sent one of His servants to our house. He is a missionary and he prayed for our whole family during the visit. Through that prayer, my husband and I received the assurance from God that it was not our fault that we have an autistic child. It was as if we heard God’s voice speaking to our hearts and we were both in tears as the Holy Spirit touched our hearts. It was the first time I witnessed my husband in tears. We thanked God for the assurance of His love for us and that He will carry us through each and every stormy period.

After that prayer, I could sense that the Lord had lifted all my burdens away. He had turned my mourning into joy; there was an inner peace within me that I had not experienced for quite a while. I praised Him over and over again. He is the Good Shepherd who has directed me out of the valley of darkness. I could feel God's love enveloping me. Although my heart was unsure as to how to raise up this child, I was determined to surrender my whole family to the Lord. I knew that God is in control and that only He knows what lies ahead, for He holds the future. I knew that the path ahead will be difficult, but deep within, I was certain that God's grace and power is sufficient to carry me through. As His Word has promised in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

Struggling with Brendon's behavior

We enrolled our son in a special school immediately. He was totally unable to speak at that time and had severe behavioral problems. In the first term, the teacher had to train him to sit and pay attention during lessons. Brendon had a short attention span and could not sit on the chair for even one minute. He would engage in some unusual behavior and could not understand a single word. He did not even know his own name. We tried very hard to teach

him the word “wait,” and it took him months to understand the meaning of that word.

I recall the frustration and anger within my heart whenever we were at public places. Eyes from all directions were staring at us as if we were hopeless parents who did not know how to discipline our son. In each moment when my son was impatient and misbehaved, I cried out to God, but God seemed far away and did not come to my aid. I was full of anger because I felt I was being tested beyond my strength, yet the Word of God says we will not be tempted beyond our ability to bear, but God will provide the way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). But where is the help? What is the way of escape? I could not give thanks to God at all. Each time that happened, I sinned, for my heart was angry with God. I failed to understand what God was trying to teach me.

On many occasions, I lost control of myself for I could not stand my son’s behavioral problems. I lost patience with him, for he could not understand a single word of what I said. Due to his inability to understand, he was unable to follow instructions.

Once I was so angry with him that I caned him; I threw the footstool on the floor and it broke apart. I remember him crying in pain. I hugged him tightly, and I was weeping with so much pain in my heart. I told the Lord that when I caned my son, it hurt him physically; but I was hurt even deeper, for it was as if a sharp dagger pierced through my

heart. I knew I had failed the Lord and had fallen into temptation. I pleaded for God's forgiveness again and again.

Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, I joined the training program at church, and began to understand what commitment is all about. I learned the importance of total commitment and that one has to live a life that abides in Christ constantly (John 15), for apart from Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). I knew I was treading on a difficult path and have to be courageous. In my own strength I will not be able to accomplish anything. Only by the grace of God will I be able to win every single spiritual battle. I was determined to pursue the Lord even though I had failed the test time and again. In His time, the Lord showed me that the attitude of a true disciple is to serve. He is our master and we are His slaves. I stopped demanding that God be at my beck and call whenever I am in need.

As I have shared, my son cannot talk. We consulted speech therapists. We sought help from psychologists and many experts in this field. I began to realize that I was searching everywhere in the world for a solution to my son's problem. We spent lots of money only to buy some comforting thoughts that we were doing something for our son. I consulted the teachers on how to teach my son, and I spent most of my time preparing teaching materials for him. All I had in mind was to do everything possible to make him "normal". There were many disappointments as

we saw that our son still remained speechless and was not making much progress.

Reconnecting with God

It was then that God revealed Himself to me once again. He asked me, “Why are you seeking a miracle cure for your son in this world? I am the answer.” I was stunned. Truly, I have been drawn to this world, thinking that there is a solution to my problem somewhere. In fact the answer is with Him who holds the future and is in control of everything.

Indeed the Lord is good all the time. He knew my spiritual state at that time. I was slowly drifting away from Him, yet thinking I was still treading on the right path. However, the Lord had never given up on me. He enabled me to see that I must surrender all to Him and be totally committed to Him. I realized that my commitment to Him has to be 100%, for no partial commitment will ever save me. I was remorseful for all that I had done and I repented before the Lord once again. I began to experience God’s power of transformation at work within me. All that I wanted to do was to know Him more, and to understand His perfect will for my life. I committed my son and my whole family into His hands, knowing that God will supply all our needs in His time and in accordance with His will.

I learned the importance of being absolutely honest with God. I told the Lord it was beyond my ability to understand my son. I pleaded before the Lord to show me how to communicate with him.

A hopeful start

Amazingly, my son came to understand the word “wait” and to know his name. My heart was overwhelmed with joy although he knew only one word. That was enough to assure me that God is able. It was a miracle! I stopped preparing teaching materials, and confessed before the Lord that it was beyond my ability to teach my son. I asked the Lord to teach my son in line with what He will permit him to learn, in His time.

As the days went by, we were told that it was almost impossible for him to have any speech, and that we must teach him sign language to enable him to communicate with us. Ever since I entrusted my son to the Lord, I stopped listening to others’ opinion for I had decided to follow God’s instructions.

In 1996, the Lord prepared my son for a special treatment called “Tomatis Treatment” to help him to articulate. There were parents who sent their kids for this treatment and had no results at all. So it was wonderful to see another miracle in my son’s life. He began to say words although without clarity of speech. But in May 1997, he was able to

call me “Mummy” for the first time! That truly melted my heart; I cried before the Lord with tears of joy. That was the best Mother’s Day gift for that year. Once again, the Lord had turned my mourning into joy, and that joy was indescribable!

It was also in that year that my son began to join us at mealtime. For many years, he would refuse to eat anything but potatoes. He would eat potato chips and French fries only.

But God was very gracious to him. He took care of my son for I could see that he looked radiant and healthy. Our friends and relatives wondered what food we were feeding him because he appeared very strong and healthy indeed. We knew it was by God’s grace, love and mercy poured upon my son that he could be a healthy boy despite the unbalanced diet.

The Lord removed his fear of new foods and he began to sit at the dining table with us. I waited almost four years for my son to eat a meal with us. That was another miracle! Wow! I thanked the Lord that we are, at last, a complete family at the dining table. Praise the Lord!

Throughout the years, I could see how the Lord provided teachers to meet my son’s need. On a few occasions, we came across some unqualified teachers. I guess those were the times in which our faith was being tested. We had to look to the Lord for help, and He showed us His unfailing love and faithfulness. He removed those teachers and

assigned new teachers to teach Brendon. We saw God's mighty hand at work; He sorted everything out so beautifully. Moreover, I realized that my son progressed much more without me spending time teaching him. That was truly amazing! The Lord taught him through many ways.

We could also see that the Lord enabled my son to communicate with us through writing. In 1999, we discovered that he had a photographic memory for words. He could write out any length of words after taking just one glance. Although he had minimal speech, he could communicate with us through writing. We praise and thank God for the skills given to my son. He is also very talented in drawing. He could observe every single detail of the things around him and draw them with much clarity. God has been very good to my son despite his psychological condition.

A year later, God opened his vocal cords to enable him to speak. He was able to speak simple sentences with clarity. We taught him to pray and to sing praises to God. The desire of my heart is that my son will know there is a God who has been constantly helping him, enabling him to do things which are considered impossible in the sight of the world. I prayed that someday he too will testify with his own lips that God is real.

It has been seven years since we discovered our son's psychological problem. Life has not been easy for all of us at home. My husband and I experienced a very unique and special love from God, which motivates us to love our son.

We have become God's channel of love to our son. Without God's power and grace, we would not be able to survive all the hardships in the past seven years.

We also thank God for giving us a daughter who is able to bear with her brother at all times. Although she had to miss out on a lot of fun and enjoyment at a young age, yet she did not complain and blame her brother. I am amazed how God worked in her heart at such a tender age that she could be so mature to understand and cope well. I could see God's mighty work in her life, too.

After experiencing God's reality on so many occasions, I appreciated Him for putting me in impossible situations. I have experienced God's strengthening my faith through each and every trial. I felt that I have grown spiritually. If my son's psychological problem could be cured through worldly means, I would have solved all his problems in my own strength. Precisely because it is incurable, I had to be totally submissive to the will of God. Indeed how true are Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:9: "... for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me." (NASB) It is when we are weak that we can become God's channel of power, such that His power may be manifested through us and that the world may know that He is the true and living God.

As I end my sharing, my husband and I would like to give all glory, honor and praise to our God who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.

Spiritual Lessons Learned in Raising an Autistic Child

Pearl Bong, July 2002

Thanksgiving to God

As recounted in my previous sharing, “A Special Gift from God,” my husband and I give all glory, honor and praise to God for His wonderful working power manifested in our son’s life. Through God’s miraculous work, my whole family had come to experience the abundance of blessings from our gracious God in many ways.

In this second sharing, I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to God for teaching me many spiritual lessons throughout these years of raising my autistic son. The content of this sharing is closely linked to my son’s psychological condition. God had taught

me many valuable lessons through some of the positive and negative aspects of the life of an autistic individual.

As I shared earlier, ever since my husband and I discovered our son's psychological condition, we have gone through almost eight years of hardships accompanied by many pleasant surprises from the Lord as we raised our autistic son. Indeed our God is forever faithful, His steadfast love never ceases, and His mercies never come to an end. We praise the Lord that our son will soon be celebrating his eleventh birthday in June this year. Throughout the past ten years, the Lord had never failed to see my whole family through each and every difficult situation, and I truly thank Him for His mercy and grace. The Lord's blessing is always in abundance and His grace is sufficient for us; it overflows and overwhelms all the time. His marvelous work in my son's life is indeed beyond description.

Some symptoms of autism

First of all, I would like to draw your attention to some of the symptoms of an autistic individual. One of the obvious symptoms is that he is indifferent to people and the things around him, simply because he lives in a world of his own, which is totally different from ours. He therefore lacks social interaction, and does not know how to show love and concern for others.

However, in Brendon's case, he was always happy and satisfied with his daily life until the psychologist and the speech therapist voiced their concern about his abnormal way of living. Well, is there any way to help an autistic individual get out of his little nutshell? Yes, help is certainly available for him. Although there is still no known cure for autism after approximately fifty years of medical research, an autistic individual can be trained to be integrated into this world.

In this sharing, I would like to share six different aspects of the life of an autistic individual, through which the Lord had taught me some valuable spiritual and biblical lessons.

1. Say good-bye to the old way of life

As I mentioned earlier, in order to fit into this world, an autistic individual has to part with his usual or old way of life. So long as he continues to live in his own world and does not part from his usual way of life, he will forever be known as an abnormal individual.

Similarly, if we have made our commitment to follow the Lord, we must part with our usual or old way of life in order to enter into the new life in Christ. We cannot deceive ourselves by living a life that is half-old and half-new, for the old and the new are incompatible and simply cannot harmonize with each other. It will certainly bring about spiritual disaster.

We read about it in the Lord's teaching in Matthew 9:16–17. If we pour new wine into an old wineskin, the new wine will cause the old wineskin to burst, tearing it apart. If we allow some of our old nature to coexist with our new life in Christ, we will soon face an intense conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. None of us who are of the right mind would choose to live that kind of life.

Moreover, there is no such thing as what may be called partial commitment. You are either committed to God or you are not. In other words, you are either in Christ or you are not.

Individualistic; indifferent to people; indifferent to the teachings of Christ; lacking love and concern for others—these are the symptoms of “abnormal Christian living”. The word of God has revealed to us that we must die to the old man, which means we must say goodbye to the old way of life (Romans 6:6). It is only after the old man has died that we are able to live the new life in Christ. The new life in Christ is a life in which we become living sacrifices, to give ourselves to serve others, always sacrificing oneself for the others. We have to love God with all our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In other words, there must not be any self-interest in us, as Philippians 2:4 says, “Do not look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” In everything we do, our aim is to glorify God and draw people to Him.

How are we going to achieve this goal of bringing glory and honor to God? To achieve this goal, our life must be fully governed by the Spirit of the true and living God. It is only by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit that we can achieve that goal.

Let us take a moment to examine ourselves. Have we in some way yielded to the flesh, thereby becoming somewhat “abnormal” or what is commonly known as the “nominal or superficial Christian”? Take heed, for even a slight blemish of sin in us could disqualify us from entering the kingdom of God.

2. Be flexible and ever ready to serve the Lord

An autistic individual often leads a very rigid and routine lifestyle. He will maintain the same old routines every day and cannot adapt to the changes in his surroundings. It can be very upsetting to an autistic individual not to keep to one’s own life routines, leading to frustration, anger and even depression. It is considered abnormal because one cannot expect everything to always remain unchanged. Again, an autistic individual can be trained to break away from that routine lifestyle in order to live a more normal way of life.

Let us take a moment to examine our spiritual lives. Is your spiritual life highly routine, with nothing changed in

the past year or so? Have you been experiencing God's wonderful working power? If not, then something has obviously gone wrong in your spiritual life.

The normal Christian life is one that is fully governed by the Holy Spirit. John 3:8 says that everyone who is born of the Spirit bears certain similarities to the Spirit. This verse says that the Spirit is like the wind. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So a Spirit-filled Christian is one who moves along with the leading of the Spirit. This type of Christian is mobile, flexible and ever ready to serve the Lord. For example, the Spirit may prompt us to attend to someone's need or make ourselves available to help out in a certain ministry.

All these require our commitment, and we may even need to reschedule our timetable to be always available to serve the Lord. That is the kind of followers that the Lord seeks: someone who lives in total obedience and is fully devoted to Him.

3. Focus on Christ and aim to do his will

An autistic individual has difficulty focusing on accomplishing a given task. This is due to the fact that his heart and mind are always distracted by the things around him. He is always obsessed with, and shows greater interest in, the things which captivate his attention.

Oftentimes he is attracted to things which are of no value in life. Seven years ago, my son was unable to sit on a chair even for one minute. He would always focus his attention on doing tasks other than the one given to him. Oftentimes he could not perceive or understand the importance of focusing on the given task which is of greater value and importance. As a result, he fails to accomplish anything. That is another abnormal symptom of an autistic individual.

Similarly, we cannot be fruitful Christians if our focus is always on earthly things, which will someday vanish into thin air. God has assigned tasks to us as Christians, in order that we may accomplish and fulfill His will and eternal purpose. That is our full-time job, not an optional job. But there are Christians who choose to live a life that is constantly preoccupied with heaping up treasures on earth rather than doing God's will in fulfilling the task He has assigned us to do. This type of Christian is in danger of being subtly drawn to the world, for the Bible says, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). God will not accept any offering from us if our heart attitude is not right. Again, aim to become a true disciple of Jesus and not a nominal or superficial Christian.

4. Be doers of the Word and not merely hearers

An autistic individual can be educated using very structured teaching methods, but he oftentimes fails to apply what is taught in the classroom in real-life situations. In other words, everything is just head knowledge to him. It may seem that he has mastered what was taught in class, but when he is caught in a real-life situation, he is blurred and unsure of what to do, and does not know how to act accordingly. That is a very serious problem and an obvious symptom of an autistic individual.

My son's teacher would often ask me, "Is your son functional after learning these skills?" I would rush home and be eager to test my son, for I was concerned about his progress. Oftentimes I was shocked to know that he did master those skills, but was incapable of putting them into practical use. He did not understand that whatever skills he had learned in the classroom would be useful if and only if he knew how to apply them in every real-life situation. But through constant drilling and applying those skills each day, he will be able to lead a more normal life.

I would like to draw your attention to the word "functional" used here. Let us look at the lives of some Christians. When we become Christians, the Lord gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us in our walk with Him. We would also join trainings to learn spiritual principles that serve as

guidelines in living the new life in Christ. But why do some Christians constantly grow from strength to strength while others make little spiritual progress, even living a life of constant defeat?

Perhaps we can ask ourselves: Have we been accumulating spiritual head knowledge without applying much of what we have learned, thus are becoming a “non-functional Christian”? James 1:22 says, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

Matthew 7:24-27 talks about the wise man and the foolish man. Are we the wise man who built his house upon the rock or are we the foolish man who built his house upon the sand? Verse 24 says that the one who hears these words of Jesus, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house upon the rock. But the one who hears the words of Jesus and does not act upon them is described as a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. When disaster strikes, the first house stands strong and firm, but the other collapses. So are you the wise man or the foolish man?

5. Be transformed in the inner man

Most of the autistic individuals I know are blessed with very good physical appearance. The majority of my son’s classmates look handsome and adorable. An autistic

individual appears normal externally, but deep within, he is suffering from a psychological condition.

Let's once again examine our lives: Do we appear to be deep in faith yet are superficial Christians? In one of Pastor Eric H.H. Chang's sermon tapes, he asked, "Are you a leaf-Christian or are you a root-Christian?" He described the leaf Christian as someone who appears beautiful externally, but lacks the substance of a true Christian.

Maple leaves look beautiful externally. In autumn they turn orange and red. What a beautiful sight! But sadly, they do not last. Before winter comes, the leaves will fall from a tree, leaving behind a barren tree.

But a root-Christian is deeply rooted in Christ. Roots may be hidden and may not be pretty, but they keep growing deeper and deeper, stretching into the deepest part of the ground such that the tree is strongly anchored to the ground, with the roots remaining strong even in winter-time. The roots are the most important part of a tree. They take in water and nutrients that enable a tree to keep growing strong and tall.

In the Bible we read about some Pharisees who did things that display their religiosity. But deep within, they were not fully transformed. They honored God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him (Matthew 15:8).

Through my son's condition, the Lord reminded me that a life that is not totally transformed will result in a "spiritual handicap," which renders the person unfruitful.

The Lord will not be pleased with any offering from us if our lives are not holy and righteous.

6. Make full use of your talents—Strive to excel in the Lord

Most autistic individuals have certain unique talents. I once I attended a concert performed by an autistic adult who was blind from birth. He is a Christian, and travels to many places to encourage others through his outstanding performances. The Lord was good and merciful to him, in the sense that he was given a very special talent. He would be able to play any music on the piano, guitar and a few other musical instruments after listening to the music just once. There is a collection of about three thousand songs in his memory bank. I was amazed to see such a remarkable performance and at the same time marveled at God's love for this autistic adult.

As for my son, I am grateful to God for granting him a photographic memory for words, which enables him to communicate with us. It also makes it easier for us to teach him many things about God. In addition, Brendon has very strong visual skills, which enable him to learn new things through observation. His teacher once said to me, "Although your son is autistic, we must never be discouraged by the fact that he cannot perform many tasks. Rather, we

will focus on what he is able to do and train him to use those skills to realize his potential.”

That truly taught me a valuable spiritual lesson. God has given each and every one of us a talent, maybe more than one talent. Have we been using our talents to serve the Lord? Have we been striving hard to realize our full potential in serving the true and living God? Do we give our best to serve Him?

1 Peter 4:10 says, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” It is in giving that we receive, and it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). The mark of a true Christian is that he is always self-giving.

Sometimes we focus too much on our weaknesses and inadequacies, so we feel that we have nothing to give and are unable to serve the Lord. There must be something we can do for the Lord. Perhaps we ask whether we have made ourselves fully available to serve Him? Are we living our Christian lives in our own strength or are we doing everything together with Christ? 1 Peter 4:11 says, “Whoever serves, let him do so by the strength which God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Let us strive towards spiritual excellence!

Imagine this: If each individual part of the body gives its best—if everyone makes 100% use of his or her talents to

serve the Lord—what a dynamic and powerful church we will have! We will become a church that shines in this world of darkness. We will surely be a powerful witness for the Lord, wouldn't we? May we all live the triumphant Christian life as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:14, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place."

A Miraculous Journey to Israel with my Autistic Son

Pearl Bong, March 2020

With photos from the Israel trip

Shalom! Peace be with you. How time flies! It has been twenty five years since my son was diagnosed with autism in 1994. If you have not read my testimony titled “A Special Gift From God” and my sharing, “Spiritual Lessons Learned in Raising an Autistic Child” (chapters 1 and 2), I hope you will take the time to read through them and to learn about the miraculous arrival of my beloved son Brendon whom my husband and I embraced as a very special gift from God. To this day, I marvel at how Yahweh, the only true God, has led me and my family through a triumphant life journey with Brendon.

Throughout the past twenty eight years, our compassionate God Yahweh has never ceased to pave the way so

beautifully for Brendon through many big and small miracles. It was overwhelming to experience how Yahweh God had removed many obstacles along the way which I often perceived as missions impossible. God's intervention in His perfect timing would often leave me dumbfounded! My little mind wonders, "Who could grasp Yahweh God's infinite wisdom? Who could fathom the depth of God's love for mankind?" I could only say that I stood amazed at how Yahweh God made all things beautiful in His time. His unfailing love for mankind is indeed beyond description!

The longing of my heart

Over the years, there has been a deep longing within my heart to walk on the path that Jesus and the crowd of witnesses had walked on, and to visualize the events of the Bible unfold before my eyes. With that in mind and with the strong burning desire within my heart, I prayed and asked Yahweh God for His provision, for I certainly would love to set my feet on the Bible Land if it were God's will. Oh well, after committing the desire of my heart to God, I waited patiently for my dream to come true. Why do I say that a trip to Israel would be to me a dream come true? Precisely because I knew it would be another huge challenge to embark on a totally different journey together with my son Brendon. You will understand why I had such thoughts as you read on.

While committing my vision and dream into Yahweh God's hands, lo and behold, in October 2017, our pastor announced in church that there would be a "Visit Israel Trip" from 10th to 23rd November 2018. Interestingly, that was the first "Visit Israel Trip" for our Singapore CDC English Service in thirty years. My heart rejoiced when I heard the announcement. Immediately I cried out to Yahweh God and prayed, "Father in heaven, you knew my heart's desire and you have answered my prayer. Yes, I am determined to set my feet on the Bible Land." That was my simple prayer of thanksgiving to Yahweh God.

After a short discussion with my husband, I discovered we shared the same vision. How wonderful! Our decision to sign up for the trip was firm and we speedily registered for a family of three (my husband, me, and Brendon).

A week later, I realized I had totally forgotten to assess my son's condition before submitting the registration for the trip. I believed it was Yahweh God's intervention at that instant. It seemed that at the point of registration, I was like someone who was undergoing a temporary memory loss. If I had considered more deeply my son's psychological condition, perhaps I might not be courageous enough to say "Yes" to "Visit Israel Trip." As I look back, oh how I thank our God Yahweh for helping me to make that prompt and wise decision.

The biggest obstacles ahead of us

Up to this date, autism remains an incurable lifelong psychological disorder. One of the symptoms of autism is obsessive compulsive behavior. Up to this moment, it has remained a tough challenge for my husband and me to deal and cope with Brendon's obsessive compulsive behavior issues. Our worst nightmare was to cope with the constant switch from one obsessive behavior to another without any knowledge of when each obsessive behavior will persist. We have to be very alert at all times to catch the change in Brendon's behavior so that we will be mentally prepared to deal with each new obsession which could surface out of the blue. Thankfully we found the tremendous strength and wisdom from Yahweh God to brave through every stormy encounter.

At the time when my husband and I had made up our minds to join the "Visit Israel Trip," Brendon was extremely obsessed with destroying things like certain building structures which, in his sight, look old or worn out. He was also obsessed with kicking stones and pebbles which appear along his path. When he discovered a crack or a defect in a wall or a hole in the ground, his obsessive behavior would act up instantaneously. He would lose control of himself, and his immediate reaction would be to make the crack bigger or to use his foot to kick hard on the hole in the ground until it becomes larger. As a result of his

obsessive plus destructive behavior, I was often reprimanded for being a lousy mother who didn't know how to educate my son. It was so painful when others fail to understand the predicament I was in. In all the hardships I went through, I just had to grit my teeth and bring them before Yahweh God in prayer. Through it all, I thanked Him for He is my tower of refuge and strength, always!



I wouldn't know how long each of Brendon's obsessive behaviors would last. However, despite all the struggles we had with Brendon, Yahweh God would always be merciful. He never ceased to keep watch over Brendon. On many occasions, Brendon would not sustain any injuries even though he destroyed things with his bare hands. The only things which often tore apart were his shoes as he

constantly and excessively kicked on stones, pebbles and holes in the ground. On average we had to buy him a new pair of shoes every three months.

How we dealt with the challenges before us

After my husband and I had signed up for the “Visit Israel Trip,” all of a sudden it dawned on me that almost all of the historical sites we will be visiting are full of old building structures, cracks and holes. Can you imagine that those sites are more than two thousand years old? Certainly many of the building structures are extremely old and worn. We will come across many stones and pebbles everywhere! Oh no! A horrifying thought surfaced on my mind. As I thought, “How on earth are we going to survive the fourteen-day trip with Brendon’s obsessive plus destructive behavior?” My heart began to waver a little.

Nevertheless, I came humbly before Yahweh God to seek His guidance. Amazingly, there was a sense of perfect peace enveloping me after I had committed my fears before our loving God and Father. The moment I stepped out of my prayer closet, I felt, “Wow! Fantastic! What a relief!” The answer remained a resounding “yes” to the “Visit Israel Trip.” Deep within I knew for certain that Yahweh God will carry us through no matter what will happen.

To this day I am so amazed at how Yahweh God has led us through each and every situation. It was after my

husband and I had made the commitment to go to Israel that I began to see the enormous problems I had on hand with Brendon. Initially I thought dealing with Brendon's obsessive behavior would be the only issue we were going to face. As I pondered on this, there remained many other daunting issues such as Brendon surviving the long flight hours; following the directions of a tour guide in a tour group for the very first time; and his obsession with eating limited choices of food in Singapore which are not available in Israel.

As I listed down the issues on hand, I calmly entered my secret place which is none other than my prayer closet. I earnestly knelt before Yahweh, my God and my maker. As a child in need of assurance from her father, I called out Yahweh's name. My sincere plea before Yahweh was, "Avinu, my Father in heaven, please show me Your way and teach me Your path, for Your ways and Your thoughts are higher than mine. I delight in doing Your will and I will gladly follow Your guidance and fully submit to Your will. Help me gracious Father in preparing Brendon for our 'Visit Israel Trip'. Amen."

After that prayer, the following week our pastor sent us a text message to ask for our final confirmation for the "Visit Israel Trip." Our decision was final and we will not let anything change our plans at all. My heart was totally at peace and I looked forward to my new and exciting adventures with Brendon and the rest of my teammates.

Besides my family of three, one of our church brothers and six sisters were on this trip together. So we were a small group of ten people embarking on exploring Israel with joy and anticipation. Oh how I thanked Yahweh God for granting us the golden opportunity to participate in the “Visit Israel Trip.”

Preparation for the “Visit Israel Trip”

Seven months prior to the trip, in April 2018, I shared with Brendon’s school coaches about the upcoming fourteen-day “Visit Israel Trip.” I highlighted to them the dilemmas we faced, and that we foresaw that Brendon might have issues if he weren’t mentally prepared to cope with so many uncertainties in a totally foreign land. The best way to prepare Brendon for the trip was to try our best to reduce his anxieties as much as possible. We knew that any new and unknown factor could trigger a breakdown in him. We were aware of the consequences of meltdowns at public places, something that had happened far too often whenever we failed to understand the factors which might possibly contribute to his negative responses.



Ancient tomb in Nazareth

The majority of autistic individuals have very high visual capabilities, and Brendon is no exception. With inspiration from Yahweh God, around mid April 2018, the idea of a visual guidebook came to my mind. I started gathering information on the various hotels we will be staying at. I visited many websites in search of pictures of all the places we will be visiting. After a thorough search, I finally printed out a set of pictures of hotels and places of interest. I then compiled a booklet which served as a concise travel guide for Brendon.

Although Brendon was now verbal, his understanding of language and his expressive language skills were rather limited. In view of his limited vocabulary, I had to write a brief introduction in simple English to describe each

picture so as to help Brendon understand what to expect during the trip. The whole process was quite tedious but truly refreshing and enriching for me as our Abba Father Yahweh had blessed me richly through it all. In fact I had already got a virtual tour of Israel before setting my feet in Israel. My heart was grateful to Yahweh God for teaching me to look beyond the obstacles before me and to face all the challenges courageously as He is my source of strength and the anchor of my soul.

In the midst of all the necessary preparations, I deeply appreciated Yahweh God for providing wonderful coaches who were very patient and kind in rendering good advice always. They offered their very best help in preparing Brendon for the trip almost every single day for seven months. They would go through the travel booklet with Brendon every day. On their part they designed a set of customized rules for Brendon to follow. Knowing Brendon from the inside out, they feared that he might interrupt others unnecessarily for he could be quite insistent at times. To help him learn respect for others, his coaches prepared three sets of question cards for him to use when needed. Brendon went through an intensive seven months of guided training every day to learn about the places we will be visiting, and to become familiar with how to make proper requests by using the question cards. The three sets of question cards were as follows:

- ***Hello, how are you?***
- ***May I ask you something?***
- ***May I say something I like?***

Besides teaching Brendon to follow the customized set of rules and to maintain good manners when communicating with others, the next big hurdle was to educate Brendon on accepting the totally unfamiliar food in Israel. In Israel the food is mainly a fusion of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisines. To date, research on autism has shown that it is a common problem for parents when it comes to persuading their autistic children to try out new foods. Brendon used to stick to a 100% potato diet when he was very young. During that time, I couldn't understand how he could eat potatoes three meals a day, 365 days a year, and had never gotten sick. I recall that it took many years before he could overcome the fear of trying out new foods. In fact, while in Singapore, Brendon's daily diet would consist mainly of French fries, mashed potatoes, Hainanese chicken rice, braised duck rice, Char Siew rice, Chinese style fried noodles, and spaghetti bolognese.

After much thought, I was caught in another dilemma. I wondered what would be the best way to solve Brendon's daily meal problems when we reach Israel. All of a sudden I felt there was a huge mountain standing in my way. I was lost for quite a while and didn't know what to expect or what steps I should take next. As soon as I was in despair,

once again the word of God came as a timely reminder. I turned to the word of God, and read Philippians 4:6–7,

⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (ESV)

Indeed Yahweh God comforted my heart when I cried out to Him. As I sat before my computer, our gracious God Yahweh led me to hunt for pictures of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisines. After I had done my research, I presented my findings before Brendon. I told him in plain and simple language, “Son, there is no chicken rice, duck rice, char siew rice or Chinese fried noodles in Israel. You have to eat all these new foods shown in the pictures. If you don’t want to eat these foods, we can’t go to Israel. Is it okay with you?” I was stunned when he nodded his head and said, “It’s okay Mummy!” His simple reply reassured me that everything will be fine and that I shouldn’t be overly anxious or concerned about his meals. Oh how I thanked Yahweh God for He is good all the time.

Finally, seven months flew by quickly! We were all ready to embark on our new adventure together! Our hearts were full of excitement when we arrived at the departure hall of Singapore Changi Airport. It was with an open heart

and mind that I looked forward to learn as Yahweh God leads us, be it through spiritual lessons from the guided tour or as an eyewitness of some surprises/miracles through another journey with Brendon.

Over the previous seven years, the maximum flight time Brendon could endure was approximately 6 to 8 hours. As for our “Visit Israel Trip,” the flight hours plus transit add up to a total of eighteen hours. It was quite daunting when I wondered how Brendon would cope with the long eighteen-hour flight.

Finally the day arrived for us to depart from Singapore to Tel Aviv on 10th November 2018 at 8 o’clock in the evening. After we boarded the plane, my heart was filled with thanksgiving to Yahweh God for He had made my dream come true! Travelling all the way to Israel with my autistic son was possible because Yahweh God is sovereign over all!

The beginning of our journey to Israel

While on board the plane, Brendon did not sleep a wink, yet he did not complain about boredom or physical exhaustion. I could see he was grinning from ear to ear as he has always enjoyed travelling. Though he couldn’t express what was running through his mind, I could sense that he was looking forward to explore Israel in no time! Much to my delight and relief, eighteen hours flew by quicker than

I had thought. When we landed at Ben Gurion Airport at Tel Aviv, I couldn't describe in words how grateful I was to Yahweh God for granting Brendon perseverance throughout the long flight hours. My heart exclaimed, "We made it because Yahweh God's power sustained us! Glory be to the most high God Yahweh!"

The issues with food

To cut a long story short, I will proceed to share about some of the miracles I experienced throughout the trip. As I have mentioned earlier, it is a tall order to persuade Brendon to try out new foods. On the second morning after checking in the hotel, we got up at 7am to have buffet breakfast at the hotel cafe. The first item I spotted at the buffet station was spaghetti bolognese. My jaw dropped when I saw that! It was the first time in my travel history that I encountered spaghetti being served as one of the breakfast items; and among all the foods which Brendon loves, spaghetti is his all time favorite. My heart melted as I thought, "Oh how lovely! How marvelous! That was absolutely a very warm welcome meal for my beloved son Brendon. Thank you so much Heavenly Father for loving Brendon." Brendon ate two big servings of spaghetti and satisfaction was written all over his face.

That was the first heart-warming meal for Brendon. Throughout the entire trip, we made no attempt to persuade Brendon to try out new foods because from our past experience, we felt that he could never be persuaded. We feared that he might get agitated and end up throwing a tantrum if we insisted he should eat the unfamiliar food provided. We had tried to persuade him to eat new foods when in Singapore, and the result was that he flared up, screamed loudly, and finally threw himself on the floor. In order not to create an ugly scene, we decided to keep quiet, for we believed that Yahweh God was in control of everything.

Amazingly, I saw a totally different Brendon in Israel. He gladly accepted the unfamiliar foods; he took the initiative to try many types of food without much hesitation. Indeed that was a miracle! I thanked God for removing what was standing in the way for Brendon to enjoy all the foods on the table.

If you have been exposed to Mediterranean diets before, you would know that they consist of lots of vegetables, pita breads and the well known hummus (a dip, spread, or savory dish made from cooked and mashed chickpeas blended with tahini, lemon juice, and garlic). Pita breads were served every day for it was a staple food. I couldn't believe my eyes when I witnessed Brendon gobble down a few pieces of pita on many occasions. To be honest with you, while in Singapore, he refused to eat bread at all.

Besides the pita breads, plain rice cooked in olive oil was served at almost every meal. Throughout the fourteen days, Brendon would eat rice together with all kinds of delicious gravy and chicken chunks or kebabs, all cooked in either the Middle Eastern or the Mediterranean style. On two occasions French fries were served together with our meal. I watched Brendon enjoy the French fries like never before. After all he used to be a potato lover when he was a little boy. To him that was the best bonus meal ever! How wonderful is our almighty God Yahweh. Cheers!

One morning, the team gathered for our usual buffet breakfast. One of us had tuna chunks. Brendon pointed at the tuna chunks and told me he wanted some. I was very surprised because it was the very first time in twenty eight years that Brendon had shown interest in trying out tuna chunks. I thanked God for providing tuna chunks which caught Brendon's attention that morning.

Back in Singapore we do eat tuna chunks from time to time but never once did Brendon show any interest in eating them. At first I was kind of doubtful he would eat them at all. Anyway, I served him a reasonably small portion at his request, and he finished it rather quickly. Then he asked for more, and I gladly fulfilled his appetite in that lovely morning. In this incident, I couldn't understand why Brendon had decided to eat so much tuna chunks for the first time in twenty eight years, until something unexpected happened the following day.

On the following day after visiting a few sites, we went off for lunch at a fast food cafe. That was the one and only time we had fast food for lunch.

We were given two choices of prepacked food, either ham sandwiches or tuna bagel. As all our meals were included in the tour package, we had to follow the tour agent's decision on where to have our meals. Oops! There were no signs of rice, pita bread, French fries, or spaghetti. My heart sank as I thought, "What then is Brendon going to eat?" Just as I was all caught up, Brendon picked up a package of tuna bagel. I was shocked, but I was guessing he would probably eat the tuna since he had eaten tuna chunks the day before. As for the bagel, I guessed he might not be able to swallow it. That was my thought at that time. Guess what happened? There was absolutely no grumbling from Brendon. He happily grabbed a seat in a quiet corner, then slowly but surely nibbled at the tuna bagel. It was then that I realized why tuna chunks was one of the items on the buffet spread a day ago.

How marvelous and how great is our God Yahweh who has helped Brendon to be mentally prepared for his next unexpected meal. To this day I cannot forget God's goodness. It has been more than a year since our return from the "Visit Israel Trip". Strangely enough, during the whole year not once did Brendon ever ask me to serve him tuna chunks. I think he has clearly forgotten that he had eaten a tuna bagel in Israel. What an amazing encounter!

How Brendon fared at the historical and Biblical sites

For the next part of my sharing, I would like to touch on how Brendon fared at the historical or Biblical sites we visited. Each morning after breakfast we would hop on the tour bus at around 9am. A local tour guide would guide us through all the Biblical sites from 9 o'clock in the morning till around 4 o'clock in the evening.

As I mentioned earlier, Brendon has obsessive compulsive behavior issues. We feared that he might lose control of himself and that his destructive behavior would emerge without warning. Will he create havoc when coming into contact with old building structures which are more than two thousand years old? Will he kick stones or pebbles? Will he dig holes in the ground? I thought he might, since he has symptoms of obsessive behavior. However, to my amazement, the answer is, "No. He did not. He did not destroy or kick anything at all throughout the fourteen days in Israel." I couldn't believe that his obsessive behavior had actually vanished into thin air. Brendon showed absolutely no interest in destroying anything at all. After our return to Singapore, his obsessive behavior did not resurface. How amazing!

Throughout the trip, I was stunned when I observed Brendon's behavior: he was pretty much like a normal child who understood that his daddy, mummy, uncle and

aunties were going on an educational tour, and that he ought to behave himself and not disturb anyone. Most of the time he remained quiet, and surprisingly he did not take out his question cards to ask anyone anything even though he was allowed to. That wasn't the usual Brendon I knew. Hallelujah! Praise Yahweh God for His mercies. Indeed how blessed we were to experience His marvelous hands at work in Brendon.

For the trip, my husband brought along a mobile router to give Brendon access to Wi-Fi on the go. While Brendon was waiting for us as we were listening to our tour guide's explanations from place to place, most of the time Brendon would find a rock, a huge stone or a pavement to sit on. He would tune in to some YouTube video channels.

One of his favorite animation videos is "Tom & Jerry." He loves the way Tom (the cat) fought against the cheeky Jerry (the mouse). The main reason he loves "Tom & Jerry" cartoons is that they are loaded with funny actions, yet there is no ongoing verbal conversation between the cat and the mouse. Kudos to the creator of "Tom & Jerry" cartoons!

From time to time I would notice a smile on Brendon's face. Each day the duration of our tour was seven hours. Can you imagine that for seven hours a day, Brendon happily moved along with the group, sitting on countless rocks, stones and pavements coated with a thick layer of dust and dirt that is more than two thousand years old?

Perhaps he could be the only person willing to sit on those dirty surfaces. We took many photos of him sitting everywhere and at every corner in Israel. I couldn't believe Brendon waited seven hours daily without a single word of complaint and had done that consistently every single day for fourteen days. Again, that wasn't the usual Brendon I knew. As I reminisced on those good days, indeed our Lord God Yahweh knew how much my husband and I needed the peace to stay focused throughout the trip in order to visualize all the events that had taken place in the Biblical era. Yahweh God took care of everything in ways beyond my imagination. Our God Yahweh is awesome!

The "Visit Israel Trip" was by far the most adventurous and challenging trip not just for Brendon but for all of us. We moved from hotel to hotel as we ventured out to explore all the sites where the significant Biblical events took place. Just to name a few, one moment we were at the wilderness overlooking the place where Jesus was tempted. The next moment we were at Elah Valley, the site of the battle between David and Goliath. At a few sites, we had to walk up and down some sloppy, slippery and uneven grounds. Nevertheless Brendon was full of vigor and did not breathe a word of discomfort even though the going was tough. In fact he was always the first to reach the final destination point as he was the only one in the group who was in his late 20's and was the fittest among us. Truly it wasn't an easy trip but the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Seeing Brendon in good spirits spurred me on. I thank Yahweh God again and again for encouraging me through Brendon's positive outlook and his never-say-die spirit!



The Wilderness of Temptation

In the city of Jerusalem

The longest stretch of our “Visit Israel Trip” took place in the city of Jerusalem. Some unforgettable incidents happened while we were there.

We checked into a hotel in Jerusalem named “Jerusalem Gardens Hotel & Spa” on Thursday, a day before the Sabbath which starts on Friday evening and ends on Saturday evening. That allowed us to get a feel of the atmosphere in Jerusalem during the Sabbath. One interesting fact to note is that the hotel lifts continue to operate on Sabbath day but they will stop at every floor and the lift

door will open and close at every floor. We were staying on the 11th floor. It was an awkward feeling and we needed lots of patience to travel up to the floor of our hotel room, as the lift door would open and close eleven times.

Like any other day, we were out Friday morning and got back to the hotel after our tour for the day. It was the Sabbath when we arrived at the hotel lobby at around 5.30pm. After a long and tiring day, Brendon was very eager to get back to our hotel room. He quickly dashed into the lift without knowing that the lifts in the hotel functioned differently from those in Singapore. He meant to press the “Hold” button while waiting for me and my husband to get into the lift, but in that hotel once you press any button, the lift will travel up to the designated floor. Before we could get into the lift, the door was shut, and the lift went up and up. We were very anxious when we couldn’t get into the lift in time to join Brendon.

At that moment, I almost suffered a nervous breakdown. My husband and I scrambled to find the quickest way possible to go up to the 11th floor to look for Brendon. My heart almost jumped out as I was very fearful and in great shock! As Brendon has extreme difficulty in communicating with people, we feared he might not be able to seek help from others. That was my greatest nightmare. In my helpless state, I could only cry out to Yahweh God for help. That was the first time we lost our son in a foreign land.

My husband was much calmer than I during this panic situation. He immediately told me to take the next lift and go up to the 11th floor to see if Brendon was waiting for us outside the hotel room, while my husband would wait at the passenger lifts lobby in case Brendon comes back down to look for us. I listened to his instruction and took the next lift to go up to the 11th floor. When I reached the 11th floor, there was no sign of Brendon. My prayer to Yahweh God intensified and I wept. I asked Yahweh God to protect Brendon from harm and to lead him back safely to us. Then I took the lift down to the main lobby. When the door opened, I saw my husband and Brendon right before my very eyes. Tears of joy welled from my eyes as I hugged Brendon tightly. Oh how I thanked Yahweh God for answering my prayer.

After calming my nerves, my husband shared with me that he was waiting outside the passenger lifts area but Brendon wasn't in any of those lifts. Later he spotted Brendon calmly walking out of the cargo lift which was near the passenger lifts lobby. He guessed that when Brendon went up to the 11th floor without us, he quickly got out of the passenger lift and switched over to the cargo lift to come down to the main lobby.

After that shocking incident, I guessed that Brendon probably thought it would take far too long for him to wait for the next passenger lift to go down to the main lobby, so he opted for a quicker way to go down. That was a pleasant

surprise! Totally unbelievable! The truth of the matter is that Brendon had never taken a cargo lift before. How on earth did he figure out that the cargo lift could take him to the main lobby? The only explanation I had in mind was that Yahweh God had sent a guardian angel to lead the way so that Brendon could get back to us as quickly as possible.

Later in the evening, our team gathered for a meeting to share with one another about what we had learned. My teammates were shocked to learn about Brendon's misadventure and how he miraculously returned to us safely through a rather unusual means. As we closed our meeting with a word of prayer, we were very thankful to Yahweh God, for His steadfast love never ceases. It was such a wonderful experience for my husband and me, knowing that our God is forever faithful and loves us dearly.

Miracles at the Temple Mount

Miracles continued to happen the following day. Our next miraculous encounter was at the Temple Mount. The Temple Mount is a site within the Old City that is holy to the Jewish, Christian and Muslim people. In Muslim tradition, it is the third holiest site after Mecca and Medina. Security is very tight at the site and there are strict rules to follow such as that we must keep our volume down, that men and women are not allowed to stick too closely to each other, and that holding hands is not permissible. The whole area

was heavily guarded by security officers. I felt rather uncomfortable there.

When we were on the move, as usual Brendon would use his mobile phone to search for things to keep himself occupied while waiting for us to explore the site. Unfortunately, the mobile router died on us at the Temple Mount, of all places. Can you imagine what might have happened if Brendon really kicked up a fuss at that sacred place? My husband and I would definitely be dead meat. At that juncture, we were really caught in a fix and we expected an outburst of anger from Brendon, much like an explosive volcano eruption.

To my amazement, nothing of that sort happened. This was yet another time I saw a totally different Brendon. He had never behaved in that manner over the last twenty eight years. That was not the Brendon I knew. Back in Singapore, whenever things weren't going his way, his normal reaction would be to throw temper tantrums regardless of where we were. Sometimes he would cry his heart out for at least twenty to thirty minutes. We would try every means to coax him but nothing ever works. In the end we had to raise our white flags and just leave him alone until the storm subsides.

At that crucial moment, what was Brendon's reaction? Actually I thought that all hell might break loose but the outcome was the exact opposite of what I expected. In fact no storm was brewing. Brendon accepted the fact that the

mobile router wasn't working, and he remained calm when I told him he should just give his mobile phone a short break while enjoying the beautiful surroundings before our eyes. On my part there was very little effort in calming Brendon down. Over the years although Brendon has limited verbal communication skills, he has high visual capabilities and a photographic memory for words. He could write out a string of words of any length after taking one glance. Before we left Singapore, I prepared a communication booklet for Brendon to carry along with him. He kept it in his backpack and had been using it from time to time to write down his thoughts and to learn new words along the way.

When the router stopped working, Brendon took out his communication booklet to communicate his thoughts while keeping himself occupied. He did that out of his own accord. I was stunned at how quickly his little brain worked and how the whole issue was resolved. There were no hassles and no struggles whatsoever. My heart was at peace when the situation remained calm. Oh wow! At the end of that day I thanked Yahweh God for allowing the router to fail us for a day. Otherwise, I might have missed an opportunity to see another miracle.

Indeed new, every morning new! We had a good sleep that night and woke up the next morning to discover that the mobile router was back to normal working condition. Search me. I have no clue as to why the router didn't work

the day before. Anyway, Brendon was very happy that he could reconnect to Wi-Fi. He continued to watch more episodes of the battle between Tom & Jerry on his favorite YouTube Channel. How lovely! Yahweh God is good. He had given my husband and me another opportunity to experience his wonderful working power.

More amazing experiences at the Western Wall

In the remaining time I will share about a unique experience I had at the Western Wall. The Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem is Judaism's holiest site. The wall and the plaza before it form a permanent place of worship, a pilgrimage site for Jews, and a focus of prayer. Many Jews and Christians would come from all over the world to place their hands on the Western Wall and make their petitions known to Yahweh God. Most of them would write down their petitions or prayer requests on pieces of paper and insert them between the huge stones.

The Western Wall
Men and women sections



When I was there, my sincere prayer to our heavenly Father was, “Abba Father, gracious God and Savior, may Your church be the light of the world which shines brightly in the midst of darkness so that the world may know who You are and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. Amen.” As I beheld our God Yahweh and uttered those words, all of a sudden the Holy Spirit touched the depths of my innermost being. Tears began to stream down my cheeks uncontrollably. Many images of the miracles which happened in Israel kept flashing across my mind. I thought, “Who am I that our God Yahweh would choose to reveal Himself through all the miracles that has happened thus far?” If it

weren't for Yahweh's mercy and love, my dream of going to the Bible Land might not have come true! Indeed glory be to our God Yahweh.

On 22nd November 2018, the evening before we returned to Singapore, the team gathered once again for our final meeting to share about our experiences. With one heart and one mind we committed our journey home into Yahweh God's hands. I took out the three question cards from Brendon's backpack and showed them to my teammates. I told them that Brendon's coaches were worried he might have difficulty communicating with others. Those question cards were meant for him to use when initiating a conversation with others. In the end he didn't used them at all. Frankly speaking, that wasn't Brendon's style of conducting himself. Back in Singapore whenever we were in the midst of a conversation, he would always interrupt without any good reason. We had to stop him and tell him that it is rude and unacceptable to interrupt when someone is talking, but he would never follow the proper code of conduct. It is incredible that Brendon did not ask anyone a single question during the fourteen days in Israel.

The end of our journey

Finally we have come to the end of our journey. At the end of our trip I gave Brendon a big hug and a pat on his shoulder. I said to him, "Well done my son! Dad and Mum

are so proud of you!” It took us slightly fewer hours to fly home. With a heart full of excitement, Brendon looked forward to returning to his home sweet home. Although it was another long journey, Brendon remained cool and calm on our return flight.

When we touched down at Singapore Changi Airport, it was a great relief for all of us. We arrived safe and sound! Thank Yahweh God for that. Just as we were about to walk to the baggage claim area, suddenly Brendon unzipped his backpack and took out the three question cards. There was a moment of silence and I heard him exclaim, “Oh no! Brendon forgot!” What he meant was that he had forgotten to use those question cards while in Israel. All of us burst into laughter when we saw his funny yet unexpected expression. He was a bit unhappy for not remembering to use those cards.

In a situation like this, I have to be quick witted. I immediately tried to appease him, and said, “It’s ok Brendon. If you wish to, right now you may use those cards to ask one of the uncles or aunties something.” Surprisingly he didn’t take my suggestion seriously. He quietly put the question cards back into his backpack and followed us to the baggage claim area without a word of despair. He had never behaved like this over the last twenty eight years. I couldn’t believe my eyes when I saw a totally different Brendon. Oh wow! Miracles continued to happen when we arrived in Singapore. I was stunned!

An autistic individual normally follows a fixed routine. Once he/she forgets to keep it, behavior issues will surface. Over the years, whenever Brendon forgets to do something, his usual response would be an outburst of anger, followed by a temper tantrum. On many occasions, whenever Brendon was in a fit of anger, he would vent his frustration by destroying his toys, tearing up his books, and dismantling the toilet pipes under the sink. He once even ripped off the skirting in his room (a narrow wooden board that runs along the base of an interior wall). I almost suffered a heart attack when I saw all the damage he had done in a fit of anger.

Finally we were back to our home sweet home. As always, Brendon's usual practice after a long absence from home is to proceed to his bedroom and giggle non-stop. That was his usual way of expressing the joy of being back to where he belongs. I expected him to behave in that manner when we got back from Israel. However, he was totally silent. He hopped onto his bed and lay down quietly to rest. I was waiting to hear loud and long giggles from him but there was nothing at all. It was total silence and absolute quietness!

Again that wasn't the Brendon I knew. I was so amazed and said a little prayer of thanksgiving to Yahweh God, "Abba Father, thank you for allowing my husband and me to experience a totally different Brendon. Oh how good and how pleasant it is to experience all the big and small

miracles even up this point in time! We are eternally grateful to You, my God and Savior! Amen.”

The old Brendon is back!

Before I end my sharing, you might wonder: Did the “old” so-called usual Brendon ever make a comeback? Yes, he did. The “old” Brendon finally returned after two days of good rest. At last I could hear him laugh loudly, with the sound of giggles coming from his room. Oh how I missed those familiar sounds. For the first time in my life I realized that those sounds were like music to my ears! Oh wow! My handsome son is back! How beautiful! That was what I have been waiting for. He missed our favorite local foods for two weeks, so the first thing he requested was his favorite Hainanese chicken rice. What a joy to see him gobble up the chicken rice within five minutes. Cheers!

After a few days of good rest, finally everything resumed as normal except for one thing: Brendon is no longer obsessed with destroying things. After he had visited all the more-than-two-thousand-year-old Biblical sites in Israel, perhaps a different light was shed on Brendon. How lovely! As I have shared earlier, before going on our “Visit Israel trip,” Brendon’s shoes would never last more than three months. I used to burn huge holes in my pocket as I spent lots of money to buy him new shoes every three months. However the pair of brand new shoes I bought for him to

wear on the Israel trip remains intact up to this day. Whenever I gaze at that pair of shoes which had tread the soil where our Lord Jesus had walked thousands of miles, it reminded me of Yahweh God's goodness and lovingkindness towards Brendon and my family. Praise Yahweh God from whom all blessings flow!

When I look back at all the miracles that had happened throughout our fourteen days in Israel, and the great learning journey, I thank Yahweh God for granting my family and the team a fruitful trip.

The joy of exploring Biblical history

It was seeing the Biblical sites that helped to clear up many of my misconceptions about Israel. Amazingly, after our "Visit Israel Trip," Yahweh God in His mercy opened my mind to enable me to go deeper in the understanding of Biblical history. Over the years I would often get a headache when I am exposed to Biblical history. Everything about history was hard for me to grasp as I found history to be a dry and boring subject. That has prevented me from digging deep into the word of God, particularly in the understanding of the Old Testament. I admit that I was a totally hopeless student in any subject related to history.

After the Israel trip, Yahweh God instilled in me the desire to explore Biblical history. Much to my delight, I could finally understand history in a deeper sense, which


had never been the case since the first day I became a Christian. Without my realizing it, I spent every single day for more than a month studying Biblical history, totally immersing myself into it. It was the most beautiful thing that had ever happened to me and I am eternally grateful to Yahweh God for that. Having said that, I realize I have learned to approach the word of God with a totally different mindset these days. With a grateful heart I will end my sharing with these words from Isaiah 40:31,

But they who wait for the LORD (Yahweh) shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (ESV)

Indeed how encouraging are those words from Isaiah. As I have testified, there is indeed none like Yahweh God who is full of compassion, mercy and love. It is the prayer of my heart that more and more people will come to know Yahweh, the one and only true God and to know Jesus Christ, the only perfect man, the one whom Yahweh has sent into this world. As Scripture says in John 17: 3,

And this is eternal life, that they know You (Yahweh) the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

May all glory, honor and praise be to the only true God Yahweh. Amen.



En Gedi waterfall

All photos in this chapter were taken during the Israel trip. Photos courtesy of Pearl Bong.

Embracing the World of Autism With My Autistic Son

Pearl Bong, July 2020

A brief introduction to Autism

First and foremost, “Bless the LORD (Yahweh), O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name!” (Psalm 103:1)

Blessed be the name of Yahweh, who is God for every aspect of creation. We live in a complex world created by the almighty God Yahweh. Certainly it would take a whole lifetime for us to explore and to comprehend some of the complicated aspects of humanity in the entire universe.

For the sake of those who are unfamiliar with the world of autism, I begin my sharing with a brief introduction to autism.

What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability that affects a person's ability to make sense of the world and to relate to others. Autism comes from *autos*, the Greek word for "self". A person on the autism spectrum is often described as someone who lives in a world of his own.

Autism is a life-long developmental condition. There is currently no known cure for autism. Children do not outgrow autism, but the symptoms may lessen with intervention. Structured intervention and training will help the individuals acquire skills but not cure the condition. There is a wide body of research to support the knowledge that young children experience significant improvement when intervention is started at the earliest possible age.

While the cause or combination of causes of autism is not fully understood, research suggests a biological correlation with those parts of the brain which process language and information coming in from the senses. Other research suggests there may be an imbalance in certain chemicals in the brain. There is no known single cause of the autism spectrum disorder, but it is generally accepted that it is caused by abnormalities in brain structure or function. Genetic factors may sometimes play a role within certain families. In reality, what we know is that autism may develop from a combination of several causes. To date, medical science has not found the actual cause of

autism. Accordingly there is currently no documented cure for autism.

It is estimated that 10% of individuals on the autism spectrum may have special abilities in areas such as music, art, mathematical calculation, memory, and manual dexterity. But the majority may have areas of high performance that relate to their special interests or obsessions.

Life is not a bed of roses, but God's mercies overflow

It is a joy to behold the beauty of the Maker of heaven and earth who is none other than the only true God, Yahweh. Indeed the journey with my autistic son is a never ending story of exploring the mysterious world of autism. The more I embrace the world of autism, the more I find grace and strength from God to press on! Through it all I have witnessed God's marvelous work unfold before my very eyes! There is joy unspeakable as I continue to declare some of the miraculous encounters which have taken place over the last twenty eight years of walking hand in hand with my beloved autistic son.

In my first sharing, "A Special Gift From God" (chapter 1), which was written in year 2002, I shared about some of the significant events which happened up to year 2000, when my son was nine years old. As the saying goes, "Curiosity killed the cat!" How true! If you have been following my

story, I guess you may be wondering, “What has happened after the year 2000?”

As I press on in this wonderful journey of life, our awesome God has laid upon my heart the strong conviction to share further on how He had paved the way for my son Brendon from the years 2001 to 2019.

How time flies! Twenty eight years have passed quickly and Brendon is now a fine young man. A few days ago, when I was doing some housekeeping work, I chanced upon some of my old photo albums. Many meaningful reflections of my son’s development milestones began to surface in my mind. While reminiscing about the past, I began to count my blessings one by one. Tears of joy filled my heart when I recalled God’s goodness, mercy and love towards Brendon and my family. Oh how blessed it is to know that God is always with us and that He is good all the time!

Ever since the day I made my commitment to become a Christian, I have experienced God’s protection and deliverance always. He has granted me wisdom and strength to brave through many of the trials and tribulations which I encountered in my daily life. For as long as I live, I will continue to testify of the magnificent wonders God has performed in my daily walk with Him. Frankly, I cannot find an exact expression to describe the greatness of our merciful God and Father in heaven. All that I wish to declare to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear is

this truth, “Our God Yahweh is real! He is forever faithful and true! He is an amazing God and Father in heaven who will never leave us nor forsake us.” Having said that, it is the sincere prayer of my heart that all Christians will remain loyal and faithful to Yahweh God today and forevermore!

Over the years I have learned that the path to the kingdom of God is never an easy road. In fact it is a continual journey of striving to enter the kingdom of God. As the word of God says in Acts 14:22,

“Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God.” (ESV)

The Christian life is a continual journey with God that is filled with many challenges ahead. We are Christian soldiers ever ready to fight the good fight in countless spiritual wars as the word of God has told us. However, I strongly believe that as children of God we will always triumph if we function by the mighty power of God. Our gracious God continues to perform wonders and make ways where there seems to be none. How marvelous! How wonderful!

As I embarked on my spiritual journey, there were many occasions on which I experienced unimaginable encouragements from God. Many miracles happened when I surrendered every aspect of my life to Him. He has enabled me and my husband to experience His marvelous work

which is indeed indescribable! There were moments of joy, sorrow, defeat, as well as victory. Nevertheless, God's unfailing love consumed me, and His divine love lifted me up when I stumbled. I could only come humbly before Him and say, "Abba Father, gracious God Yahweh, You are awesome! I am forever grateful to You."

The challenge of speech

When I look back, the year 2000 was a memorable year for my family. My husband and I had prayed for many years while waiting for God's will to be done! To refresh your memory, I would like to recap a portion of what I shared in my first writing, "A Special Gift from God" (chapter 1). I wrote,

A year later (in the year 2000), God opened Brendon's vocal cords to enable him to speak. He was able to speak simple sentences with clarity. We taught him to pray and to sing praises to God. The desire of my heart is that my son will know there is a God who has been constantly helping him, enabling him to do things which are considered impossible in the sight of the world. I prayed that someday he, too, could testify with his own lips that God is real.

The everlasting God Yahweh has never failed us. He knows our pain when we cry out to Him. To my amazement, our compassionate God granted Brendon the gift of speech in the year 2000 when he was nine years old. His speech has since become clearer and more comprehensible to his hearers as the days went by. That is truly remarkable! Why do I say that it is “a gift of speech” granted to Brendon? The truth of the matter is that we waited many years for Brendon to speak, but he remained non-verbal.

After a long period of assessment by a speech therapist, at last the most shocking truth was presented to us. I remember the speech therapist’s words very clearly. She said, “Dear parents, please be mentally prepared! Your son Brendon might be non-verbal. He may or may not be able to speak. So in view of the situation, the best approach now is to start teaching Brendon sign language as the possibly workable mode of communication.”

Those were the most earth-shaking words I had ever heard! Fear instantly crept into my heart and mind. All of a sudden I sensed my whole world collapsing. I realized I could not accept the truth that was revealed to me. It was so painful to learn that my son might not be able to speak at all. I wept sorrowfully before God and asked Him to help me accept that shocking truth.

Over the years, researchers have been seeking solutions to many of the unanswered questions regarding autism. Sadly speaking, as many as 40 percent of autistic children

don't speak at all. Others may speak but have very limited language and communication skills.

In the world in which we live, the majority of normal kids are able to speak naturally when they reach a certain age. However, for our special son Brendon, the ability to speak was a gift granted to him because of God's mercy. Every word which Brendon uttered over the last twenty eight years was to me a gentle reminder of God's love and mercy towards him. I am eternally grateful to God for the gift of speech granted to Brendon. Indeed God knew my fears. When I was in the valley of despair, He showed me the importance of trusting in Him 100% and to wait upon Him to act at His perfect timing. Our God is great! Tears rolled down my cheeks when I heard my dear son's first spoken words. That was by far the most beautiful testament of what Yahweh God had done. Indeed He is a sovereign God who performs wonders and miracles!

The biggest challenge ahead of us

In the 1990's, there were only a handful of very small-scale government funded centres and only two private special education schools in Singapore that provided some basic services for autistic individuals. Information about autism and support for families with autistic individuals were very lacking then. The government funded centres had limited vacancies, thus the annual intake was very small.

At that juncture, we had no choice but to enroll Brendon in the early intervention program at a private special education centre by the name, “Horizon Centre for Special Education,” where he would spend about three years.

After many years of committing our prayer requests to God, finally in the year 1992, a moderately sized government funded centre named “Rainbow Centre” was established. I then decided to submit an application for admission into its early intervention program, in 1994, but there was no vacancy at the time. I was told that the waiting list for admission to Rainbow Centre was approximately two to three years. Amazingly, after two years of waiting, Brendon got his placement in 1996. At that time, Rainbow Centre operated at the premises of an old primary school while waiting for its new centre to be built.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Finally on 19 July 1999, the new Rainbow Centre was built. It was a well equipped centre with all facilities fully catered to the needs of autistic individuals. The new centre was named “Margaret Drive Special School.” In God’s wonderful plan, Brendon spent five eventful years, from 1999 to 2003, at Margaret Drive Special School.

Throughout the five years at Margaret Drive Special School, God had provided wonderful teachers, speech therapists, and occupational therapists to teach Brendon in accordance with God’s will and purpose. Although I had lived with Brendon for so many years, I admit that I could

not fully understand the complicated aspects of life in an autistic individual. Oh how I marvel at God's creation. He has created autistic individuals with such unique personalities whereas our human minds can never fully understand the complex world of autism. It was through countless prayers of intercession that many obstacles were removed, thus enabling Brendon to grow and learn as God wills. Indeed glory be to Yahweh God for His unfailing love and provision for Brendon.

On many occasions, I was unable to get through to Brendon but the Almighty God knew Brendon from the inside out, and I had to plead before Him for guidance and direction. All I could do was to submit to God's will in total obedience and to walk by faith, for I believed with all my heart that God's intervention will come some day as He makes all things beautiful in His time. I sought after God's will and to fulfill them by His power, wisdom, and strength.

As I pondered deeper, I began to perceive one fundamental truth. Our God Yahweh prepares each and every Christian to go through many essential training grounds with the intention of building up strong disciples who will follow Him faithfully to the end. I realized that God had placed me in many situations in order to transform me, as well as keep me humble. When I could not find answers or solutions to the many challenges I faced with Brendon, the only way is to put my trust in God, as I knew He will definitely show me how to proceed from one point to the

next. With assurance from God, I knew He is the one and only true God who holds the future.

Indeed how true it is. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. How marvelous it is to behold the beauty of our awesome God! Although the path before me is long and winding, I have no fear because God has never ceased to sustain me by His grace and to grant me strength to brave through each and every stormy period victoriously.

As the days were going by, there remained a huge challenge in educating autistic individuals to fit into our world which is totally different from theirs. The reason is that autism is a spectrum psychological disorder. One of the symptoms of autism is obsessive-compulsive behavior.

When Brendon first started his school year at Margaret Drive Special School, life was tough as we had to cope with many of his major behavior issues. One of the greatest challenges we faced was how on earth do we cope with his obsessive-compulsive behavior issues?

There was a time when Brendon become very obsessed with digital watches. Whenever he spotted someone wearing a digital watch, he would grab hold of it just to examine the functions of all its tiny buttons. I was totally helpless in dealing with his obsessive behavior, so I prayed and asked God for wisdom and strength to stop Brendon from grab-

bing items belonging to strangers at public places. Amazingly we experienced God's mighty hand at work, thus preventing Brendon from offending others unnecessarily. Brendon's obsession with digital watches lasted a couple of months. Just as we were rejoicing over the victory won, a new obsessive behavior emerged.

The majority of autistic individuals display obsessive-compulsive behavior in one form or another. Moreover, it would shift from one obsessive behavior to another without any clear indication as to how long each behavior issue will last. That is certainly mind-boggling to parents, teachers and caregivers who are trying their utmost to work out the most effective approach to resolving the issue.

I am nevertheless thankful to God for giving me the opportunity to live with my autistic son. It was through what I have gone through with my son that led me to go deeper into exploring the complex world of autism. Through it all I have learned to empathize with individuals who are suffering from some form of physical or mental handicap. As I pressed on, I cried out to our merciful God, pouring out my grief before Him. I desperately needed the courage and strength to overcome the next big hurdle before me.

Although we had won the battle over Brendon's obsession with digital watches, other obsessive-compulsive behaviors emerged. There were lots of uncertainties as I waited. Lo and behold, out of the blue he started to become

very obsessed with pennies (one-cent coins). Strangely he had no interest in any other coins except pennies. I am not sure why he set his eyes only on pennies but I guess it might have to do with their bronze color. During that period, we gathered lots of pennies for him. Worst of all, he would cast aside the pennies once the surface had become tarnished. We had to gather brand new shiny pennies for him from time to time.

Our worst nightmare would come when we were out at public places. Brendon could not control himself when he spots a cash register at any shop. His immediate response was to climb over the cash counter to see if he could peek into the cash register in search of pennies. His obsessive behavior had turned our world upside down to the point we feared stepping out of our house. It was hard for us to face the wrath of people who did not understand the behavior issues of autistic individuals. I wept before our good LORD and Father whenever Brendon stepped on others' toes. Each time Brendon misbehaved, I would cry out to God for help as the Psalmist says in Psalm 121:1-2,

"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD (Yahweh), who made heaven and earth." (ESV)

Whenever I come humbly before God, it was comforting to experience peace in God's presence although my struggles

intensified day by day. As I knelt before our gracious God Yahweh, I experienced His lifting away all the burdens which were weighing me down. The strong assurance of His presence in fighting every spiritual battle is the motivation and inspiration for me to move on courageously! Although my problems did not disappear overnight, and although the tall mountains that stood before me were not removed, yet the promise “I am with you always!” spoke loud and clear to me, reassuring me that our sovereign God is my shield, my strength, my hope and the anchor of my soul! With that in mind, I could face my son’s behavior problems with perfect peace from our everlasting God Yahweh.

As I watched Brendon’s obsession with pennies fade away, a new obsessive behavior emerged and the cycle would go on and on. There is no room in this article for me to share every single account of his obsessive behavior issues. If you would like to know further about some other aspects of his obsessive behavior, I would gladly encourage you to read my sharing, “A Miraculous Journey to Israel with my Autistic Son” (chapter 3).

Blessed Moments at Margaret Drive Special School

I shall move on to share two astonishing events which took place while Brendon was at Margaret Drive Special School.

Through it all, I perceived how Yahweh God comforted my heart and soul when I was growing tired and weary. The first event happened on 9th August 2001, which was Singapore's 36th National Day. How wonderful it was to witness God's greatness on the day the nation celebrated its birthday! It was indeed a blessed day to commemorate the event.

Many months prior to the National Day celebrations, Brendon's teachers had spent much time racking their brains to come up with great ideas to celebrate the happy occasion. After much consideration, his teacher decided to engage her students to perform the traditional Chinese dragon dance. If you haven't seen a dragon dance before, basically the dance has a person holding a rod with a big ball at the top that leads the dragon during the dance. The ball is moved left and right, back and forth, up and down, and the dragon follows the ball. Its body, moving in waves, appears to be dancing.

There were altogether eight students in Brendon's class. Because Brendon's behavior issues had taken a toll on him, he had great difficulties in following the given set of instructions. Thus it was impossible to engage him in the performance. During the rehearsal, Brendon would sit at a corner to observe the details of the dragon dance movements. Although Brendon is an autistic child, he has a superb photographic memory. His brain has the ability to capture snapshots of things around him in full detail. That

was truly amazing! Through observing the rehearsals over and over again, all of a sudden, on one unusual day, Brendon “volunteered” to join the rehearsal. Everyone was stunned and applauded! Amazingly Brendon could follow the whole dance procedure well. His teacher was so impressed with his superb visual skills that she decided to assign him to be in the position of the “dragon tail”. Oh wow! What a pleasant surprise! How lovely!

Finally the much awaited National Day celebration arrived. My husband and I looked forward to the concert. I could not hold back my tears when I saw Brendon perform on the stage. That was too good to be true. Oh how unbelievable, a dream come true! It had to be God’s enabling for Brendon to work together with the whole team to present such a beautiful dance. Absolutely incredible! At that instant I could sense that God’s hands were leading Brendon as he paraded gracefully on the stage. A miracle indeed! Glory be to our most high God Yahweh!

My heart was full of joy and thanksgiving to God as I shared with our church brethren about His mighty and loving hands at work in Brendon so beautifully. The joy was so overwhelming that I literally experienced His unfailing love consuming me. Yahweh God is indeed awesome and beautiful beyond description.

The second amazing event happened in the year 2002 in which there was a special national sports event known as “Special Olympics Singapore”. The organizer of this event

believes that sports can be a platform to help special athletes develop holistically. Besides sports, Special Olympics Singapore also offers initiatives and special programs that contribute to the overall development of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Over the years, we have seen the impact that the Special Olympics is making on the lives of these special athletes and their families.

Brendon's teacher strongly believed that every child with special needs has the potential to excel if he or she is given the opportunity. After many months of training, Brendon was given the chance to participate in an event known as the "Standing Long Jump". It was an eye opening experience for my husband and me as it was the first time we attended a Special Olympics event. We were full of curiosity, and looked forward to seeing athletes with intellectual disabilities in action.

It was a beautiful sunny day! My husband and I were all ready to cheer for our beloved son. During the event, we watched Brendon participate with great enthusiasm. It was a blessing to see him enjoy himself immensely. Moreover God turned our curiosity into joy when Brendon won a gold medal that day. We had never expected Brendon to win at all, much less a gold medal! I thanked God for the lovely pleasant surprise. At that instant, God reminded me once again that He can do the impossible as His word says in Matthew 19:26,

“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Before the year 2002 drew to a close, my family was blessed to go on a ten-day trip to Perth, Western Australia. The purpose of the trip was to expose our two kids to life in a foreign land. My greatest concern at the time was that Brendon might have difficulty in accepting and eating the totally different kinds of food in Perth. The majority of autistic individuals have problems eating foods which are unfamiliar to them. Nevertheless, we committed our worries to God. Once again we experienced another miracle during our ten-day trip in Perth. We were truly amazed that Brendon ate everything offered to him without a word of complaint. I couldn't believe my eyes when I watched him enjoy every single meal. I truly give thanks to God with a grateful heart for He had resolved our most knotty issue.

What a joy to experience the wonderful working power of our compassionate God Yahweh. He had helped Brendon overcome the fear of eating new foods. Hurray! How marvelous! After returning from Perth, Brendon began to try out more varieties of food as never before. We were very shocked to see him gain 10 kgs within two months. That is a tremendous weight gain over such a short period of time! I remembered that all his clothes could no longer fit his exploded size and I had to rush off to the shopping mall to buy him new clothes. That sounds

quite hilarious but my family was blessed to see a chubbier Brendon for quite a long while.

Indeed God is good all the time. He has granted my family a wonderful trip to Perth. As we explored the country in admiration of God's handiwork, we thanked Him for being the marvelous Creator of the entire universe. How I praise Him over and over again.

An amazing victory at Grace Orchard School

At the close of the year 2002, we were told that Brendon had to leave Margaret Drive Special School by June 2003 when he turns twelve. In those days, there were very few schools in Singapore for autistic individuals above the age of twelve. There were only two schools for the intellectually disabled which would probably accept Brendon. Without further delay, in November 2002, we submitted the applications for admission into either one of the two schools. Two months later, we received news from both schools that Brendon did not meet the admissions requirements.

My husband and I were very disappointed, and we had no clue as to what steps we should take next. In desperation, I came before God and earnestly committed my prayer request before Him. I prayed,

“Our gracious Father in heaven, if all the doors in Singapore schools are closed for Brendon, and if it is Your will that Brendon should remain at home, I believe You will teach him through Your own channels.”

Amazingly, I found new hope in God’s answer to my plea. While we were searching frantically, my husband and I came across a school by the name “Grace Orchard School” which was founded by two churches in Singapore. However, both the principal and the psychologist of Margaret Drive Special School were against the idea of submitting the application to Grace Orchard School because they felt that the system of education there would be unsuitable for Brendon. As a result, they were reluctant to provide the required supporting documents to be submitted together with the application.

Deep within my heart, I knew that God’s ways are higher than man’s. I believed that if it were God’s will for Brendon to join Grace Orchard School, He will certainly pave the way for him. After many days of prayers, my husband and I decided to submit the application for admission into Grace Orchard School without seeking help from either the principal or the psychologist from Margaret Drive Special School. It was a crucial period for my family. As I waited upon God, I cleaved to Him for He is my only source of help and strength at all times.

Since we did not have the required supporting documents to submit together with the application, we had to engage a psychologist in private practice to conduct a psychological assessment test and to write a report on Brendon. On the day of the examination, much to our dismay, Brendon fared poorly due to the fact that he was totally distracted in an unfamiliar setting. The outcome of the whole assessment test seemed to indicate that the only hope I had was shattered. Just as I was facing another discouraging moment, a still and quiet voice whispered to my ear, "My dear child, I will continue to pave the way for Brendon!" I was stunned when I heard those gentle and assuring words. Our God Yahweh is an awesome God! He knew I needed to hear some comforting words. Instantly my heart melted and my fear was gone! Praise God, Hallelujah!

A few days later, it was absolutely beyond our comprehension when the psychologist in private practice informed us that she had decided not to give the exact score on many sections of the whole assessment test conducted in her clinic. The reason was that she felt things were rather unfair to Brendon since the test was conducted in a totally unfamiliar setting. The majority of autistic individuals cannot perform when they are in an unfamiliar setting.

The truth of the matter is that Brendon had failed the whole assessment test. But to my amazement the

psychologist did not mention in her report that Brendon had failed miserably. Instead she decided to write a report to explain her conclusive observation on Brendon's performance which according to her was good. She also mentioned that Brendon would certainly have performed better in a more familiar setting. I couldn't believe my eyes when I read such an incredible report on Brendon. I was very surprised to hear such an unexpected explanation from the psychologist. All I can testify is that our God was mightily at work throughout the whole process. He is the provider for our every need in accordance with His good purpose and perfect plan!

Another unexpected pleasant surprise!

A few weeks later, we finally received good news from Grace Orchard School. The school principal called us for an interview, with further assessment tests to be conducted later. We looked forward to stepping into the new school compound and to have a good view of the school environment. At last we met the interviewer who is a psychologist from India. It was an unforgettable encounter for my husband and me to meet up with an Indian psychologist who spoke with a strong Indian accent. While we were communicating with him, we encountered some difficulty in understanding his English. Fear began to creep into my heart as I thought, "Oh no, how on earth is Brendon going

to understand his English with such a strong Indian accent? I guess it might be hard for Brendon to pass the assessment test. Sigh”

At that juncture my faith was once again put to the test. A little reminder from our good LORD and Father came to me, “Don’t you have faith in the Almighty God whom you worship and adore all this while? He has done great things and He will continue to do so. Have faith in Him.”

The word of God from Matthew 17:20 came instantly into my heart and mind,

If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move, and nothing will be impossible to you. (ESV)

At that instant, there was a sense of joy and peace within my heart. I prayed, “Abba Father, I believe. Yes, I believe with all my heart, and all that is within me praise His holy name!”

After the assessment, we were shocked to learn that Brendon was the “A-Star” kid of the day. The Indian psychologist assessed a few other kids on the same day but none could understand him as well as our son Brendon. He praised Brendon for his excellent performance! We were so thrilled when the principal of Grace Orchard School told us that Brendon had passed the assessment test with flying colors, and he was accepted by the school immediately.

After a good laugh, we wondered, “How on earth did Brendon manage to understand the psychologist’s English with a strong Indian accent?” The only explanation was that God is able! He is able to do all beyond our imagination. He has once again paved the way for Brendon. Glory and honor be to our awesome God Yahweh!

The good news of Brendon’s acceptance into Grace Orchard School soon spread quickly. Despite the objections from both the principal and the psychologist of Margaret Drive Special School, God had opened the way for Brendon in His perfect timing. Everyone was stunned as they thought it was an impossible task. Once again our God is great! He used our situation to prove to the world that He is the almighty God who works wonders, for He is able to do the impossible.

There were other pleasant surprises which came later when we discovered that Brendon’s new teacher was in fact his ex-teacher from Margaret Drive Special School. She joined Grace Orchard School in May 2003, just one month before Brendon was accepted into Grace Orchard School. As had happened in the previous years, God had provided yet another great teacher for Brendon. That was absolutely marvelous!

After joining Grace Orchard School for a year, Brendon continued to progress by leaps and bounds. In June 2004, he was transferred to another class that consisted of fourteen children with mild learning disabilities. I gathered

from Brendon's teacher that he was the only autistic child who was eligible to join that class for that semester. Oh how I thank God for His great blessings!

Although Brendon was given the opportunity to join a class with a group of children with mild learning disabilities, my deep concern was that he might have great difficulty in relating to the kids in his new class. I thought, "How is Brendon going to cope with all the changes?" I confess that there was a certain degree of fear and doubt within my heart at the time. But time and again God has to assure me that He is constantly keeping watch over Brendon and I have to surrender every aspect of my life to Him.

True enough, God again provided so much care and love for Brendon. His teacher had assigned not one but three buddies to take good care of Brendon, and they were great buddies who were most willing to assist him in all ways. Although Brendon has difficulty socializing with others, his buddies did not mind his mental condition at all. In fact they were most willing to tag along and help him when necessary. I thank God for providing wonderful people to support Brendon throughout his learning journey.

The other major challenge I faced was tutoring Brendon in his studies. He used to live a carefree life, learning everything through fun and play in his previous class. But now he has to learn two academic subjects, English and Mathematics, which were quite tough for him. I recall that there was a time when Brendon could not understand the

subject at all no matter how hard I tried to explain it to him. I had to acknowledge before God how incapable I was, and I had to come humbly before Him to seek His help and guidance. Amazingly, God enabled Brendon to understand the subject well. It was within a short time span that Brendon managed to complete his homework. That was an instant victory! How lovely!

The opportunity to know the only true God Yahweh

Over the years, my heart longed for Brendon to know that it was Yahweh God who created him a unique child with special needs. The prayer of my heart is that Brendon will come to know that there is a true and living God who loves him dearly. Indeed God knew the burning desire of my heart. I had never expected that there would be a regular daily prayer session before the commencement of classes every morning.

As I said earlier, Grace Orchard School was established by two churches. Some brethren from the two churches started a Sunday school for students to learn teachings from the Bible. Glory, honor and praise be to Yahweh God for the opportunity given to Brendon and the students to participate in art and craft sessions, to listen to Bible stories, and to attend prayer sessions. My heart melted when I received the art and craft done by Brendon in his

Sunday school classes. He had learned many spiritual lessons about loving God and caring for others. I thank God for His unfailing love for Brendon.

Yahweh God paved the way to St Andrew's Autism Centre

How time flies! Brendon spent six fruitful years of learning at Grace Orchard School. By January 2009, he had to move on to another special school meant for young adults with autism. Our only hope at the time was to submit the application for admission into St Andrews Autism Centre which was the one and only centre that specialized in educating young autistic adults above the age of eighteen. We submitted the application in June 2008.

A week later, we received the news that the centre had decided to place Brendon's name on the waiting list as there was no vacancy. We were told that the waiting time would be at least two years or more. My husband and I were caught in another dilemma. How depressing it was to learn that in the entire country there was no school available for our beloved son. At the age of eighteen, Brendon was too young to be confined at home. I wept before our merciful God and Father when I was caught in a totally hopeless situation. We were at our wit's end; the only answer was to commit our way and our cares to God. In desperation I

bowed humbly before my gracious God and Father in heaven. I prayed a short but sincere prayer,

“Abba Father, please show us Your way. I believe You have great purposes for Brendon. May Your will be done. Amen.”

Every single day I cried out to Abba Father in heaven, and uttered that simple but sincere prayer. In my heart I believed that God loves Brendon dearly, and that He will surely make the way for him some day. Lo and behold, the answer to my earnest plea came six months later.

In December 2008, the best ever Christmas gift finally arrived at our mailbox. Oh wow, at last we received a reply from St Andrew’s Autism Centre. The psychologist from the centre informed us that out of the blue a client had withdrawn from the centre, and she would like to conduct an assessment test to see if Brendon was a suitable candidate for that class. We jumped with joy at such an unexpected pleasant surprise! Certainly I knew that God had once again heard my sincere prayer request.

As that was the only chance given to Brendon, the outcome of the assessment test would determine if he could continue his school years or be stuck at home for the next two to three years. At that juncture, I committed all my fears and doubts to God. To my amazement Brendon was calm and cooperative throughout the entire examination.

The psychologist was well pleased with his performance and she declared right after the assessment test, “At Brendon’s current level, he fits perfectly in the designated class. We warmly welcome him to join our centre.”

My heart wept with tears of joy when I heard the confirmation. How timely was God’s provision for Brendon. I pondered: Had there been many choices of schools available for Brendon, then most probably I would not have sought God’s provision simply because I could easily select my top choice of school for Brendon. However I thanked God for placing me at the dead end of the road. When I was wandering in the darkest valley of fear and doubt, God would show me He would definitely shine some bright light real soon. That comforting thought gave me hope in a totally hopeless situation. All I had to do was to keep pressing on by His power and might! How incredible and miraculous it was when Brendon was accepted into the one and only autism centre at that time. How wonderful it was to behold our God Yahweh who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I thank Him for teaching me the importance of casting all my burdens on Him, and never to lean on my own understanding. In all my ways I acknowledged Him, and He will direct my path.

Oh how beautiful! Brendon could finally continue his next phase of learning at St Andrew’s Autism Centre starting from January 2009. Over the past twenty eight years, in every stage of Brendon’s learning curve, we were told that

the waiting time for admission into every single special school was approximately two to three years. However, he never had to wait long before being accepted into each school of our choice. Through it all, Yahweh God has never failed to prepare a place for Brendon.

The curriculum at St Andrew's Autism Centre covers practical training for autistic individuals in the areas of adaptive learning, social development, and daily living skills. After many years of planning, it established the "Day Activity Centre" (DAC) which aims to meet the needs of autistic individuals from the age of nineteen to fifty-five. When I first read about St Andrew's Autism Centre (SAAC), its vision and mission caught my attention.

SAAC Vision

- ***Enabling people with autism to lead dignified and meaningful lives.***

SAAC Mission

- ***Enriching the lives of people with autism and their families through quality education, training and care, distinguished by Christian love and compassion.***

How amazing! As I meditated on those words, my heart was overwhelmed with joy and thanksgiving to God. What a beautiful vision and mission I thought. St Andrew's Autism Centre is an extension of Singapore Anglican

Community Services managed by the St Andrew's Mission Hospital, whose motto is, "Trusting God, Bearing Fruit."

Oh wow! What a beautiful motto. Those words inspired me to press on relentlessly! It is indeed a good reminder to all Christians. May it be our motto as well, "Trusting God, Bearing fruit."

More exciting learning journeys at St Andrew's Autism Centre

In January 2009, Brendon joined St Andrew's Autism Centre which was operating at a rented premise located at the ground level of an old government subsidized Housing Board Estate. There were altogether seven clients and two coaches in his class. When I look back, St Andrew's Autism Centre started off with humble beginnings. In due time the reputable St Andrew's Mission Hospital foresaw the need to provide a permanent place of learning for people with autism. It was then that the idea of a new autism centre emerged. I thank God for meeting our needs through various channels and through the love of people who have hearts of gold.

Three months after Brendon joined SAAC, St Andrew's Mission Hospital turned a new page in its history. On 28 March 2009, St Andrew's Mission Hospital held a ground-breaking ceremony. Construction of a new purpose-built integrated centre for people with autism began shortly

after. By September 2010, the new centre was built. The S\$23.7 million centre was the first integrated comprehensive facility in this region to serve people with autism from age nineteen to fifty-five.

On the grand opening day of the newly built centre, the chairman of the SAAC board prayed this prayer, saying,

“We remember the commission given to us, the Anglican Church, to be a Christian community serving people in Singapore with Autism Spectrum Disorder. We are humbled by Your grace in providing these premises which are to be dedicated for the service of our clients. Keep us faithful to our calling and strengthen us in our service. It was with this strong sense of calling and a desire to serve the nation of Singapore, that St Andrew’s Mission Hospital Board began to plan for the Centre.”

Many years have passed since the opening of the new centre, and this beautiful prayer by the chairman of SAAC will always remain in my heart as a reminder to me of the vision and mission of the newly built St Andrew’s Autism Centre.

On 3 January 2011, the long awaited day had finally arrived for Brendon and his classmates to start their new semester at the newly built St Andrew’s Autism Centre. I thank God for His continual provision of an environment conducive to further learning.

Tree Planting Ceremony on SAMH's 100th Anniversary

2013 was a special year for St Andrew's Mission Hospital (SAMH) as it celebrated its 100th anniversary. As part of its year-long celebration, SAMH held a Tree-Planting Ceremony and Fun Walk event at St Andrew's Autism Centre (SAAC) on 20 April 2013. A "Gustavia Superba Tree" was planted in celebration of 100 years of Anglican community services in Singapore.

Our Almighty God continued to shower His love upon my beloved son Brendon. Much to our delight, Brendon was selected to be one of the participants in the Tree Planting Ceremony. Together with the Bishop of the Diocese of Singapore, the President of SAMH, and the CEO of SAMH, Brendon dug deep down into the soil with all his might to plant that lovely tree at one of the prominent sites at St Andrew's Autism Centre.

A commemorative plaque was put up for this meaningful event. The plaque structure featured the SAMH centenary logo's "100" design which symbolizes how SAMH continues forth, keeping relevant to current times while always remembering the journey that God had led them through.

Two Bible verses, Jeremiah 17:7-8, were engraved on that plaque.

⁷ “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD (Yahweh), whose trust is the LORD. ⁸ He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.” (ESV)

How lovely are those words from the Bible! Every time I visit the centre, I would stop to catch a glimpse of that majestic Gustavia Superba Tree and to estimate its height to see how tall it had grown. Besides admiring that tree, I would spend a moment to gaze at one of the glass wall panels where photos of the Tree Planting Ceremony are permanently on display. I could see the bright smiles on Brendon’s face reflected on those photos. Indeed that special event was another testament to the lovingkindness of our good LORD and Savior lavished upon my dear son. Oh how I praise and thank God for His goodness!

The opportunity to explore horticulture

In the year 2014, God continued to pave the way for Brendon. A devoted Christian teacher perceived the need to explore new avenues for his students. He foresaw the benefits of starting a horticulture project. With that vision in mind, he shared it with the board members and they were thrilled! Finally a plot of land was allocated for the

new project. That was how the very first horticulture project started. Besides outdoor gardening, the students were also trained in cultivating air-plants in a brand new indoor workshop. I am very thankful to God for the opportunities given to Brendon to explore another area of learning.

With over two years of perseverance, both the indoor and outdoor gardening projects continued to thrive. In the year 2016, Brendon's teacher managed to negotiate with the director of a landscape company who was willing to engage the students to work at his nursery. Everything worked out wonderfully. Brendon and his classmates would visit the nursery three times a week for further involvement in gardening activities such as repotting plants, watering plants, as well as weeding. It was a fantastic experience for Brendon to be a real gardener in a full scale nursery. I thank God for His abundant provisions for Brendon.

All the happenings were truly amazing! By the year 2017, Brendon had mastered the art of creating simple air-plant terrariums. Furthermore his teacher approached some small companies to support these works of art. Those organizations ordered some air-plants terrariums as door gifts for their annual company dinner event. How cool! I couldn't believe how wonderful it was. God is good all the time!

There is no end to learning. In January 2017, Brendon moved on to join a new class. His new teacher decided to take the students deeper into learning. He proposed a new vegetable farming project. Just as the need arose, a plot of land was allocated for their new project work. Brendon was blessed to play a part in vegetable farming. Although life was tough as a “farmer,” Brendon worked diligently in nurturing his little farm. When it was harvest season, a kind-hearted grocer who owned a humble farm produce store had offered to sell some of the harvested vegetables at his store. Moreover, a group of warm-hearted residents at a private condominium had rendered their kind support as well by purchasing the remaining vegetables from the SAAC farm. As for my family, we were blessed to enjoy all the fresh farm-grown vegetables which Brendon brought home over a long period of time. Oh how I rejoiced! How I thanked God for showering Brendon with His unfailing love.

Earnest plea to God for an “Adult Disability Home” to be built for persons with autism

To date autism remains an incurable life-long psychological disorder. Parents of autistic individuals are concerned about the future of their children. The question is, “Where could these autistic individuals go when their parents are no longer capable of looking after them?” My husband and

I shared the same sentiments as do all other parents. In desperation we brought our prayer requests before our gracious God and Father in heaven. Through all these years, we had witnessed God's intervention in His perfect timing. He had never ceased to make the way for Brendon, and we believed with all our hearts that He will continue to do so.

Amazingly, on 2 October 2015, Singapore's President Tony Tan, who was the guest of honor at the annual Singapore Anglican Community Services event called St. Andrew's Mission Hospital Charity Dinner, announced at the dinner that SAAC had been appointed by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) to co-develop and operate an Adult Disability Home for persons with autism.

Since then, SAAC and MSF have been working closely to design and build a facility that will provide long-term residential care for those without alternative options.

This next big step forward for SAAC is a part of the centre's commitment to continue work alongside families of persons with autism, and to be a bridge for education, training, intervention, and advocacy.

My husband and I were shocked when we heard the good news. Once again our compassionate God Yahweh had heard our earnest plea. That was so incredible! Oh how we thanked Him for answering our prayers. With a grateful heart, we looked forward to seeing the very first residential

home for autistic individuals to be established in Singapore.

The Adult Disability Home (ADH) that St. Andrew's Autism Centre (SAAC) co-developed with the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) began construction on 21 February 2017. The new residential home, St. Andrew's Adult Home (SAAH), is specially designed and built to meet the needs of persons with autism. It has the capacity to house 200 residents, with a co-located Day Activity Centre (DAC) with a capacity of 50 adult clients.

SAAH provides long-term residential and respite care services that center on three core development goals: Daily Living Skills, Communal Living Skills, and Emotional Behavioral Management. A team of staff nurses and healthcare assistants, together with allied health staff such as psychologists, therapists and social workers, work with the frontline care staff in helping the residents live dignified and meaningful lives.

On 19 April 2018, the 10th floor of one wing and the 7th floor of the other wing had been completed. Work on fittings and equipment, programs, staffing and logistics to support the residential home, was ready. Finally St. Andrew's Autism Centre (SAAC) officially received the purpose-built St. Andrew's Adult Home (SAAH) building from the Ministry of Social and Family Development on 16 January 2019. An official grand opening ceremony was

held on 11 February 2019. Thereafter SAAH received its first residents in early April 2019.

I couldn't believe my eyes when my husband and I were invited to a tour of the newly built St. Andrew's Autism Home (SAAH). Indeed Our God Yahweh knew my anxious thoughts, and His consolations delighted my soul. Truly no words could rightly express my eternal gratefulness to our awesome God for providing a future earthly home for our beloved son in unforeseen circumstances when my husband and I are unable to look after our son anymore.

Currently there is a Day Activity Centre (DAC) at St. Andrew's Autism Home (SAAH) which has a capacity of 50 adult clients. Since SAAH is closer to our home, we decided to apply for Brendon to be transferred to the Day Activity Centre at SAAH. We were very grateful to God when Brendon was accepted into the new DAC in April 2019.

It has been a long journey in learning to submit to God's will while embracing the mysterious world of autism with my beloved autistic son over the last twenty eight years. Through it all I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to the one and only true God Yahweh for granting me and my family His grace, mercy and courage to face every obstacle which stood in our way. Oh how good and how pleasant it is to experience the love of God through the miracles He had performed.

Before I end my sharing, I would like to thank all my dear brothers and sisters from all over the world for reading my

writings. To those who have been supporting us in prayer, we would like to say, “A big thank you for remembering us.” May our gracious God and Father in heaven bless you with the abundance of His spiritual blessings! Amen.

Braving Through the Covid-19 Pandemic Together With My Autistic Son

Pearl Bong, June 2022

An unusual and memorable year 2020

Over the last two years, I have been praying for God's will to be done through His churches worldwide. May the spirit of God grant to each and every child of God wisdom in knowing the heart of our loving God and Father Yahweh. Every morning when I wake up, I would give thanks to our Heavenly Father Yahweh for another new day. There is joy unspeakable when I behold the beauty of our awesome God Yahweh. No matter what happens, my heart seeks to praise and honor Abba Yahweh in all that I do. As I pray earnestly and unceasingly, lo and behold, the spirit of God would lead me to share these thoughts which have been lingering in my mind for a long time.

When we look at the world around us, life is truly so fragile and unpredictable. No one is able to guess or predict what tomorrow holds! As for me, I will always remember to count my blessings and name them one by one so that I may testify to the world that I worship and serve the only true God Yahweh.

At this juncture, we are still in the midst of the worst ever worldwide outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is absolutely unthinkable that not a single country has been spared from a mysterious virus known as Covid-19 which has surfaced out of the blue!

We have all been through more than two years of the Covid-19 pandemic since the outbreak started on 31st December 2019. To date, there has been no way of eliminating Covid-19 from the face of the earth. In early January 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that Covid-19 is transiting from being a pandemic to being endemic, which means that the virus is still around but at a level that is not causing significant disruption to our daily lives.

Over the last two years, I have experienced many miracles happening in my family during the course of braving through the pandemic together with my beloved son Brendon. As I reminisce on some of the dramatic incidents, my heart and my soul sing for joy to the ever-living God Yahweh for He is great and greatly to be praised! I am eternally grateful to our merciful God and Father for

granting my husband and me the strength and power to brave through the Covid-19 pandemic together with our son. I stood amazed as I witnessed Yahweh God's mighty hand at work in my son's life over the last two years of living with Covid-19.

To those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, how blessed it is, and what an honor it is, to behold our God Yahweh who is a God of miracles. Absolutely nothing is impossible for Him. He performed great miracles in the past and will continue to do so today and forevermore!

A note of thanksgiving

Before proceeding, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to those who have read my previous writings. A big thank you to everyone for your unfailing love, constant prayers, and most encouraging support, always. Certainly, I believe you have been richly blessed by our awesome God Yahweh when you read through all my writings particularly my most recent one, "Embracing the World of Autism with My Autistic Son" (chapter 4).

As always, it is my wish and prayer that the world may know that Yahweh is the only true God and Jesus Christ is His only begotten son whom He has sent to lead men to God.

John 17 verse 3 says,

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (ESV)

The beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic

On 31st December 2019, World Health Organization (WHO) was informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan City, China. A novel coronavirus was identified as the cause of these cases by Chinese authorities on 7th January 2020, and it was temporarily named “2019-nCoV,” later renamed “Covid-19”. On 22nd January 2020, Singapore set up a Multi-Ministry Task Force (MTF) committee to manage the Covid-19 pandemic. The MTF formation was timely: the very next day, 23rd January 2020, a Wuhan tourist was confirmed as Singapore’s first Covid-19 case.

Against expectations, an invisible yet powerful virus totally new to the human race had suddenly emerged. It shook up the entire world population into fear and trembling! We were at the mercy of a fierce and highly transmissible virus known as Covid-19 which has since wiped out a huge number of the world population. Oh how daunting it was for everybody as we were trapped in a world of chaos. How helpless and wretched we were! I cried out to our Lord God, “Have mercy on us, O God Yahweh, according to Your unfailing love.”

Despite new medical advances, at that time medical professionals and scientists had yet to discover an effective solution to deal with Covid-19. Every single soul was waiting eagerly for the invention of a vaccine that will protect us from the severity of illness and death caused by Covid-19.

Right from the start of the pandemic, we have all been experiencing a tumultuous period. Living with Covid-19 has been challenging enough for normal human beings over the last two years. What about autistic individuals like my son Brendon?

Obviously, it was doubly hard for them. I tried to describe in words how challenging it has been but I could not find specific words to describe that disheartened feeling. I could only say that the autistic people were rendered a greater blow than we normal human beings.

While I was caught in a sense of total hopelessness, all of a sudden I felt my foot slipping, and I plunged deep into the valley of darkness. It was pitch dark and extremely cold in that deep valley! Out of desperation, I stepped into my prayer closet and knelt humbly before the God of all creation. I prayed, "Father, only You and You alone are able to get through to Brendon. Please hear my earnest plea! How on earth am I going to share with my son about Covid-19? It is an awesome task to explain to him about the sudden emergence of a new and dangerous virus that is lurking about, causing much issues in the world today. Oh

dear Abba Father, to begin with, how do I explain to Brendon what a virus is? It is such an abstract word! Oh no, I am at my wit's end! Oh dear God Yahweh, please teach me Your way and show me Your path. Amen.”

After committing my request to God, slowly but most assuredly I began to perceive a ray of bright light at the end of the tunnel. Indeed, it was the light that would illuminate my path ahead. I instantly experienced the peace of God enveloping me, and right away I knew what my mission was! My lips uttered, “Hallelujah! Praise Yahweh for He is sovereign over all!”

All these years I have never ceased thanking Yahweh God for granting Brendon a high visual capability. He has much higher visual skills than the majority of normal human beings I know. Then it dawned on me that the easiest way to explain Covid-19 to Brendon was through visual aids. Without further delay, I started my new mission right away by gathering pictures of people wearing masks, pictures of doctors and healthcare workers wearing protective clothes and using equipment, and scenes of hospital wards where Covid-19 patients with breathing difficulties were hooked up to oxygen tanks or ventilators. I also searched for some animated videos created by some talented artists which convey a clear message of what Covid-19 is all about.

I went through the collection of pictures and videos with Brendon and explained to him in simple words. I said, “My

dear son, many people are very sick because of a virus attack. Some cannot breathe and need to breathe through oxygen tanks or they will die. From now on we must wear masks when we go out.” He stared at the pictures for a while. Then he shouted out loud with his thunderous voice, “No! No die!” I understood what he meant. To my dear son, “death” or “die” is a taboo word. In his simple mind, death implies the end of one’s life. He has always dreaded the sight of someone who breathes his/her last.

When I showed Brendon the collection of pictures and videos, I did not mention to him that the new virus was known as Covid-19. To my amazement, two days later he came to me and said, “Mummy, Covid-19!” My jaws dropped when I heard him say this loud and clear. I was wondering how on earth did he find out the new virus is called Covid-19? I asked my husband and Brendon’s class teachers if they had told him so. Surprisingly, none of them did. Oh how cool! How incredible! A miracle indeed! I believe with all my heart that our gracious God Yahweh had answered my prayer. It was God who had revealed it to Brendon through His amazing ways. Up to this day it remains a mystery as to how Yahweh God had revealed the name of the virus to Brendon. How marvelous it is to see a miracle at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic!

New Challenges ahead of us

Those of you who have read my earlier writings would probably understand that most autistic individuals have great difficulties in accepting changes to their daily routines. Disruption in the daily routines would lead to outbursts of anger and meltdowns in Brendon, resulting in a series of undesirable destructive behaviors. However, thanks be to Yahweh God that by His mercy and grace, Brendon has improved by leaps and bounds over the last thirty years. At least for now he is able to accept some adjustments to his usual routines.

When Covid-19 struck Singapore, my husband and I sensed the beginning of a tough journey ahead. The only way to equip ourselves to cope with the upcoming battle was to commit our fears and inadequacies to God. I was once again reminded to be brave and courageous through the word of God in Joshua 1: 9.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God (Yahweh) is with you wherever you go."
(Joshua 1:9 ESV)

The sudden emergence of Covid-19 has greatly disrupted our daily lives. Many succumbed to the virus when it swept speedily across the globe. My heart sank when I heard the daily announcements by the World Health

Organization (WHO) regarding the surging number of Covid-19 cases and the death toll in every country. The number was astronomical! I came before Yahweh God as I grieved over what was happening. The only solution to prevent severe illness and death from the virus infection is vaccines.

While the research and development of Covid-19 vaccines were underway, the World Health Organization made a new normal of mask-wearing and physical distancing of at least one meter apart. The Covid-19 pandemic also spurred on global cooperation for vaccine research and distribution.

On 14th April 2020, Singapore's Ministry of Health declared mask-wearing as mandatory except for children below the age of two and individuals with special needs who might have difficulties adapting to wearing masks.

Although we were pleased that mask-wearing wasn't mandatory for Brendon, the truth of the matter is that we prefer that he adapts to the new mask-wearing norm in order to protect himself from catching the virus. However, it remained a huge challenge to convince Brendon to wear a mask, for he disliked the idea of covering his nose with something. Once again, I cried out to Abba Father Yahweh for His guidance. I prayed, "Oh Father, please help Brendon accept the new changes. Enable Brendon to put on a mask. Help Brendon understand that wearing a mask is necessary. Amen."

My heart was at peace after pouring out my burdens to God. The next crucial step was to introduce a mask which Brendon would accept as he has to wear it on the school bus and at the Day Activity Centre for at least eight hours a day. I combed through a few online shops to purchase different types of masks, burning huge holes in my pocket. After much trial and error, thankfully at last mission accomplished! I found a reasonably good quality fabric mask which offered high filtration. Brendon readily accepted it and he wore it daily without a word of complain. I was very grateful to Yahweh God for His provision. My heart was filled with thanksgiving when I saw Brendon put on his mask without much hassle. Glory be to our most high God Yahweh for enabling Brendon to accept the new normal. Cheers!

Two months of “circuit breaker lockdown”

Within a short time, by the end of March 2020, Covid-19 cases skyrocketed in Singapore. Singapore’s Covid-19 Multi-Ministry Taskforce (MTF) committee held an emergency meeting to discuss a stringent set of preventive measures collectively called the “circuit breaker lockdown” to control the spread of Covid-19. On 7th April 2020, Singapore’s Ministry of Health announced the implementation of a circuit breaker lockdown for two months for the purpose of slowing down the infection rate. Singapore also

contributed US\$500,000 to support the World Health Organization's efforts against Covid-19.

During the circuit breaker lockdown, all retail shops, religious activities, and schools were ordered to close temporarily. Dining-in was not allowed in F & B businesses such as restaurants, food courts, and hawker centers. But we were allowed to buy take-away food. I recall seeing an extremely gloomy Singapore for the very first time in my life. How pathetic!

With the temporary closure of schools, all school children started online home-based learning. The new generation of kids are mostly internet-savvy. Thus it did not take them long to adapt to a new channel of learning via online platforms such as Zoom. But it was a big problem for Brendon and the majority of kids with special needs because they required hands on learning. But practical in-person teaching was impossible to do via Zoom. Brendon started to feel restless when his usual routines were disrupted.

In addition, one of Brendon's favorite weekend activities is to frequent food courts and hawker centers to feast on his favorite foods such as Hainanese chicken rice, spaghetti, BBQ chicken wings, and satays. During the two months of the circuit breaker lockdown, he was aware that dining out was not permissible due to Covid-19. It was hard for Brendon to accept having every single meal at home for over sixty days. I felt so sorry for him.

Attending classes and feasting out over the weekend are the two activities Brendon enjoyed immensely. Again, it was hard for him to break away from his normal routines. I believe that though he could not express his opinions in words, he might have thought, “Why on earth did my teachers stop me from going to school and worst of all, why did my parents stop taking me out for some good meals?”

Once again, I wept before Yahweh God as I was entangled in yet another intense struggle. Again and again, I begged God to remove the huge mountain which was standing in my way. The spirit of God prompted me to seek that God’s will be done in His time. Frankly speaking, I was caught in a dilemma as two months of circuit breaker lockdown seemed like an eternity to me. I confessed to our merciful God Yahweh that it was a tall order to brave through the two months with my beloved son. My heart was filled with anxieties and I was afraid that I might suffer a severe mental breakdown in no time.

Early one morning while I was fixing my gaze upon our everlasting God Yahweh, a small still voice whispered across my ear. A comforting yet gentle reminder came in timely fashion! I was told to take Brendon out for a thorough tour around the F & B outlets at shopping malls, restaurants, food courts, and hawker centers. At that instant some very familiar words surfaced on my mind: “Brendon has high visual capability. Seeing is believing!” Yes, how true it is that Brendon would understand and

realize what was happening once we take him out for a quick tour of his usual haunts. It was as simple as that. I was stunned by how much God cares for Brendon. I praise and thank Abba Yahweh for His faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see!

At the break of dawn, I shared with my husband the plan to take Brendon out to see the state Singapore was in during the circuit breaker lockdown. It was an unusual but pleasant tour as we visited a few of Brendon's favorite eating places and shopping complexes. Indeed, seeing is believing! At all the eateries, we saw a scene which we had not seen over the last three decades: large piles of chairs stacked up high, and tables bound together with masking tape. Obviously, no dining-in was allowed.

I caught a glimpse of the surprised look in Brendon's eyes. Finally, when we reached home, Brendon took out his communication booklet, and wrote, "No, cannot eat out!" I said, "Yes, that's right, my dear son, but someday we will eat out again." He replied, "Hopefully!" I was grinning from ear to ear when Brendon uttered his favorite word, "hopefully." That is the sweetest word ever! It brings me tremendous joy, and always encourages me to have a positive outlook. Oh how marvelous it is to see miracles unfold before my eyes. Yahweh God is good all the time!

Be creative! Let's have fun!

During the two months of not attending physical classes, it was a big challenge for Brendon's teachers to wrack their brains on what to prepare for their students to do at home. Nevertheless, they put in their best efforts in getting ready some worksheets and also a few sets of Arts & Craft materials to be delivered to the students' homes on a weekly basis. I was very touched by their dedication and deep concern for each and every student under their care. Through it all I experienced God's great love for us!

It was a rough journey during that period. I felt that my whole being was being ravaged in the stormy sea with Brendon. All of a sudden—overnight!—I become Brendon's relief teacher. It was hard enough for Brendon to adapt to some minor changes in his daily routines, but now there were a few major changes! He was under tremendous stress! My prayer to God become more intense and persistent as the days went by. Our God Yahweh once again directed my attention to the parable of the friend at midnight, recorded in the Gospel of Luke chapter 11, from verses 5 to 13. Deep within my heart I knew I have to pray fervently and be persistent always in asking God for His help for He is able!

I prayed with all my heart and all my might! At last Brendon was willing to accept me as his relief teacher. He began to sit calmly for at least twenty minutes each day to

complete his worksheets. Hurray! Abba Yahweh has paved the way for Brendon. I rejoiced over the blessings He has bestowed upon us!

Yahweh God granted me new ideas for enjoying our days of home confinement beyond doing things at the table. You may wonder what our loving God had in store for us? Ha ha, can you imagine how cool it is to enjoy the most creative and fun way of playing badminton in our mini 700 cm by 170 cm badminton court created overnight at our balcony? This may sound ridiculous or hilarious to some of you but Brendon and I had so much fun together. When I shared about this new-found adventure that Brendon and I had, his teachers were amazed! They thought it was an awesome idea. Oh how wonderful it is to be led by the spirit of the only true God Yahweh.

Life after the circuit breaker lockdown

During the two months of the circuit breaker lockdown, the number of daily Covid-19 infections in Singapore began to drop significantly. On 2nd June 2020, the Day Activity Center at St Andrew's Adult Home (SAAH) reopened. Brendon was delighted to return to classes once again.

In order to prevent the spread of Covid-19, a new set of rules was implemented. All the usual outdoor activities such as travelling, swimming, shopping, and dining out were suspended until further notice. Despite the drastic

change, I was amazed to see that Brendon adapted pretty well. Ever since he learned about Covid-19 and how it affects our lives, he was ready to accept the changes and to break from his normal routines. Without Abba Yahweh's intervention, it would be impossible for Brendon to accept the changes so quickly and readily. Indeed God's mighty power was at work in Brendon. I thank Him from the bottom of my heart.

Time flew by quickly. Our weekly Sunday services were being conducted through Zoom since April 2020. Without fail each Sunday morning Brendon would ask me if we will be returning to in-person services. I could see the disappointment on his face when he realized we could not gather in the house of God to worship our Lord God Yahweh. That was so sweet!

The other thing which Brendon missed was the annual short vacations in the historic city of Malacca in southwest Malaysia. It was beyond my imagination that many countries had closed their borders for almost two years. We felt sad to tell our son that we would be unable to travel abroad until the situation improves. Every time his term break starts, he would approach me and ask, "When can we go for hotel stay?" I would shake my head and say, "My dear son, I am so sorry, we still cannot travel abroad. I hope we can go to Malacca soon."

It broke my heart to see how persistent Brendon was in requesting the fulfilment of his desire to travel abroad.

That went on from June 2020 to December 2021. Almost one and a half years of asking persistently, yet his wish to travel was not fulfilled.

I felt sorrowful that I could not meet his needs. All that I could do for Brendon was to commit his request to God and ask God to grant him the joy of enjoying what is available locally. Yes, our God Yahweh is a compassionate God. He has granted my family the joy of admiring the beauty of His creation. Most of the weekends, we accompanied Brendon for walks at the National Parks; we visited the famous Gardens by the Bay and went for outings at the Botanical Gardens. As a result, my whole family become healthier both physically and mentally. Hurray! Praise and thank God for leading us through the stormy period!

At the start of 2022, an unexpected miracle happened again! I noticed Brendon had stopped asking me when we will be able to travel abroad. His persistent request for travelling abroad had vanished into thin air. I was stunned! Today is the 26th of May 2022. Five months have passed and he has stopped asking completely. It seems that he has accepted the truth that Covid-19 will continue to remain for as long as it wishes. How wonderful! How marvelous! Praise Yahweh God from whom all blessings flow!

The nations' hope: Vaccinations

By 11th December 2020, the Pfizer vaccine became the first to receive emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Creating a vaccine in under one year was no small feat. Under normal circumstances, making a vaccine could take 10 to 15 years, due to the complexity of vaccine development.

Finally, the long awaited moment had arrived! Vaccines for Covid-19 were available! My husband and I received our first and second Pfizer BioNTech vaccines on March and April 2021. We are thankful to God that the vaccine is able to prevent severe illness and death if we should ever catch the Covid-19 Delta variant which was spreading quickly all over the world during that time.

Singapore's Ministry of Health made an announcement that students from Special Education schools will receive their vaccinations ahead of the students from normal schools. What a privilege for Brendon and all the other special needs kids. On the one hand my heart jumped for joy upon hearing the good news, but on the other hand, I was anxious as I knew it would be hard to administer the jabs on Brendon. Our Lord God Yahweh knew my fear and He has made the way for Brendon.

Two weeks before the vaccination date, his teachers had prepared visual aids to explain the whole process to all the students at the Center. They also created a vaccination

booth to simulate an actual vaccination venue. In addition, they showed Brendon how the jab will be administered by using a needleless syringe. How lovely! My heart melted when I saw what God had done through so many beautiful souls.

Lo and behold! Brendon received his two Pfizer BioNTech vaccinations on April and May 2021. How blessed we are, I thought to myself. My heart sang a joyful song to Yahweh, “Bless Yahweh, Oh my soul, blessed be His name! From everlasting to everlasting Yahweh is God! Amen.”

A close brush with Covid-19

Covid-19 is an extremely tricky virus which has mutated several times over the last two years. As the days go by, the newly mutated variant would become more and more contagious than the older strains, and is capable of spreading at a much faster rate. In January 2022, we heard on the news that the new variant called Omicron is capable of spreading much quicker than the Delta variant. Thankfully more than 87 per cent of the population here have been fully vaccinated, while 39 per cent have received their booster shots. Because most patients infected by the Omicron variant displayed very mild symptoms, they do not require hospitalization. Instead they can be isolated at home until they recover from the infection.

February 2022 was the month I would describe as the “roller-coaster ride” period for my family. Brendon had a few close brushes with Covid-19 when his class teacher, two of his classmates, and his school bus driver contracted Covid-19 one by one. It was beyond my imagination when relief teachers and a temporary bus driver were roped in to hold the fort. His school principal ordered parents to conduct the Covid-19 Antigen Rapid Test (ART) on their kids every morning. Only those whose test results were negative were allow to attend classes.

The next big hurdle was to do a nasal swap on Brendon. I have to cry out to God for help. In the end, we managed to brave through it, and with each passing day, it was getting easier to cope with Brendon. After five days, Brendon had gotten used to the ART process such that he would come to us spontaneously and ask us to perform the test on him. I was very surprised to see him so obedient and cooperative. We continued to perform the tests on Brendon successfully for almost ten days. My husband and I were very thankful to God that Brendon’s test results were negative although he was in close contact with quite a few Covid-19 cases.

The Omicron wave continued to sweep across Singapore like wildfire. Within the same month a few of our church brethren also contracted the Omicron virus but they have all recovered well. Praise and thank Abba Yahweh for His mercy and love! After the whole nation had

gone through more than two years of battling Covid-19, the entire world economy had suffered many setbacks. Singapore was not spared. Singapore's Multi-Ministry Taskforce (MTF) committee evaluated the situation carefully and declared Covid-19 as endemic on 6th March 2022. Our church leaders also held a meeting, and the team decided that it was the right time for our church to return to in-person service.

My personal encounter with Covid-19

On 6th March 2022, CDC Singapore resumed its in-person church service while continuing the regular online Zoom service for those who are unable to attend the in-person service. With a grateful heart we returned to church. Although mask-wearing remained mandatory and we could not see each other's bright smiles hidden behind the masks, it was no doubt a beautiful moment to worship our great and almighty God Yahweh together in His church.

Three days after our in-person service reopened, on 9th March 2022, my husband and I started to feel unwell. We did the ART tests immediately. The test results showed me as positive while my husband tested negative. Without further delay, I wore a mask at all times and isolated myself in my master bedroom for seven days to prevent the spread of the virus to my husband and Brendon.

Many thoughts ran through my mind when I was in isolation. Most importantly, I was very thankful to God for allowing me to be the first in my family to get infected by Covid-19. I needed that first-hand experience so that I may understand how it is like when one gets infected in order to have a better understanding of how to help Brendon if he should catch the virus some day. God knew the desire of my heart and it happened in His time. In my quiet time I asked God for the inspiration to share my Covid-19 journey if He so wills. I prayed and waited upon God's guidance to pen another testimony in accordance with His will.

During the seven days in isolation, I thanked Abba Yahweh for the love He had showered on me through my family members and our church brethren. Above all, I thank God for granting me a doting husband who served me faithfully. It was not easy for him to prepare meals for almost a week and at the same time to attend to Brendon's needs singlehandedly.

As I was unable to have my meals at the dining table during the seven days in isolation, Brendon started to sense that something had gone terribly wrong with his dear mummy. By day three he knocked on my door and said to me, "Mummy, you are very sick. Go and see a doctor!" I replied, "My dear, I will be alright soon. Please be a good boy."

As the days went by, Brendon waited patiently for me to step out of my room. By day six Brendon could not bear to

see me eating meals alone behind closed doors anymore. He broke down and shouted, “Mummy, come out from that room please!” Tears streamed down my cheeks when I heard my dear son’s lovely voice. I was very touched by his love for me expressed in words so simple yet so full of deep concern. I replied, “Mummy will be okay by tomorrow. We will visit the Science Center together, I promise.”

On 15th March 2022, which was the seventh day after infection, I did the ART test at twelve noon. It remained positive but according to Singapore’s Ministry of Health’s protocol, by day seven the virus is no longer contagious and I can be discharged. As a safety precaution, both my husband and Brendon also did the ART tests. They tested negative throughout the time I was infected. Thank Yahweh God for protecting them. Finally, I could step out of my room, and I gave my dear son and my wonderful husband a big hug for their love and never-ending support.

As I had already promised Brendon to take him to the Science Center after my recovery, we visited the Science Center that afternoon. It was so breathtaking to see the world out there once again! Everything seemed too marvelous under the sun! Oh how I missed the sunshine, the birds singing, and the gorgeous flowers blooming! I give thanks to Yahweh God for creating this wonderful world. Abba Yahweh is good; His steadfast love is everlasting!

Pressing on towards an unknown future: Living with Covid-19

It has been a very challenging period for everyone to learn to cope and live with Covid-19. Singapore's Prime Minister Mr. Lee Hsien Loong addressed the nation through his heartwarming speech on 24th March 2022. He thanked Singapore's healthcare and frontline workers for making tremendous sacrifices at a heavy personal cost since the start of the pandemic. He praised Singaporeans for their cooperation in adhering to the restrictive measures during the most trying period over the last two years. Without the whole nation's collective efforts, it would have been impossible to control the spread of the virus effectively. Our economy had suffered much and it was time to reopen our borders.

On the same day (24th March), Singapore and Malaysia jointly announced that there would no longer be any need for pre-departure or on-arrival Covid-19 tests. From 1st April 2022, those who are fully vaccinated will be able to travel freely between Singapore and Malaysia by land, including by driving, without testing or quarantining, in a highly anticipated move that was set to kickstart short trips between the neighboring countries.

With that announcement came the good news for my dear son Brendon. My husband and I agreed that the timing was right to fulfill Brendon's wish to go for a short

vacation in Malacca. When we told Brendon that we were heading for a two-night hotel stay during his upcoming term break in June 2022, he jumped for joy! That will be the greatest reward to him for braving through the Covid-19 pandemic together with us. We looked forward to a refreshing time together! I thank Yahweh God that at last I could fulfill Brendon's wish to travel abroad.

On 24th April 2022, Singapore's Ministry of Health (MOH) declared the removal of all Covid-19 restrictive measures with the exception of mask-wearing, which remains mandatory for indoors only. It was so wonderful to see the usual crowds gradually return, and many were reunited with their loved ones whom they had not met face to face for more than two years!

What a memorable year 2022 is! It is a year in which we are pressing on towards the age of living with the Covid-19 endemic. As for me, I will behold our God Yahweh. I will say of Yahweh God that He is my refuge, my fortress, my God in whom I trust today and forevermore! Quoting His precious word from Psalm 91:1-2,

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say to the LORD (Yahweh), "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." (Psalm 91:1-2, ESV)

To end my sharing, I would like to share these beautiful words from a poster which I received from a dear friend recently.

The deepest level of worship is:

- *Praising Yahweh God through the pain,*
- *Thanking Yahweh God through the trials,*
- *Trusting Yahweh God when we're tempted to lose hope,*
- *And loving Him, even when He seems distant.*
- *At my lowest, Yahweh God is my hope.*
- *At my darkest, Yahweh God is my light.*
- *At my weakest, Yahweh God is my strength.*
- *At my saddest, Yahweh God is my comforter.*

Those words are timely reminders from our gracious God and Father Yahweh who stood by me when I was walking through the valley of darkness. Words aren't enough to express my heartfelt thanksgiving to Yahweh God for the love He has bestowed on me and my family through His word and His church.

Last but not least, may all glory, honor and praise be to our Lord God Yahweh who is the one and only true God. Amen.

