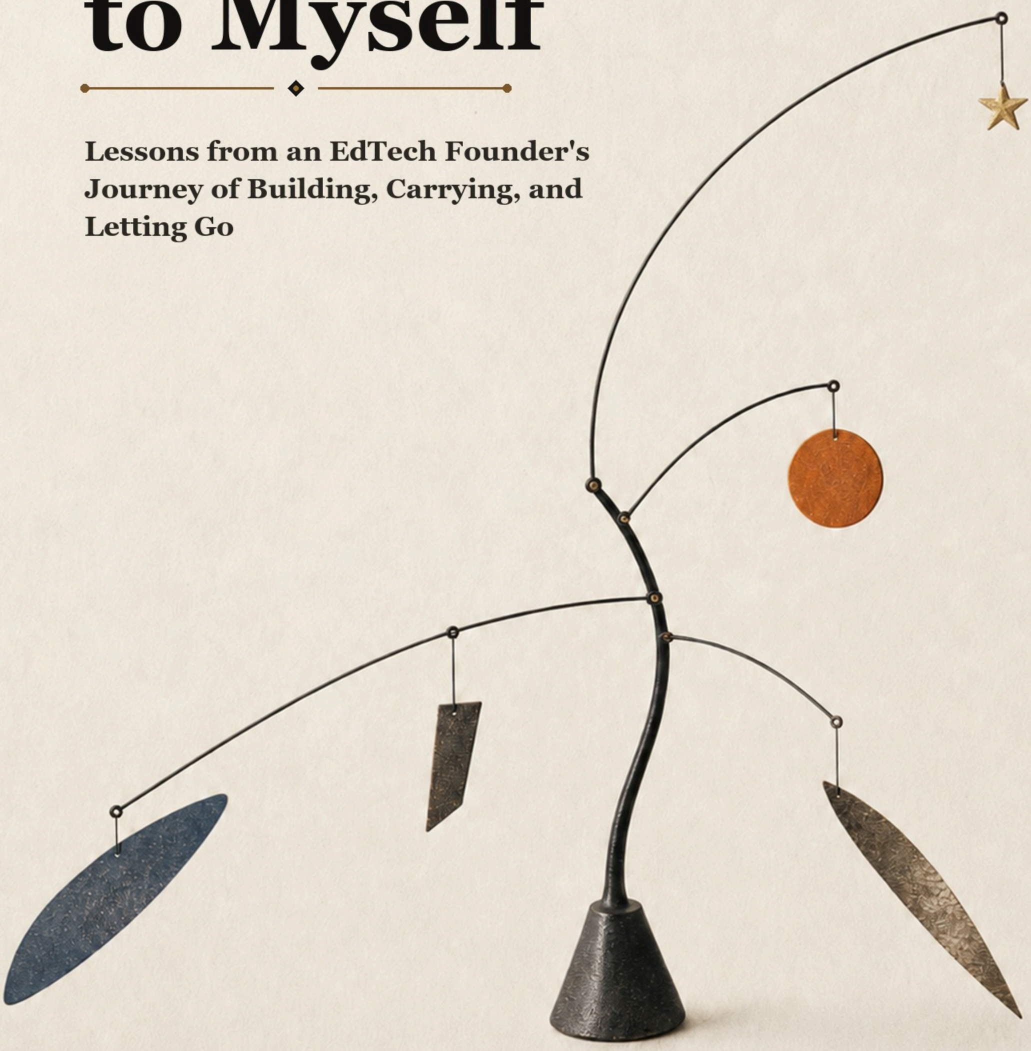
Coming Back to Myself

Lessons from an EdTech Founder's Journey of Building, Carrying, and Letting Go



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Author's Note

This book is not an insider account of a company, nor is it a success story.

It records a part of my life: from someone working in education technology, to founder, to the person who carried responsibility, and later to someone learning to let go. Entrepreneurship allowed me to build a company. It also allowed me to see how I faced dreams, responsibility, pressure, the body, family and loss. When I look back on this road, what I most want to leave behind is not which achievement shone the brightest, but the moments that once pushed me to grow and forced me to understand myself again.

I once thought entrepreneurship meant building a company. Only later did I understand that real growth is this: after building, carrying, losing and letting go, you can still come back to yourself and live again.

I do not want this book to become an evaluation of anyone, and I do not want it to be read as the complete history of any company. A company has its version. The market has its version. Those who walked alongside me each have their own memories too. What is left here is the part I can honestly acknowledge as a founder, husband, father, fellow traveller in education technology, and ordinary person on that road.

If you once walked with me, this book is a note of thanks.

If you are still on the road of entrepreneurship, I hope this book can be a reminder: dreams matter, and the journey matters too. But in the end, what is most worth holding on to is whether, between the dream and the journey, you can still live as the person you truly are.

Prologue

Letting Go Was How I Came Back to Myself

It begins with the last working day. No farewell cakes, no goodbye in person. Only the quiet of home, a few words on a phone screen, and a man finally admitting: enough, this is enough.

On September 30, 2022, I was at home.

I should have gone back to the office that day. There should have been farewell cakes, hugs, photographs, and someone saying thank you face to face. But in those few days, my wife, Jay, tested positive for COVID-19. I had symptoms, though my test was not yet positive, and I was counted as a close contact. The two of us had to go through fourteen days of compulsory isolation together.

So on the last working day of an eight-year entrepreneurial journey, neither of us could go anywhere.

All I could do was type the same message into the WhatsApp groups: Jay and I have graduated. Today is our last day at the company...

Then, in the afternoon, I pressed leave group.

It was quiet.

So quiet that it did not feel like the company I had known.

I worked in education technology in Hong Kong. In this field, September has never been an ordinary month. Schools reopen. Parents wait for notices. Students return to classrooms. Information, activities, payments and communication all rush into the system at once.

At peak hours, tens of thousands of people used the platform at the same time. Principals and teachers chased for answers in the groups. The team reassured schools while keeping their eyes on the system. Colleagues in Hong Kong handled the frontline. The development team in Guangzhou picked up the work from the other side.

Many times, people did not stay behind because someone had ordered them to. They stayed because the problem had not yet been solved, and no one felt right being the first to go to sleep.

I had listened to that kind of noise for many years.

But on the day I left, there was no first-month-of-school chaos, no customer chasing, no colleague calling for support between two cities. There was only the quiet at home, a line of words on a screen, and the small, silent act of leaving a WhatsApp group sometime after three in the afternoon.

I was not leaving a small company that only a few of us remembered.

It had once helped around three hundred schools in Hong Kong, hundreds of thousands of students and families, and a wide network of education organisations and community partners handle communication, activities, payments and learning support on one platform. During the days when COVID-19 suspended classes, it had also worked with partners from different sectors to keep the most basic learning arrangements between schools and families going.

But on the day I left, what I felt most clearly was not those numbers.

It was my body finally asking me to stop.

I thought I would be sad. Instead, I felt lighter than I had expected.

That lightness was not the relief of escape. It was the feeling of a person finally willing to admit: enough. This is enough.

In May that year, my heart began to hurt. It was not a sharp pain. It came once in the morning, once at night, punctual as if it were keeping accounts for me. I was thin, yet my bad cholesterol was above the healthy range. Once, I even fainted at home.

The doctor said stress could do this. It could turn into anything.

By my birthday in June, my wish had shrunk from the old familiar one - I hope the company gets better - into four simple words:

I just want to be healthy.

My body knew the answer before I did.

It simply took me a long time to listen.

So this memoir is not an attempt to rewrite the history of a company.

A company has its version. A team has its version. The market has its version too. I will leave those to time.

What I want to leave behind is only this: how a founder began with belief, learned to carry responsibility, saw his own limits at the very moment things looked most successful, and finally understood that some things, the tighter you hold them, the more you have to learn to let go.

There are still many details I choose not to write.

Not because they are untrue, but because truth does not always need to be told in a way that wounds other people.

What I want this memoir to preserve is the light I personally walked through, and also the shadows I spent a long time refusing to look back at. But this is not a reckoning. It is not an insider account.

I write to turn this road into meaning for myself, not merely memory.

I also write to say a late thank you to the people who walked with me through those eight years.

If, one day, these words are of any use to an entrepreneur who is still burning himself to keep going, that would be an extra gift.

I once thought entrepreneurship meant building a company.

Only later did I slowly understand that real growth is this: after building, carrying, losing and letting go, you can still come back to yourself and live again.

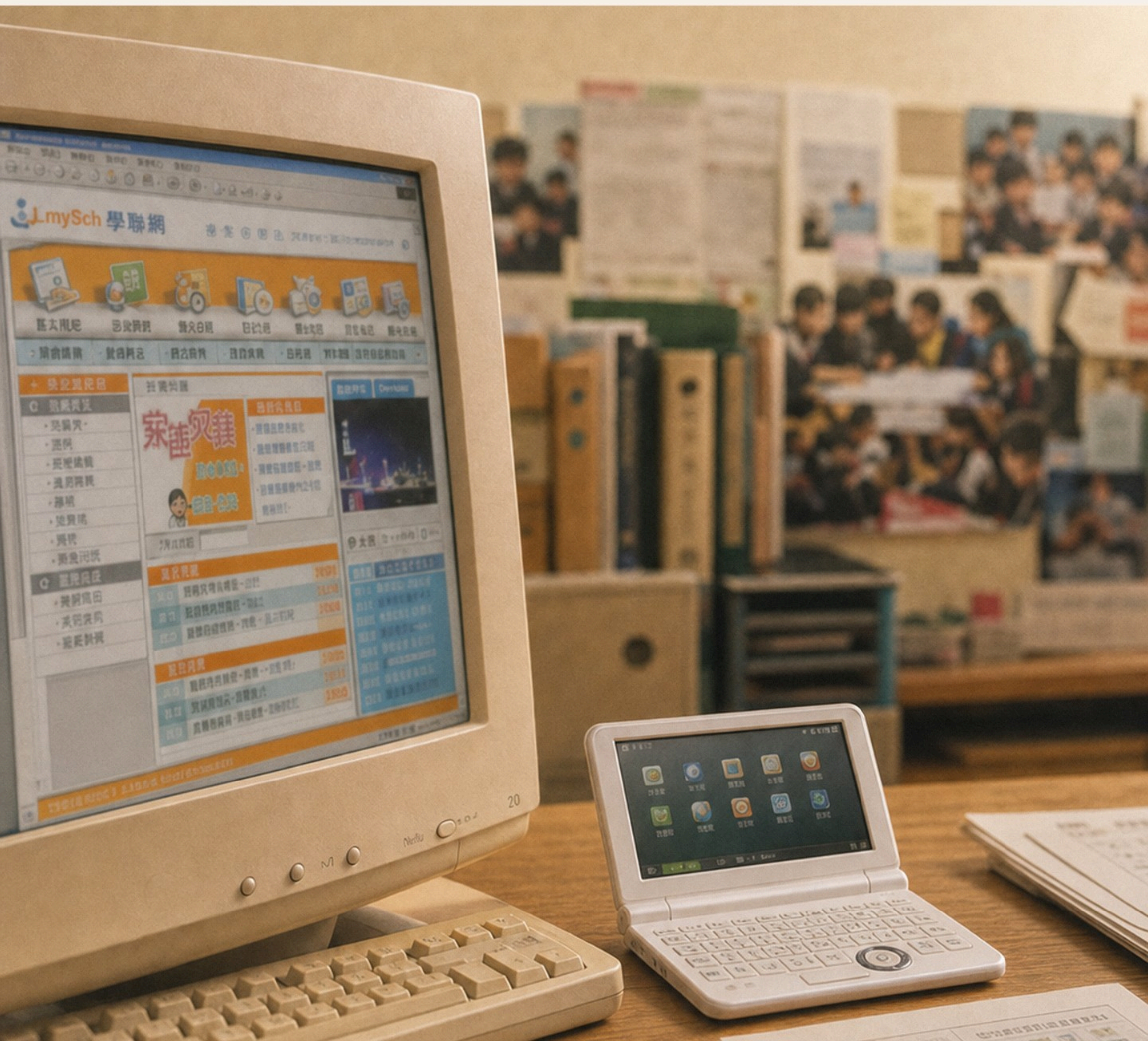
This memory begins here.

With a person who had not yet understood what price he would pay, and how he eventually arrived at the day he was willing to leave.

Chapter 1

Before the Startup: Why I Left the Safe Path

From designer to general manager in education technology, and from a stable career into the uncertainty of entrepreneurship. Leaving was not an act of impulse. It was a serious response to a problem I had watched for ten years and could no longer ignore.



When I resigned, I was holding what many people would have considered a very good job.

By 2014, I had already spent twelve years in education technology. Seven of those years were as general manager of a company that was, by then, one of Hong Kong's major education platform service providers. In the school sector across Hong Kong and Macau, it was a key supplier of development and research platforms. More than 650 kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, organisations and public institutions had used its services.

In other words, I could have stayed safe.

Many people, once they reach that kind of position, stop moving.

But I moved.

To explain why, I have to go back to how I arrived, step by step, at the place where I could have chosen to remain comfortable.

I did not begin in education.

I did not even begin in design.

When I first started working, around 1998, I was a clerk at an information technology company. While working there, I taught myself web design. It was the late 1990s. The internet was just beginning to rise. To be able to make websites, animations and interactive applications was already a new craft in itself.

In 1999, I created a personal project called "動の物", a small world where I played with pets, mini games and Flash animations. That little craft won me a web design competition organised by HongKong.com. Computer Square later interviewed me in a two-page feature. The article was destroyed years later in a typhoon flood, and now survives only as memory.

Around 1999 to 2000, I joined a satellite television station as a web designer, creating online promotions for different films and television programmes. In about a year, I went from designer to senior designer.

In 2000, Wan Li Book Company invited me to turn the techniques behind those personal projects into a book teaching Flash animation. I spent about a year organising and writing it. In 2001, the book was published.

Today, Flash is already an antique from another century. Every technology has a lifespan. Looking back, that book was less a technical achievement than a small time capsule I left for myself.

Later, I went out on my own. For two or three years, I ran a small design company and took on projects myself. Those years taught me what it meant to live from one job to the next. Finish one project, chase the next. Stop working, and the income stops too.

I began asking myself a question: if every piece of business had to begin again from zero, and after finishing one job I had to chase the next, could this road really go far?

That question slowly became the starting point of my desire to learn how to build a sustainable business.

What brought me into education was a turn of fate.

Between 2002 and 2003, I worked on information technology related to curriculum development at the Education Department. I designed and developed interactive courseware, and also packaged tools for curriculum planning. Then an education technology company located inside the University of Science and Technology invited me to join.

The person who first invited me was an early founder of that company, and had also been a client from my small design-company days. He gave me a great deal of freedom. I began with design, then gradually came into contact with products, teams and the market.

Looking back, he was one of the important people who first opened the world of education technology to me.

Perhaps out of gratitude for being given that chance, I said yes.

Once I started, I stayed for twelve years.

There, I slowly changed from a designer into a manager.

That transformation was much harder than it looks from the outside, because I was carrying a mission: to turn around both the products and the performance of a company that had fallen into business difficulty.

I began as head of the design team, responsible for building teams in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Later, I worked in sales, marketing, product development and after-sales service. I spent time in almost every department before becoming general manager in 2008.

A designer thinks: is this screen beautiful, is the experience smooth?

A manager has to ask: can this business survive, can this team be led, does this product have real competitiveness?

Between the two lies more than a change in job title. It is a whole body of learning, and sometimes a whole set of old habits that must be unlearned before anything new can be learned.

During those years, several of the company's product lines had already found a firm place in the traditional education market. School administration systems, student profile systems, home-school platforms, electronic libraries, school-based systems and learning materials were genuinely used by many schools in Hong Kong and Macau. Later, we also worked on electronic schoolbag projects and tablet-based marking systems. Some of those solutions won Hong Kong ICT awards.

To me, these were not merely product names.

Over time, my role shifted from "making something" to asking why a solution was worth making, how it should be launched, why schools would adopt it, and whether it could eventually hold up as a real business.

I still enjoyed the creative feeling of building something from nothing. But I began to care more about another question: how could a good idea become not just a one-off project, but something the market would use repeatedly and schools could rely on over the long term?

One of the most memorable projects was the myID mobile learning electronic schoolbag, around 2009.

It was not the tablet computer people are familiar with today. It was a small five-inch device. Working with the hardware research and development team at Hong Kong's Liseng, and with the Hong Kong Applied Science and Technology Research Institute, we placed a browser, Flash support for the many interactive learning materials of that time, a multimedia player, dictionary functions, Ming Pao Knowledge Base, reading content from Commercial Press, school notices, interactive exercises and even peer-to-peer sharing technology into one learning tool.

It attracted the first pilot schools. It received more than forty pieces of media coverage. Later, it even appeared at the Hong Kong Book Fair and was sold publicly through Commercial Press bookstores.

That project was precious to me not only because of the product itself, but because I met people along the way who truly understood products and technology, and who were willing to bring me forward with them.

Years later, I realised that experience had taught me more than how to build a device. It taught me how to look at products, how to look at teams, and how to understand where I might be able to go.

Seen from today, of course it was primitive. It was quickly overtaken by more mature mobile devices. But what it left me was not nostalgia. It left me with an early reminder: the hardest part of education technology is not putting many functions into a device. It is making schools, teachers, parents and children genuinely willing to use it in their everyday lives.

Those were the years when the Education Bureau was promoting electronic learning resources, and schools were beginning to look for new tools. We happened to be standing on that wave. Yet I also gradually saw that selling systems to schools alone still could not touch the deeper layer of education.

It was a respectable, stable, well-regarded job.

By ordinary logic, I should have been satisfied.

But after more than ten years inside the same company and the same education circle, I began to see a wall more and more clearly.

Whether it was the company or the wider market, the old way of doing business seemed to have reached a bottleneck. We sold systems to schools.

It was business on the school side, what people would call B2B. But the part of education that truly mattered - how children grow, how parents take part, what a student has beyond grades - still could not be connected into the system.

I believed deeply that a B2B2C model had enough market scale and real demand. Its potential was strong enough to push the education industry itself toward transformation.

In my mind, an idea slowly grew. At that time, not many people were trying to do it.

To make it real, we would need a different way of running the business. We would have to move from serving only schools to connecting schools, families and communities at the same time, what people now often call an ecosystem model. We would also have to bring in outside capital to increase our speed. And within the education solution itself, we would have to go much deeper into product design and value-chain building.

None of that could be done by staying where I was.

To do it, I would have to begin again from zero, and take on risks that a general manager did not need to take.

There was one person beside me throughout this road.

Jay Kwong had worked with me since the days of my small design company. Later, she became my wife. She also became the most reliable product designer on my entrepreneurial journey. We worked hard together, lived together every day, and went through twenty years of storms side by side. That was no small thing.

Many years later, I finally dared to say the words: thank you for enduring this with me; better days will come.

In truth, I had already begun owing her those words from here.

In 2015, I finally said goodbye to employment.

On Facebook, I wrote three words in Chinese: I have started a business.

I called the group of people who had come together for the same mission

GRWTH, pronounced "growth". At the time, I wrote that we were putting student growth at the centre. Through data from inside and outside school, we wanted to see, connect and fulfil every child's possibilities, and help each child find his or her own No.1.

Looking back at that moment now, I have a little admiration for that version of myself.

He was not exactly young. He had a stable job he could have kept. Yet he chose a road that was long, slow and heavy.

He was stubborn, and not particularly good at protecting himself.

But without that almost reckless belief, everything that came afterwards - the bright parts, the unbearable parts, and the parts that eventually forced me to understand myself again - might never have begun.

Only later did I learn how to explain that leaving in one sentence:

No matter how large the work, if it does not match my core values, I cannot bring myself to care. But if something is truly worth doing, no matter how hard it is, I will find a way.

Leaving safety was never an act of impulse.

It was my attempt to finally do something about a problem I had taken seriously for ten years, a problem that had stayed in the same place for too long.

And how that "thing I wanted to do" moved from a slogan into something real, something schools were willing to try and children's dreams could live inside, is another story.

Chapter 2

Letting a Child's Growth Be Seen

The starting point of my partners' and my entrepreneurial journey was a belief that a child's growth should not be defined only by scores. Behind data, activities and home-school connection, what we truly wanted to connect was every child's possibility.

The hardest beginning for a company is not necessarily having no customers. Sometimes it is this: you do not yet have a real product, but you already have to face the market.

GRWTH began exactly like that.

This company was not started by me alone. At the time, several co-founders came in with their own resources, networks, experience and trust. This memoir begins from the place I personally walked through.

In the first few months before GRWTH had properly taken shape, Jay and I worked out of a small room partitioned from a shareholder's company office. It had no windows. It could barely fit two or three people. That was all the space we had.

Every day, we shut ourselves inside. We only went out to drink water or eat. The rest of the time, we worked within that tiny space. Often, we did not even know whether it was sunny or raining outside.

It was a closed, difficult, forward-only period.

Yet when I look back now, that closedness had its own strange goodness. A room without windows forces you to draw all your attention back to the one thing in your hands.

We did not yet have a formed product. What we had was a belief, and a sentence we had written for ourselves:

Release the power of data, so children can embrace the future with confidence.

To the outside world, it was a vision.

To us, it was pain relief.

Turning it into reality was far harder than writing a vision statement. GRWTH was not a simple program. It was an entire cloud system built from zero. Schools, teachers, parents and students all had to be considered. Later, suppliers and different services would also have to be connected.

Student growth data, in particular, is not something completed by filling out a form once. It accumulates with grades, classes, activities, interests and experiences inside and outside school. It also has to allow different people to see the right part from the right position.

A platform like that cannot be rushed. It has to be designed, developed and tested through trial and error at the same time.

For more than half a year, I was often based in Guangzhou, building the underlying structure piece by piece with the development team. At the other end, I had to return to Hong Kong and visit schools, so the market could first understand what we were trying to do.

The hardest test was that before the first official version had even launched, I already had to explain this direction to schools.

There was no mature product in my hands. There was only a direction, a blueprint and an unproven belief. But early entrepreneurship is often like this: before other people can see the result, you first have to help them understand what problem you want to solve, and why it is worth trying together.

In this, I was luckier than many people.

Before starting the company, I had already accumulated years of cooperation and reputation in the school sector across Hong Kong and Macau. So even without a finished product, with that trust from the past and the strength of the co-founder group, I was already able to sign letters of intent with more than ten pilot schools.

When the product was finally launched, the number of schools using it quickly went up to thirty, then fifty.

Whether schools would believe us was not the hardest thing that year.

The truly difficult thing was something outsiders could not easily see.

I had been inside this industry for more than ten years. At my previous company, almost every year I had led people to build new products, using up every bit of thought I had. But after starting my own company, what I had to do was not copy the old set of things out and use them again. I had to take those experiences apart, look at them again, and rebuild a larger, more ambitious system from them.

There were two layers of difficulty in that.

One was building a team. A completely new group of people had to learn to work together from the beginning, and build trust from the beginning.

The other was myself. I had to force myself to step outside the way of thinking I had grown used to over the previous ten years, and reinterpret the industry with a more forward-looking eye, then find a new opening from within it.

Those old experiences were not wasted. They had to be transformed.

I had seen Primary One students take electronic schoolbags out of the classroom and use them for outdoor learning at Disneyland. I had also worked on student profile and learning journey platforms, and knew that schools had long wanted to preserve growth beyond scores.

Those projects did not all become large businesses. But again and again, they reminded me of one thing: technology itself is not the answer. It only becomes meaningful when children genuinely dare to try, teachers can genuinely teach with it, and parents genuinely feel helped by it.

What GRWTH wanted to build was not another new tool. It was to take those scattered experiences and place them back into a larger question:

How can a child's growth avoid being missed?

For a founder, the greatest test is often not learning something you do not know. It is letting go of something you know too well.

At the end of May, I said this publicly on Facebook.

"A group joined by a sense of mission, working hard to make Hong Kong's education ecosystem better. From 0 to 1: using innovation and technology to open up every child's infinite possibilities."

I wrote that passage more seriously than usual, because it was not only an announcement. It was a promise:

"We put student growth at the centre. Using big data technology from inside and outside school, we analyse students' current situation and tell parents the possibilities and suggestions on their children's growth path, so every student can find a growth direction suitable for themselves."

When that declaration returned to daily life, it became a very concrete question:

Could the information and understanding long disconnected between schools, parents and children be connected again?

The child seen at school and the child seen at home have always been two separate sides. Teachers cannot see one side. Parents cannot reach the other. The blank space in between is left unfilled.

I wanted to connect it.

Home-school communication, the records a child leaves along the way in a "growth journal", changes in learning, activities, interests and feelings - all of these could come together in one place, so every adult could see a more complete child.

Not to see where the child ranked in an exam, but to see what kind of person the child was becoming, and then teach according to that child's needs.

Among those pilot schools, the earliest and most reassuring trust did not come from a cold market after I had started the company. It had been built slowly, over many years, inside schools and classrooms.

Principal Fung and I had known each other long before GRWTH. Before I started the company, while I was still working hard at the previous education technology company, we had already collaborated on electronic learning projects. Later, his school had also taken part in an electronic schoolbag pilot.

Those experiences meant that our relationship was never just that of supplier and customer. It was a kind of trust tested over many years, through projects, classrooms and students' daily lives.

So when GRWTH was still at its beginning, his willingness to listen to me explain this larger idea again was not merely a favour to me. It was a very serious professional trust.

Because he deeply recognised the long-term idea behind the product, and had seen the delivery capability we had built over a solid decade, that trust received its first beautiful echo at the end of the year.

On December 5 that year, at St. Edward's Catholic Primary School, where Principal Fung was then serving, the school joined with teachers, students and parents from more than twenty kindergartens and secondary schools to hold a learning and arts exchange event. One part of it was a pledge ceremony called "Flying Toward Dreams".

More than a thousand paper planes carrying written dreams flew from children's hands into the grey sky.

Parents born in the 1970s and 1980s stood in the rain with their children of a new generation, doing the same thing together: speaking aloud what was in their hearts.

Wong Suk Man stood on stage and sang "Almost We Fly". That version, on that day, sounded better than any recording.

I stood at the edge of the crowd, watching paper planes rise one after another and fall again. At that moment, I could not quite say what I was thinking. I only felt that all the months we had endured seemed finally to have an echo.

That night, I wrote:

"Today, GRWTH witnessed the dreams of hundreds of children. This is a kind of work satisfaction that money cannot buy."

That sentence was not an exaggeration.

From resigning from that safe job, to walking into that small office, to that rainy afternoon, I had kept repeating to myself: this matters.

That day was the first time I clearly felt that I was not the only one who believed it.

But what truly moved me was not the thousand paper planes. It was a little girl at the event.

She came over, looked up at me and asked, "Uncle, can you tell me where I can write down my dream?"

At that moment, she had simply grabbed a passing adult.

I brought her back to the booth and asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up.

What she wrote was:

"When I grow up, I want to help my mum with her work, so she can have more time to spend with me."

I looked at that line and, for a moment, said nothing.

She was not asking to become someone. She was not asking for anything grand. What she wanted was a little more time with her mother.

Something that, in an adult's eyes, might seem too small to count as a dream was the greatest wish in her heart.

In that moment, I suddenly understood what a sentence I had written a few months earlier had really meant.

At the time, I had said: "This system will no longer overlook anyone."

Back then, I was speaking about technology. If the data was broad and deep enough, then no student would be missed.

But standing in front of that little girl, the sentence took on another layer of meaning.

Not being overlooked did not mean the system could detect her. It meant that her small wish about time should not disappear into the crowd and be treated as insignificant.

To be seen.

What a child truly needs is to be seen.

I remembered this for many years, because it later forced me to face a more difficult question.

Once, a friend in the education field asked me directly, "What exactly does the GRWTH parent app bring to users? Is it just an app for parents to check their son's handbook, check notices, check whether he went to school? Check, check, check... Does everything have to be monitored before it counts as family education? Where did the trust we talked about go?"

That question was not easy for me to answer, because it touched the very thorn in my own heart.

A tool that lets parents know their child's situation at any time can, with one wrong step, turn from "seeing" into "surveillance".

My original intention was to create more understanding between parents and children, not to add another eye that keeps watch.

If a little girl longed for her mother to spend more time with her, but the tool I built ended up only making it easier for that mother to check whether she had handed in her homework, then I would have turned the whole thing upside down.

Between being seen and being monitored, there is only one thought.

But that one thought was the whole meaning of GRWTH.

At the time, I still did not know how to hold onto that thought. It followed me for many years. Later, it became one of the measures I used for many decisions.

In those years, it was just a few pairs of hands in a small office, carrying this belief from school to school.

Those who believed stayed.

And it was not only schools that were willing to believe.

In the company's earliest days, when we still had almost nothing to show, several people were already willing to put in the first money.

What they invested in was not a business with visible returns. It was an idea, and a person who said he would turn that idea into something real.

That kind of trust, given first at a time when you have almost nothing to prove yourself with, is something I still remember today.

Every step the company later took had, behind it, people like that:

people who believed first, then waited slowly.

Then I realised that connecting schools and parents was still not enough.

A child's growth happens in a larger place. Beyond the family, there is the whole community around the child.

To connect that larger circle was another road.

It was harder than I had imagined.

And it was far wider than I had imagined.

Chapter 3

Turning Growth into an Ecosystem

The hardest part of education technology is not adding another feature, but finding a daily entry point that schools, families, community organisations and suppliers all need, and are willing to use again and again. Payment was only the needle. What truly needed to be stitched together was a growth ecosystem that could keep working.

By the company's third and fourth years, the things in my hands had quietly become more numerous.

The original belief, that a child's growth should be seen, was still at the centre. But around it, other things had slowly grown. In parents' phones, there were records of their children's growth. School life messages, notices, homework and attendance had also been connected one by one. There was also a place we called the GRWTH Community, where football teams recruited students, interest classes opened, and parent-child talks were shared. These were things outside the school gate, yet closely tied to how a child grows up.

Each piece, seen on its own, pointed back to the same original intention: to let an adult see a whole child, not only the child's scores.

But these things were scattered from one another.

They were like several pieces of cloth already cut, but not yet sewn together. A parent might open the app today to read a notice, but might not remember to come back tomorrow. The growth records were there, but they were not daily enough. They were not something a parent had to open.

At the time, I faintly felt that somewhere among all these pieces of cloth, a thread was missing.

That thread, unexpectedly, was found in one of the least glamorous things: the payment process.

Throughout the year, schools have to collect money from parents: activity fees, book fees, miscellaneous charges. There are always notices to sign and payments to make. At that time, schools were not without electronic payment methods. Some approaches already existed. But for many schools and parents, the process was still fragmented. Notices were one thing. Signing and returning them was another. Payment was another again. For schools, after collecting the money, there was still checking, bookkeeping and chasing to do. The administrative burden was not light at all.

The real turning point came when a shareholder introduced us to Mastercard.

In our first conversations, we were not talking simply about adding one more payment method. The question was whether mobile payment could be brought into schools' daily routines, and become something convenient for parents, useful for schools, and sustainable for the platform. That collaboration also gave us room to build a solution that did not rely on only one channel. What parents and schools needed was convenience, something that fitted naturally into use, and a process that could integrate different payment habits. Because of that support, GRWTH Pay had the chance to truly begin.

I began to see that the payment process might be the needle.

Parents might skip an ordinary notice. They could look at a growth record later. But when it came to paying money, they would do it. They had to do it every month. If signing a notice, making payment, posting the entry and reconciling the account could be placed back into one mobile flow, then a parent's phone would no longer be opened only occasionally. It would be opened again and again in daily life.

And as long as parents opened it often, those pieces of cloth that had been scattered, the growth records, community information and school notices, might all be brought along with it.

I began to understand that this needle might be able to sew those scattered pieces of cloth together.

In September 2018, I showed that needle to the outside world.

On Facebook, I wrote: "We spent the whole of 2018 preparing this city-scale project, one that will serve one hundred thousand parents... Parents, from now on you can sit at home, sign your son's or daughter's notice, and use your phone to transfer money and pay!"

Together with Mastercard, we promoted a project called the Hong Kong Education Sector Electronic Currency Promotion Programme, first looking for ten pilot schools to try it.

What I remember most clearly was the day it landed at Fung Kai No.1

Primary School.

On September 22, the first day the school payment notice was sent out, once the home-school seminar ended, more than sixty percent of parents successfully completed the app download and mobile payment process on the spot.

In that post, I wrote: "They moved very quickly, proving how common online shopping has become."

That sentence sounds plain. But in that moment, my heart felt grounded. What parents wanted was not some extraordinary system. It was the convenience of no longer having to rummage through a schoolbag for a crumpled paper slip. As for reducing the administrative work of class teachers and the school office, and making accounting reconciliation easier, those were the pain points we were solving for schools behind the scenes.

But for this needle to work well, the machinery behind it was far from simple.

After the event ended, what the outside world saw was applause, media coverage and schools applying on the spot. But people on the front line knew that the real test had only just begun.

Fanny wrote one sentence in the group: "Now the real battle begins. The app has to be usable, smooth and good."

I have always remembered that sentence. What she saw was not only whether the event looked good, but whether after the event, schools, parents, colleagues and the product could truly run in daily life.

On the surface, this was "using a phone to pay school fees". Behind it was a whole system that had to be built from zero.

School collections had always been scattered across the year: one activity fee here, one book fee there. After receiving the money, schools still had to record each item and reconcile the numbers. What we built was not just a button for parents to press so money could be paid. It was to connect the collection process with the account book that gave schools the greatest headache.

Parents could choose the channel they were used to. Once the money came in, scattered transactions were automatically placed where they belonged, and the school accountant could reconcile them with one click.

Later, we called it a diversified collection and reconciliation system.

Payment was only the entrance. Saving schools from that account book was the real work.

To make payment feel natural for parents, we connected almost every kind of payment channel in the market: from Mastercard and Visa credit cards to AlipayHK, WeChat Pay, Tap&Go and other electronic wallets and prepaid payment tools. Parents could use whichever one they were used to.

Behind that was one commercial negotiation and technical integration after another with multiple financial institutions.

To turn an idea into such a system in ten months was something I wrote down in October that year as a way to remember the team: "Creating from zero a high-standard diversified mobile payment and reconciliation system... the coordination and management involved really were not easy at all."

This also made GRWTH seriously visible to the outside world for the first time.

We launched the Hong Kong Education Sector Electronic Currency Promotion Programme with Mastercard, and worked with HSBC and Cyberport on a launch event attended by two hundred schools. When it was launched, we invited radio DJ Sammy to help promote it. He was a father himself, and understood the awkwardness best. In an interview, he laughed at himself and said he had once searched the whole house for seventy cents to pay a fee, and finally had to borrow it from his domestic helper.

Around that time, Ming Pao and HK01 came one after another for interviews.

A payment process that had originally seemed the least glamorous suddenly became a topic in the city.

For an education technology company, having results seen by the outside world is itself a form of accumulated trust. Schools are conservative. Parents are cautious. Payment involves money, daily administration, and whether each side is willing to use something with confidence.

When a payment process that had once been hidden inside the school office and a child's schoolbag was suddenly brought to the front by banks, card organisations, media and schools together, I knew in my heart that GRWTH was no longer only something I believed in inside a small room. It had begun to have a language the market could understand.

During the same period, the pieces of cloth that had once been scattered also began to be connected one by one.

First came the community piece.

Information outside the school gate had originally been scattered everywhere, and parents often encountered it only through word of mouth. We connected those things too, and it grew faster than I had expected.

In early September, I wrote: "More than half of Hong Kong's football schools have joined the GRWTH Community information channel?!"

A few days later: "In one week, it has risen to one hundred organisations joining."

By March 2019, this line had connected to a larger partner: Ming Pao. We launched a collaboration with its parenting platform, HappyPaMa. At that time, GRWTH Community already had the support of more than two hundred organisations. I wrote that we wanted to "jointly create a student-centred education ecosystem, walk with parents, and nurture children's growth together."

In March 2019, external recognition also arrived in the form of an award.

GRWTH Pay won a Gold Award at the Hong Kong ICT Awards. That day, in a diary-like post, I wrote down how I felt. I was happy. At last, I had won first place in a competition by relying on our own work. But it was also within expectation, so I was not especially excited.

I also wrote one sentence to remind myself: "Do not forget: success is the result of everyone working together."

That sentence was true.

During those ten months, the whole team was doing something none of us had done before. We originally came from the education sector. We understood schools and parents. But GRWTH Pay was financial technology: payment, clearing, reconciliation, compliance. It was another language altogether.

No one was born knowing it. We could only learn while doing, pushing several lines forward at the same time.

In Hong Kong schools then, this kind of mobile payment integration was still early. Even the technical interfaces we received were often test versions. Many paths had not been walked before. We could only feel our way forward, step by step.

The person I felt most indebted to was Jay.

The company's resources were tight. Almost the whole front-end interface and process design of the system fell on her shoulders, and she had to coordinate with the Guangzhou team by herself.

During that rushed period, she was so exhausted that her body developed problems. She was in severe pain and could not stop, yet she still delivered one design after another on time.

Many years later, the sentence I finally dared to say out loud, "Thank you for enduring all this with me," owed its weight to debts like these, one by one.

Then came the supplier piece.

The first to connect was school uniforms.

In September 2019, we worked with a school uniform supplier. I wrote a joking line: "Parents no longer need to take leave and go back to school to queue up and pay."

Under the joke was something real. In the past, parents buying school uniforms had to take half a day off, go back to school, queue and pay. Now, it could be done on a phone. After uniforms, suppliers of bring-your-own-device services and STEM toys also gradually came in.

At this point, that garment could finally be considered sewn together.

Schools, parents, community organisations and suppliers had once each operated on their own. Around the same child's growth, they were now connected.

The needle was the needle of payment. But what it sewed together was never payment. It was a way for a child's growth to no longer happen only during the eight hours inside the classroom, but to be joined by the family, the school and the world outside school.

And yet, the award was given to GRWTH Pay.

The thing people outside began to remember was also that function, the one that let them pay school fees with a phone.

In my heart, I already had a faint unease: the needle was too bright.

It was useful. It won awards. It let the company be seen. But in the end, it was only a needle.

What I feared was that one day, even I would mistake the needle for the garment. I feared that when people asked what GRWTH was, the answer would become, "Oh, that app for paying money," instead of the place I had first imagined, where a child's growth could be properly seen.

The little girl who had hoped her mother could spend more time with her was still in my heart.

I did not want the final result to be that I had merely given her mother a more convenient payment button.

At the time, I did not yet know how to guard that boundary clearly. I only knew it mattered.

Business has its own gravity. Transaction fees were real revenue. Supplier partnerships also brought real revenue. These were roots that allowed the company to stay alive.

But the original intention was also real.

Both things had to be held in the hand at the same time. Neither could be released.

This was something I would spend many years learning.

The garment became larger and larger. More and more people were connected into it. But to keep alive a piece of cloth spreading wider by the day, the few pairs of hands we had, and the small amount of savings behind us, were no longer enough.

I began to understand that the company needed more resources if it was to hold up this picture that was growing larger every day.

That was the beginning of another story: a story about money, about trust, and about how much I myself would be changed by it.

Chapter 4

Moving Forward, One Step Against the Wind

When reality moves more slowly than imagination, belief can no longer remain a slogan. It has to land in cash flow, team, customers, decisions, and every choice to keep going.

Seen from the outside, 2019 was GRWTH's most dazzling year.

As I wrote in the previous chapter, GRWTH Pay won a Gold Award at the Hong Kong ICT Awards. That award was like a light pushing us onto a brighter stage. That year, I met the Chief Executive. I appeared in Ming Pao, Hong Kong Economic Times, HK01, Sky Post and Milk. More than two hundred organisations had joined the community. Even Cyberport treated us as a signature story from its incubation programme, and found a director to film a short video for me. What people outside saw was no longer just an education app, but a company being brought to the front by the market, the public and the startup circle at the same time.

But entrepreneurship is like this: the brighter it looks outside, the tighter it often becomes inside.

The more people see you, and the more people believe in you, the heavier the things you have to carry become.

Later, people would ask me why GRWTH seemed to have shot up within a year. Every time I heard that, I wanted to add one sentence: it did not happen suddenly.

What people called expansion that year was in fact the result of pushing capital, time and the team's energy little by little to the limit. Every step looked like forward movement. But behind it, the risks had been counted, and retreat paths had been prepared. People outside saw the result, but they did not always see the trade-offs in the middle.

The most important lesson that year was fundraising.

Investors were willing to sit down and listen to me not because something appeared out of nowhere that year. In the first few years of the startup, the team and I went pitch by pitch. We won prizes at CoCoon Pitch. We graduated from the Cyberport incubation programme. We appeared at HKTDC Entrepreneur Day. I also became a startup mentor for younger founders.

Each time I stood on a stage to explain what GRWTH was, the argument slowly became more practised, and the story slowly became something people remembered.

Even earlier, in 2016, The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups and M21 gave me an opportunity to speak on a programme about innovation, technology education, and the future of the city with the Chief Executive and a bureau secretary at the time. Later, InvestHK arranged for us to take part in a Startmeup startup talk. On the same day, we went to Government House and had a brief exchange with Elon Musk.

Those scenes were not fundraising itself. But they made me understand very early that a founder cannot only hide behind a product and wait for the world to notice. You have to walk out again and again, and explain your thinking clearly. The exposure, trust and relationships accumulated over those years were what later turned, little by little, into opportunities for people to sit down and listen to me to the end.

When we truly reached 2019 and had to raise a Pre-A round, the pressure was completely different.

We had put our strength into connecting parents, and we had chosen the long term over the immediate. That was the right choice, but it came with a cost. When one road moves quickly, another road needs someone to make up the gap. To let the company move forward steadily, we had to bring in new capital.

Fundraising has never been as simple as writing a beautiful plan and waiting for people to place a bet.

During those months, both time and money were tight. We had to keep the company developing at high speed while strictly controlling expenses. At the same time, negotiations and documents stretched across Christmas, New Year and Lunar New Year. That feeling of counting down while negotiating on every side can only be understood by someone who has truly sat in that position.

For that half year, I did two things. Neither could stop.

One was fundraising itself.

At that time, AI tools were not as convenient as they are today. Fundraising meant calculating every detail of the company's internal and external value, every type of share calculation, and every contract term cell by cell until everything was clear.

I once sat from six in the morning until seven thirty at night, staring at spreadsheets with full concentration for an entire day, because if one number was wrong, everything behind it would be wrong.

Meeting and negotiating with investors was an art, not a mechanical task. Each person had to be spoken to individually. Some were decisive. Some went back and forth. Some agreed in words, but pushed the day of signing back week after week. I calculated, waited, and tried not to let myself panic.

The other thing was keeping the business in front of us alive.

The new money was still on the road. The company could not stop for even one day. I hired more people, redeployed the sales approach, and tried to sign every school we could sign, using income on this side to hold the gap on the other side.

There was no single move that guaranteed a win. Everything was a trial. If it failed, we changed it. After changing it, we tried again.

By the middle of that year, we finally fought that battle through. The company completed its Pre-A fundraising, and we received the confidence to keep moving forward.

But when I look back, what I remember most from that year was not only the money. It was the group of people behind the money.

Fundraising and keeping the immediate business alive were never things I did alone.

During those six months, there was a group of colleagues beside me who held one checkpoint after another with me. Some relearned how to run sales with a new approach. Some scheduled development late into the night. Some carried frontline pressure while calming customers at the same time.

The company's culture then was not held up by slogans. It was held up by what happened when one person could not carry any more, and another person naturally stepped in.

We were not a large team with overwhelming numbers. But we were a team willing to endure for the same thing.

It was also that year that I began learning to lead the team with a different method.

In the past, I had relied on setting goals from the top down and watching indicators closely. But as the road moved faster, and as several lines had to be opened at the same time, that approach was no longer enough.

We slowly introduced a goal management method called OKR. We made the most important objectives clear, and then let colleagues propose and take ownership of the rest from the bottom up.

At that time, this method had only just begun to land. We were still exploring how to turn it into a rhythm of daily work. But slowly, it helped this small team grow a capability: people could fight on different fronts, and each person could carry their own line while pushing in the same direction.

The people willing to walk with us that year were not only colleagues.

The investors who put money in that year were also not coming for a business that looked certain to make money. It was a difficult year for Hong Kong startups to raise funds. Many people were pulling back.

For them to place a bet at such a time meant they were also betting on this company, and on the thing this group of people had not yet finished building.

Those willing to walk with you for a stretch against the wind, whether colleagues or shareholders, are people I still remember today.

In the past, I had been a designer who worked on graphics, interfaces and system ideas. Step by step, I was pushed into a position where I had to calculate cash flow, make decisions for the team, set strategy, and negotiate with different parties.

At the beginning of that year, I shared with a group of secondary school students and said something that sounded casual then, but later felt much heavier: to go from designer to CEO, two roles that are almost opposite in direction, depends on constantly learning in knowledge, and constantly unlearning and relearning in mindset, forgetting the old self and learning again.

But that sentence was still missing half of the truth.

What truly allowed me to keep learning was not that I forced myself through it alone. It was that I was never learning alone, and never carrying it alone.

The people beside me made the hard work of "learning again" less lonely.

Team. Together we grow.

And all of this did not happen in calm weather.

In the second half of 2019, the whole city split open.

That June, I also stood among a crowd of more than a million people, watching the city where I wanted to do something for children become stranger day by day.

That year, Hong Kong slid into its first technical recession in a decade. Consumer confidence fell to the bottom. Public data also showed that startup fundraising in Hong Kong contracted noticeably that year.

We were not growing in a following wind that encouraged risk. We were growing in a headwind where everyone was pulling back, where everyone was asking whether they could still hold on. In that wind, we insisted on pushing forward a company that was still burning cash.

While expanding, I was also learning to keep a boundary for myself and for my family.

If the company had to spread outward and set up new points, I would do those things. But some risks I could take for the company, while some boundaries could not be crossed by staking my whole self.

Which things were worth it, and which were not, was something I forced myself to distinguish again and again that year.

We had to charge forward, but not to the point where I left myself no way back.

Looking back at that year now, I would not say I was especially remarkable.

I would only dare to say this: a company that can survive when the tide goes out is never surviving by luck.

Every checkpoint is endured through. It is not merely waited through.

Behind every small company that did not fall in those years, there must have been a group of people unwilling to admit defeat, yet willing to lower their heads and learn.

Later, whenever I looked at any company that had survived a winter, I no longer dared to take it lightly.

To survive is itself an extraordinary ability.

Only, at the time, I did not yet know that the difficulty of 2019 was only the beginning.

The storm that could press pause on the whole world at once was already rising quietly not far away.

Chapter 5

Schools Stopped, Growth Could Not

The pandemic suddenly stopped the daily rhythm of schools. Notices, learning arrangements and home-school connection could not be allowed to break. In those days, the team was willing to keep going because the needs of schools and families were right in front of us.

The wind that pressed pause on the world truly arrived in the spring of 2020.

But before it came, the city had in fact already stopped school once.

In the winter of 2019, the world outside was deeply unsettled. My business was the line between home and school, so during those days, what kept turning in my mind was not the company's numbers, but one very concrete question:

If children could not properly return to school, could the line between home and school, the line I had spent five years connecting, hold steady?

That November, I wrote one sentence from the position of someone working in education: first let children's bodies and minds settle, then talk about learning. Schools may stop, but stopping school does not mean stopping growth.

At the time, I thought it was only a temporary storm.

I did not know it was a rehearsal: when children were forced away from classrooms, what could a company like ours still do for schools and families?

A few months later, the real test arrived.

After Lunar New Year in 2020, the pandemic closed every school in Hong Kong.

This time, it was not only one city. The whole world stopped together.

Schools panicked. So many notices, so many parents, so much learning suspended in mid-air. Overnight, all of it seemed to have nowhere to land.

Inside the company, we held a meeting.

What lay in front of us could have been a very simple business question: in a crisis, everyone protects themselves. We could have held on to our existing customers, tightened costs, and waited for the wind to pass.

But that day, we made another decision. We opened our cloud-based home-school communication platform for free to all schools and social welfare organisations that needed it, whether or not they were our customers.

In a post, I wrote one clumsy but sincere sentence:

Do not refuse to do good just because the good is small.

This was the first lesson I learned about turning crisis into opportunity: when a crisis truly arrives, do not rush first to calculate your own account.

Whether a company is willing to extend a hand at the most panicked moment often determines whether, after the wind passes, people still remember you.

Then we began to use, piece by piece, the things we already had.

The community piece had originally been a place where parents could see interest classes and talks. In that moment, it changed into a "learning does not stop during school suspension" column. Together with Ming Pao's parenting platform and a group of committed education organisations, we updated it every day, sending content on reading, exercise, health and parenting to parents' phones, staying with everyone until schools resumed.

Those pieces of cloth I had sewn together over the years only truly showed their purpose at that checkpoint. They were not sewn together to look impressive. They were sewn together so that, in a moment like this, someone could still deliver what children needed each day into parents' hands.

During that period, we did not merely move content online.

Children were staying at home. Some families did not even have stable internet access. Some children might not even have a device they could use for class.

The shareholders connected every resource they could. Telecommunications partners provided SIM cards, and we helped collect needs from more than one hundred schools. When devices could be lent out, we delivered tablets and computers to schools that needed them.

Not every one of those things was large. But they made me see more clearly that education technology in a crisis is not a beautiful term. It is a very practical emergency line.

But columns and notices were still old things moved online.

The longer the pandemic lasted, the more schools needed something new, so children could watch the lessons they had missed again and again from home.

That summer, we worked with Tencent Cloud to launch a cloud video-on-demand teaching support programme.

Put simply, it allowed schools to record lessons and put them on a cloud platform, so students could watch them from home as many times as they needed. We sponsored the service for schools to use for free. First, we looked for fifty schools to try it. Applications filled up within days, so we had to open another round. By the end of that year, more than two hundred schools had applied.

Later, this cloud classroom support reached nearly three hundred schools, kindergartens and education centres, and touched more than one hundred thousand students. It also later received an education award from the Hong Kong Computer Society.

I want to write a little more honestly about this, because what it taught me was really a lesson about motive.

This free programme was, of course, a sincere attempt to do something for the education sector under the pandemic.

But in my heart, I was also very clear that it brought real benefit to the path the company was then walking.

At the moment we did it, I did not divide "doing good" and "being good for the company" into two mutually exclusive sides. Nor did I pretend that I could only see the former.

I said it very plainly to colleagues in the group: on one hand, this was a responsibility we should carry for society; on the other hand, it also truly helped the company move forward. It could do good, and it could help the business. Both things could be true at the same time.

When I was younger, I probably would have felt that once something was "beneficial to myself", the goodwill inside it was no longer pure.

Only after those years of entrepreneurship did I slowly come to understand that placing goodwill and business simply on opposite sides may not show the whole picture.

What is truly difficult, and truly worth learning, is to let one thing be worthy of your conscience while also keeping the company alive; to let the act of doing the right thing become something that can continue.

A company that cannot support itself cannot do good for anyone for very long.

To honestly face the fact that you are carrying more than one calculation, not be ashamed of it, and not be led astray by it. That was a piece of growth the pandemic forced out of me that year.

Of course, "turning crisis into opportunity" sounds beautiful. In practice, things go wrong.

Opening the platform for free, together with the cloud classroom, suddenly pushed usage upward.

On the first morning of the new school year, the system could not take it.

Traffic that day was far higher than usual. Many schools rushed in almost at the same time, and the platform was temporarily inaccessible. The principal of a partner school was anxious, yet still encouraged us and told us to keep going. But he also told me honestly that the school's office staff had been flooded by parents' messages that day.

There was something deeply ironic about that moment: you try desperately to help people in a crisis, but because you help too many people, you end up crushing yourself.

But looking back, although that incident was embarrassing, it also let me see one thing clearly: what we had built was something people were truly using in urgent need.

Colleagues brought the system back overnight. People in Hong Kong and Guangzhou guarded their screens from their own homes, adding servers, adjusting the architecture, repairing while holding the line.

During those days, although we were not in the same office, it felt as if we were closer than ever. Crisis never makes people lonely. It only makes the people truly willing to stay draw closer to one another.

The wind had not yet stopped, but I could already feel that this crisis was pushing GRWTH to a height it had never reached before.

More and more schools recognised us. More and more partners at different levels were willing to move things forward with us. People outside began to believe that a small education technology company really could step in at the hardest moment.

That September, I once wrote this reflection:

"When calculating benefit, we often forget time and causality; what mutual help and mutual benefit bring is often more than what selfishness brings."

That whole year, from opening the platform for free to honestly letting goodwill and business walk together, I was learning the same thing:

First keep the people in need in front of you in your heart. In the end, that goodwill also became the force that allowed the company to keep moving forward.

But the company had held steady.

What about me?

It was during those days trapped at home that this thought, completely unrelated to business, emerged in my heart.

In April that year, I asked myself a question in a post:

"When the pandemic appears, what have we lost, and what have we gained at the same time?"

Before the pandemic, I spent most days in the office, leaving early and returning late.

Elmo, the poodle who had been with us for many years, had quietly grown old, and illness had begun to catch up with her. In our hearts, she was never only a pet. Jay and I had long treated her like a daughter, caring for her and worrying about her.

Being forced to stay at home unexpectedly became one of the rare periods in many years when Jay and I could properly accompany Elmo.

At that time, the company and the outside world were both under strain. She was clearly suffering herself, yet seemed to sense what we were carrying. She simply stayed quietly beside us, guarding that small softness at home.

Only later did I understand: that was not time stolen by the pandemic. It was time returned to us by the pandemic.

The wind that had stopped the whole world also seemed to be asking me a question I had never had time to answer:

You have spent so much strength on the company. Then beside you, who has always been quietly staying with you?

At the time, I had no answer, and I did not stop to look for one.

I thought that once we endured the storm, what would come would be a success that finally allowed us to breathe.

But I did not yet know that when the company was pushed higher by the crisis, the test handed to you by fate would no longer be only "survival".

The enormous weight and pull brought by that height would soon drain what little time and health I still had.

And the seed that quietly fell during the silence of the pandemic would, two years later, grow into a decision that made me put all of this down with my own hands.

Chapter 6

After Success, the Pressure Truly Began

What the outside world saw was scale and achievement. What the inside carried was speed, responsibility, direction, and the weight of not being able to stop.

In mid-October 2021, the first money from the long-awaited round of financing finally began to arrive.

This was not the same money as the 2019 round that had allowed the company to keep moving forward. That time, the funding bought the company another stretch of road against the wind. This time, the Series A money, the governance requirements, and everything it would pull along afterward were no longer on the same level.

It did not arrive all at once. One portion came first during the autumn and winter of that year. The rest would not be fully received until the beginning of 2022. Only then could the whole round truly be considered complete.

Who the investors were is not something I can conveniently state here according to the rules. What I want to record more is this: that money did not fall from the sky. It was exchanged, little by little, for the relationships, results and trust accumulated over the years.

For a founder who had come from being a designer, that moment felt like receiving a delayed certificate, stamped at last to recognise the thing I had always believed, yet had been doubted for believing:

This road could indeed be walked.

On the day the money arrived, I told everyone in the group that after some time, I wanted to gather all shareholders and colleagues back at the company for a simple celebration, one that would carry real meaning.

I sincerely wanted to say thank you properly to each of them.

But now that this memoir has reached this point, I have to say one honest sentence: that celebration was one of the few moments in those years when I truly breathed out.

Because what came immediately after it was not a smoother road. It was the most breathless period in my entire startup journey.

Not long after that breath had loosened, our home also met a real farewell.

A little more than a week after the first money arrived, while the celebration was still only an idea I had raised in the group, Elmo left us.

As I wrote in the previous chapter, during the pandemic she had quietly guarded the small softness of our home. This time, it was as if she had held on long enough to see me think that I could finally put down a little of the weight on my heart. Only then did she peacefully leave beside us.

She had been with us for fifteen years. She had long been like family. In those final days, she also taught me one thing:

Life is not worth cherishing only after everything has been completed. Many of the most important things quietly reach their end while you are still telling yourself, after I finish this one more thing, I will turn back.

After success, the pressure truly began.

That sentence is something I learned inch by inch through those years.

Let me first speak of the thing that held me up.

After receiving enough funding to push the company into its next stage, the outside world saw us as having won.

But what kept me from collapsing during that period was never the number in the bank account. It was the group of people around me.

The first people I need to thank are the co-founders who first helped build the company from nothing.

Looking back, everyone may not always have shared the same understanding of the company's direction later on. But the fact that the company had a beginning cannot erase the fact that people were willing to step onto the field together and carry the responsibility together at the start.

That gratitude should be placed here first.

Then there were the colleagues who had gone to the front line with me and endured one checkpoint after another.

Among them, several carried with me for a particularly long time and from particularly close range. I want to place their names here: my wife, Jay Kwong; Stanley Zhang; Elwin Gao; Marco Kwok; Fanny Chan; King Ng; Shepherd Ng; Ruby Wong.

As the company grew year after year, Gabriel Mai, Candice Ng, Edward Chan, Andy Hui and Wendy Lam also joined us one after another.

There were many other colleagues too, each standing in a different position and helping the company walk one stretch after another.

I do not intend to count out here who was responsible for what.

What I remember to this day was never the titles, nor the division of work. It was that when the company was at its most visible, they did not become restless; when the company was at its most unstable, they did not leave.

What left me most speechless was that when the company had the least certainty, colleagues put themselves into it too.

Before that financing round was truly settled, while outside shareholders were still watching and deciding whether to add more, several of them stepped forward first and used cash to buy shares in the company.

There was a discounted price, but what mattered more was that they recognised the value they had helped create with their own hands. Because someone moved first, shareholders who had been watching also moved afterward.

Later, when the pandemic was at its tightest, and cash flow had to be conserved carefully to get through the long road of financing, it was again them who took the initiative to defer their salaries, without a word of complaint.

That was not only employee loyalty to a company.

It was a group of people deciding that the same thing was worth doing, and then deciding to carry it together.

So when we reached the final day, and King Ng wrote that sentence in the group, I looked at it for a long time:

"Six years as comrades-in-arms through all the highs and lows of

GRWTH. Everything is in the heart."

She did not use the words comrades-in-arms wrongly.

And the people who held up this company were not only those who had stepped onto the field earliest, nor only that group of colleagues. There were also those who, at different stages, were willing to put money in and willing to wait.

Around the Seed round in 2017, our product was still at an early stage, and we needed people willing to believe in an idea.

In the 2019 Pre-A round, when Hong Kong society and the market were both unstable, there were people willing to let the company walk another stretch.

By the 2021 Series A round, the environment had not become easier. It had become harder: the pandemic had dragged on, the external situation kept shifting, and investors were more cautious than before.

What the company had to prove was no longer only a concept. It had to explain scale, revenue, governance and promises all at once.

The real difficulty of that round was not only bringing the money back. It was that, in such an environment, there were still people willing to put capital, resources and long-term trust into the company.

Seed, Pre-A, Series A. At every stage, different people were willing to walk with us before everything was fully certain. Without that capital, and without the patience behind it, the company could not have reached the step it later reached.

Precisely because there were such people, co-founders, colleagues and shareholders alike, holding the company up from behind, I became even less willing to watch the company be carried away from the road it was originally meant to walk.

With such a group of people beside me, logically, after receiving that money, I should have been able to open my hands and lead the company toward a new stage.

But the reality was this: the larger the money became, the more different the people around the table imagined the next step to be; and the steering wheel became less and less entirely in my hands.

This was one of the hardest kinds of pressure for me to explain to outsiders in those two years.

It did not come from the market. It did not come from competitors. It came from differences at the internal decision-making table.

Before financing, everyone could place the goal together on "bringing the money back". But after the funding arrived, the real test began:

Should this money help the company walk more deeply down the path it had promised, or should the company, now that resources had arrived, immediately chase a newer and brighter story in the market?

The divergence slowly surfaced there.

To me, the money behind this round was not a blank cheque that could redefine the company. It was a set of responsibilities that had already landed inside the business: the paid school foundation had to move forward, existing collaborations had to be delivered, new indicators had to be accounted for, and the front line still had to face customers, systems and the team every day.

These were not words that could be lightly rewritten in a plan. They were things the company had already promised.

But from another way of seeing, the arrival of funding also looked like an opportunity to redesign the company.

Some people looked at the company from farther away and proposed new businesses, new narratives and a new round of financing plans. They also hoped to bring in new teams and resources, and reorganise the centre of gravity for the company's next stage.

At that time, the company had just completed its Series A. Resources seemed more abundant than before. But moves to chase the next wave had already begun taking up attention and team energy.

On the surface, those proposals were all for the company to move forward.

What truly made me uneasy was that inside the company, a gap had begun to appear between who imagined the future and who bore the reality.

Direction can be discussed. But if the people who understand the front line slowly lose the space to lead direction, then a company can very easily be carried away from the road it originally needed to walk.

During those days, when I opened my eyes each morning, my first task was no longer expanding territory. It was trying to anchor the company to its original course.

The company had been pushed to its next stage. Logically, it should have had more room to move forward. But when capital had flowed in, and people inside were also eager to redistribute roles and imagine the future again, holding the rhythm was in fact harder.

Because this time, what tested me was no longer the waves of the market. It was the fact that around the internal meeting table, different people had begun to see completely different futures in the same money and the same company.

After winning a battle I had waited years to win, I turned back and discovered that I had to spend even more strength defending what that battle had originally been fought for.

That gap was more exhausting than a cash-flow crisis.

Years later, when I look back, I also understand that there were things I could have done better then.

I had become too used to using coordination and accommodation to exchange for consensus. I tried to place different people's views into consideration as much as possible, but I did not draw the boundaries early enough.

Which promises had already landed on the front line, and which ideas were still only ideas?

Who needed to bear the consequences of daily operations, and who was influencing the company's direction?

A founder cannot protect a company only through goodwill and endurance. At certain checkpoints, one has to state clearly what can still be discussed and what can no longer be yielded.

This is not a question of whether one's personality is forceful. It is a question of whether one is mature enough to protect the company, the team, and also oneself.

That was a lesson I only truly learned later.

My body also began to send me signals.

During those two years, I became more and more easily tired.

It was not the kind of tiredness that comes simply from being busy. It was a fatigue that sleep could not refill, one that seeped out from inside.

I still forced myself to hold on, telling myself: hold a little longer. Keep the direction steady. Bring the company to the right state. Then it will be all right.

I had not yet understood that some costs cannot be deferred forever.

The day that would truly force me to stop and look was already not far away.

Chapter 7

My Body Knew the Answer Before I Did

When the heart, fainting and health warnings spoke before I could, the founder finally learned to hear himself.

That bill presented itself in the spring of 2022.

The first thing to appear was angina.

One day in May, I wrote only one line on Facebook: "Today's angina count: once in the morning, once at night."

My body was punctual, as if it were keeping accounts for me.

Then came a body-check report. I was so thin, yet my bad cholesterol was over the limit. At the time, I wrote one sentence to describe it: stress is like a magician. It can turn out anything.

The most frightening time happened at home.

That day, I walked into the kitchen to pour myself water. I had only just lifted the cup to my mouth. The next moment, I was already lying on the floor.

Things around me had been knocked crooked and scattered. But what had happened in between, I had no awareness of at all. That stretch of time seemed to have been entirely pulled away.

Just like that, without any warning, I fainted.

At the time, I still somehow had the mood to joke in a post, asking myself whether I had made a trip through time and returned.

Looking back now, that was not a joke at all. It was my body using a blow that almost knocked me down to say one heavy sentence to me:

Enough.

My body had already spoken to that point, and yet I was still bargaining with it.

On my birthday that June, my wish had shrunk completely from the previous years' "I hope the company becomes better" into one sentence:

"I only want to be healthy."

And in those very birthday days, I could not sleep from midnight until dawn, and my whole body was numb for six full hours.

If I line up the things I said during those six months, the path is perfectly clear.

From hoping the company would become better, all the way down to this one humble wish.

Rather than saying I made the decision to leave, it may be more accurate to say my body had made the decision for me earlier than I did.

I only took a very long time to admit it.

But if it had only been my body, perhaps I would still have kept holding on.

What truly made me willing to loosen my grip was that beyond the body, the heart had also reached its end.

As I wrote in the previous chapter, after success arrived, I spent a great deal of strength trying to hold the company to the reason it had set out in the first place. By the summer of 2022, that long-term tightness met the red lights from my body.

So I made that decision:

to let go.

I want to say clearly that this was not escape.

I did not slip away when the company was about to fail. Quite the opposite. I chose to hand it over when the company had sufficient capital, was still standing steadily, and could still give a respectable account.

The work had reached completion, and then I stepped back.

For a founder, saying "this company may go better without me from now on" is an extremely difficult sentence to open one's mouth and say.

But when I could truly say it, I felt steadier instead.

The ending may not have been what I expected. But causes gather and disperse. That is how things are.

Looking back years later, what I feel most grateful for is not whether I left with dignity. It is that the original intention was still there.

Across those eight years, I did not lose myself at that ever-larger decision table. I did not get lost in the game of chasing power and interest.

When the time came to leave, I still had the courage to step away. I could still choose to place family and life back at the centre of my life.

Holding on to that mattered more than holding on to any position.

Once the decision had been made, what remained was to hand things over properly.

During those months, I arranged what needed to be arranged, explained what needed to be explained, and tried as much as possible to let the people taking over receive things smoothly and steadily.

A company is many people's livelihood and many children's daily life. I could not let it fall into disorder just because I wanted to leave.

This was the last duty I could carry for it.

Then came September 30.

I was not at the company that day.

Quarantine kept Jay and me at home. The farewell that should have had cakes, conversations and embraces was finally completed only on a phone screen.

That morning, in the GRWTH group, I called everyone "old friends".

To these old friends who had fought beside me and witnessed GRWTH grow, I said: eight years ago, carrying a dream, I founded this company from zero with Jay and several partners. Today, Jay and I have graduated from GRWTH. Even though we are leaving, we must keep in touch in the days ahead.

I gave everyone a book that had accompanied me throughout the whole startup journey.

It was The Little Prince.

Since founding GRWTH in 2015, I had often returned to it. In truth, this company had always been built around the core in that book: growth. It was also my life's lesson about who I am.

I drew from the book two thoughts: what truly matters cannot be seen with the eyes; and everyone has their own stars, though what those stars mean differs from person to person.

I told everyone that I was about to walk a new road, to look for more stars in life, and also the rose that belonged to me and my family.

I also thanked every person who had worked with me, including colleagues, partners and shareholders.

All these years, you were my fellow travellers. You were also the people who showed me kindness by being willing to endure with me during my hardest times.

At the end of that message, I signed it this way:

Former co-founder of GRWTH.

When I wrote the word "former", my heart was calm.

In the group, replies came one after another.

King wrote: "Six years as comrades-in-arms through all the highs and lows of GRWTH. Everything is in the heart."

Principal Fung, who had once stood with us in the rain while children released paper planes, was also there. He said: "May everything go smoothly for everyone."

Just after three in the afternoon, I finished reading the final line and pressed leave group.

It was very quiet.

But in my heart I knew clearly that this was not the end.

The core of GRWTH was growth. And for me, these eight years of entrepreneurship had always been a lesson in growth about who I am.

I had handed the company over.

But this lesson was not yet finished.

I kept that rose in my heart.

After leaving, the first thing I most wanted to do was to turn back and care for the people and things I had set aside for too long because of the company:

my own body, and my home.

As for the question my body had been asking me for more than half a year:

After giving everything I had in exchange for all of this, what was left of me?

The answer would only be found, little by little, after I had left.

Chapter 8

What Remained After I Left

After leaving the company, what could truly be taken away was not the identity printed on a business card, but the judgment, connection, and ability to begin again that had been trained over many years.

After leaving GRWTH, and after a period of transition, my wife and I formally began life in the United Kingdom at the end of 2023.

I brought with me the question my body had been asking for more than half a year:

After giving everything I had in exchange for all of this, what was left of me?

I have to be honest. When I first left, I could not answer.

My wife and I had both lost confidence in ourselves for a while.

A company had been handed over. An identity and a way of working that I had been used to for twenty years had been put down. When a person suddenly becomes empty, the first thought that emerges is not necessarily relief, but doubt:

Away from that table, how much ability did we still have left?

On top of that, we were immigrating to a completely unfamiliar place. That uncertainty was very real.

So before going to the United Kingdom, we did one thing. Looking back now, it was the most important step in the whole second life.

I remember one night, my wife and I talked from evening all the way until dawn, seriously reviewing the many years of our lives.

From the earliest years after entering work, to myID, to GRWTH, we laid out every job, every experience and every encounter, item by item, as if arranging a portfolio.

We deliberately did not use other people's judgments to measure ourselves. Whoever had praised us, whoever had criticised us, those were all put aside.

We looked only at facts:

what we had done, what the results were, what we had learned in the process, and where each stage of life had pushed us.

After looking through the whole timeline, the doubt in my heart slowly settled.

It turned out that those thirty years had not been lived in vain.

Years of crawling and wrestling in business, and the experience of holding on again and again in adversity without falling, were themselves a form of value.

That affirmation was not given by someone else. It was something we issued again to ourselves, using the facts we had lived through.

Once we saw ourselves clearly, what came next was no longer difficult.

Moving from the first life in Hong Kong to the second life in the United Kingdom came with a great many things to handle: immigration, selling the flat, selling the car, packing up the home, arranging the move, and letting go of what no longer needed to be kept.

We did not treat it as a tangled mess. Instead, we treated it as a project, using Notion to manage priorities and schedules.

This had always been my wife's strength.

She broke every task apart, arranged the time points, thought through the order, and prepared and completed each item one by one.

Looking back, every step was walked steadily. That was truly fortunate.

In mindset, we also set something very important for ourselves.

Before leaving, we deliberately broke the past into smaller pieces and told ourselves: this was not fleeing. This was a Second Life, arrived at with half a lifetime of experience. It was a new page in life, and a new journey worth looking forward to.

We rehearsed and planned the new life at different levels. At the same time, we reminded ourselves that plans are plans, and real life would certainly change once it landed. So we had to leave room for flexibility and welcome the unexpected.

Managing the funds that would support the rest of our life, planning the many needs of daily living, preparing everything ahead of time.

To put it plainly, we were managing our life and our family like a company, truly becoming the CEO of our own life.

Step by step, I discovered that none of these abilities was something I learned only after immigrating.

They were all abilities and attitudes trained bit by bit during the previous thirty years of work.

I once thought those things belonged to the company, and that after leaving, they would remain behind.

It turned out they did not.

They had long grown inside me. Only the environment had changed, and they were now being called on again.

This made me completely understand the answer to that question.

How a person sees things, how one solves problems, how one lays a road for oneself amid uncertainty, and how one treats the people nearby, these are things other people cannot take away. They do not disappear with any business card.

A company may come to an end, but the abilities one can carry away are what truly belong to oneself.

And the thing that lit those old abilities again was a new tool:

AI.

It was also a matter of timing. As early as 2022, when I was still in Hong Kong, I had already begun coming into contact with AI. Later, after I truly began living in the United Kingdom, I was no longer unfamiliar with it. Using it became more natural.

In a place where life and roads were unfamiliar, from handling everyday matters to dealing with work still connected to Hong Kong, AI helped me in a very real way.

For someone who had spent most of his life using technology to solve problems, it was not a trend I had to chase. It felt more like a new tool that happened to connect with the old abilities already in my hands.

So my wife and I chose a way of living for ourselves:

to enjoy a simple slow life, while managing it with the newest technology and perspective.

We deliberately lived in a countryside bungalow some distance from the city, finding a large garden where we could plant the things we liked and make a corner of our own.

In the past, this choice would almost have felt cut off from the world. But today, with mature AI, the internet and logistics, life can remain convenient even when one lives far out. The cost is also much lower than in the city, which suited a slower way of living just right.

The September school-start rush in Hong Kong, when tens of thousands of people entered the system at the same time, was already far away from me.

In its place were walks in parks, walks in the Lake District, watching wild animals, looking at scenery; skiing when the season arrived, and studying AI at home on ordinary days, continuing to discover my own abilities.

Those slowed-down moments were what I had exchanged for with so much force in the first half of my life.

Being able to slow down steadily like this was actually supported by two things. Both were new fruit grown from old abilities.

One was investment.

As early as 2014, before GRWTH had even been born, I began learning investment from an old secondary-school friend. He was both my good friend and my first investment teacher, Adia Leung.

He taught me to look at economic trends and cycles, technical analysis in the stock market, and to use value-investing methods to estimate what a company should be worth.

Later, after I left GRWTH, he trusted me even more and was willing to let me manage his investment academy for a period of time.

I have always remembered that trust and recognition.

During the eight years of entrepreneurship, I had been too busy, and this set of abilities had been set aside for a long time. Only after immigrating did they truly become useful again.

Using the methods he had taught me, I grasped some opportunities in the market during those years and received quite good returns, enough for my wife and me to live without having to rush after money again.

A seed planted ten years earlier had, at just the moment I needed it most, borne abundant fruit.

The other was work.

Leaving did not mean stopping.

In these years, as a project consultant, I have been advising an old newspaper group with more than sixty years of history on business transformation and AI development.

To me, this is not only income.

It has given me a good environment in which the abilities I accumulated in business, management and AI can continue to be used. It has also given my life a steady sense of security.

For more than half my life, I had been doing the work of connecting: using an ecosystem view of education to integrate internal and external resources for companies, and to lay out business strategy.

I did not expect that after leaving GRWTH, this ability would come alive again in another setting.

A traditional newspaper group and an education technology company seem unrelated on the surface. But at their core, the question to be solved is the same:

how to understand the education ecosystem and funding mechanisms accurately, combine deep internal resources with external technology solutions, and open a new way forward.

Later, I also built a simple AI website with a principal friend I had known for many years.

He mentioned a very ordinary burden on the school front line: every year, large numbers of Education Bureau circulars arrive. Teachers and school leaders have to judge which ones are relevant to them, which have deadlines, and which involve action items or funding.

The documents themselves are not the hardest part. The difficulty is turning them quickly into arrangements that can be followed up, while teaching and school administration are already busy.

In just a few days, we generated a complete system. It automatically checks Education Bureau circulars every day, and organises them into summaries, action items and deadline reminders for different roles.

It was not a grand startup plan. But it gave me a very solid feeling:

that line was still there.

In the past, I had wanted to reduce school administration and give teachers more time to return to education itself. After leaving GRWTH, I was still drawn to the same kind of problem. Only the problem-solving toolkit in my hands had changed from a team to AI agents.

So today, I can finally answer calmly the question my body asked for me back then.

After giving everything I had in exchange for all of this, what was left of me?

What remained was the confidence to face my own nature.

It was the abilities no one else could take away.

It was a person willing to face himself honestly, willing to place time and health back at the centre of life, and willing to truly return himself to his wife.

Leaving, it turned out, was never the same as losing.

I finally understood:

building a company was never what entrepreneurship truly left behind.

What truly remains is the kind of person you have trained yourself to become while building it.

And in my heart, there was still something older than ability that I cared about.

It had been there all along.

That is something to leave until the end, and speak of slowly.

Epilogue

Real Growth Is When the Wound No Longer Hurts to Touch

After a wound heals, it does not disappear. It becomes a scar, and also a kind of thickness that was not there before.

At this point in the memoir, I want to speak about wounds.

There are many wounds in these pages: the months when cash flow nearly ran dry; the repeated arguments over direction around the decision table; the moment when my body, while I was still refusing to stop, shouted "enough" by making me faint; and the period after leaving, when I even had to ask again how much ability I still had left.

When I was writing, I thought they would hurt.

But as I laid them out sentence by sentence, I discovered that most of them no longer did.

Not because I had forgotten.

Because they had healed.

After a wound heals, it does not disappear. It becomes a scar, and also a kind of thickness that was not there in you before. When I touch those places today, what I meet is no longer raw, bloodied pain. It is a firm layer of something that belongs to me.

I think this is the most honest shape of growth: not that there are no wounds from then on, but that when the wound is touched again, it no longer hurts.

In the spring of 2026, one thing allowed me to see this completely.

Principal Fung came all the way from Hong Kong to the United Kingdom, and came by to visit me and Jay.

I had known Principal Fung for many years.

Even before I was building an education platform, even before GRWTH had any visible shape, he already knew me. Later, when I started the company, the first school willing to stand with us in the rain and let more than a thousand children write down their dreams on paper planes was his school.

From then until today, there lay between us the whole rise and fall of my startup journey, the birth of a company and my departure from it, and the thousands of kilometres between Hong Kong and the United Kingdom.

Yet that relationship had not been washed away.

It simply kept walking, until it arrived at the door of my home in England.

At that moment, I suddenly understood something. After leaving, what truly remains is never the company, nor the title. It is people.

It is the people who did not lift you too high when you were at your most visible, and who did not walk away when you were at your lowest.

A person can graduate from a company. A title can be handed back. But the relationships that have walked with you along the road will keep walking with you, across one stage of life and into the next.

This is the thing I had been carrying in my heart earlier, the thing older than ability, the thing I said I would leave until the end before speaking of it.

Ability allowed me to live my second life steadily.

But these relationships are the roots that make me feel this life has been worthwhile.

And it is also because that original heart is still there that, in these years, I have not truly stopped.

The small AI tool I mentioned earlier, the one built to reduce the administrative burden on teachers, matters to me not because the technology is especially new. What matters is that after all these years of turning and returning, what I am doing is still the same thing I wanted to do at the beginning:

to make life a little lighter for the people inside education, and to let the things that truly matter be seen.

The people changed. The tools changed. My identity changed too.

But that heart, it turns out, had never really changed.

If this memoir is to leave one or two sentences for entrepreneurs still on the road, I think they would be these.

The most captivating thing about entrepreneurship is that it forces you to grow.

The most dangerous thing about it is also that it forces you to grow to a point where you begin to mistake the size of the company for your own worth.

It took me eight years, and then a long period afterward, to separate those two things again:

a company is a company, and I am me.

The success or failure of a company should not be carried by one person until his body collapses. And a person's worth should not be tied to any business card, or to any round of valuation.

So if you are burning yourself right now, what I want to remind you is not that you should stop striving.

When it is time to strive, of course you strive.

I only want to say this: remember to leave yourself a road home.

Remember to hear yourself before your body has to speak.

Remember, even when you are winning the most, to ask what it is you truly want.

And remember that the tighter some things are held, the more one must learn, at the right time, to loosen one's grip.

Letting go is not defeat.

Sometimes, it is the proof that a person has truly grown up.

Toward the people and events of that past road, I now hold gratitude in my heart, and finally also a distance that feels just right.

I am grateful to those who once believed in me.

I am grateful to those who endured with me.

I am also grateful to the people and events that taught me pain, and taught me to let go.

Relationships arise, and relationships pass. That is simply how things are.

I no longer need anyone to place a perfect full stop at the end of that startup for me, because I have already drawn that full stop myself.

I once thought entrepreneurship meant building a company.

Only later did I slowly understand that real growth is this:

after building, carrying, losing and letting go, you can still live yourself back into being once more.

Until one day, when you turn back and touch the wounds you once thought you could never get past, you discover that they have long since grown quietly into a part of you.

Touched again, they no longer hurt.

A Page for the Reader

The story has come this far.

Let us pause for a moment.

Some kinds of growth happen when life is using all its strength.

Other kinds only slowly become visible after we are finally willing to let go.

If you, too, are somewhere on a road of your own, may you remember this:

dreams are worth cherishing, the journey is worth respecting, and most important of all, do not lose yourself along the way.

A Closing Note: Wonder

After moving to the United Kingdom, Jay and I met and adopted Ah Cake (Pebbles). Together with Elmo in memory, they are like two elder companions with fur, reminding us in their own rhythm that life does not have to be chased every moment. Sometimes, knowing how to stop is what it really means to know how to live.

So we made ourselves a small emblem around the Chinese character "嘆".

For us, it is not laziness. It is wonder, enjoyment and gratitude. Gratitude that there is still time. Gratitude that there is still a home. Gratitude that, in a new place, with new tools, we can make daily life a little lighter.

Later, when I spoke of meeting AI with wonder, it was half a joke and half from the heart. AI allowed me to feel wonder at technology again, and also gave me the ability to arrange life with more ease. In the end, technology did not bring me back to the kind of speed that could never stop. Instead, it helped me learn to slow down.

Perhaps this is the reminder Jay and I wanted to leave for ourselves:

do not remember only to do things. Remember also to savour the world.

Wonder, enjoyment, and gratitude, one quieter day at a time.

Full Book Timeline

This is not a full résumé, and it is not a company chronology. It leaves only the major points needed to understand this book: some things opened a road, some brought pressure, some pushed me toward entrepreneurship, and some taught me to let go.

- **1998 | Chapter 1**
  Event: I began taking part in Hong Kong internet and digital-content work, first working at an information technology company while teaching myself web design.
  Impact: This was my first step into Hong Kong's internet and digital-content world, and through self-learning I turned an interest into a craft.

- **1999 | Chapter 1**
  Event: I created a personal Flash website project called "動の物".
  Impact: This was the first time a personal creative work became something visible to the outside world, and it taught me that the work itself could open doors.

- **1999 | Chapter 1**
  Event: I won a home4u web design competition, and was later interviewed across a spread in Computer Plaza.
  Impact: That exposure led to later opportunities to write books and take on projects, and allowed me to see that creative work could become a career path.

- **1999 to 2000 | Chapter 1**
  Event: I entered a web design role at a satellite television station, creating online promotion for films, television programmes and media content.
  Impact: This placed web design inside a real commercial media rhythm, and I began learning to design for content, audience and delivery.

- **2000 to 2001 | Chapter 1**
  Event: Wan Li Book Company invited me to turn my personal Flash work and interactive-animation experience into a book. In 2001, my first Chinese-language book related to Flash animation was published.
  Impact: This was the first time I organised my techniques into knowledge that could teach others. Creation moved from interest toward sharing and passing on.
- **2001 to 2002 | Chapter 1**
  Event: I set up a small design company of my own, creating interactive courseware and digital content for large commercial organisations and government departments.
  Impact: Those days let me taste the pressure of earning only when work came in, and I began asking how one project after another could become a sustainable business.
- **2002 to 2003 | Chapter 1**
  Event: I took part in information-technology work related to curriculum development at the Hong Kong Education Department, designing and developing interactive courseware and packaging curriculum-planning tools.
  Impact: This connected interactive design directly with educational content for the first time, and became my entry point into education technology.
- **2003 | Chapter 1**
  Event: I joined an education-technology-related company and formally entered the work of schools, education platforms and digital learning.
  Impact: This moved me from a design role into product, team and market work, and I began learning how to turn education solutions into a long-term platform.
- **2008 | Chapter 1**
  Event: From design, product and project roles, I gradually took on fuller management responsibility and joined several e-campus and e-learning projects.
  Impact: This made me stop asking only whether a product could be

built. I also had to ask whether a team could be led, and whether a business could be sustained.

- **Around 2009 | Chapter 1**
  Event: I took part in work related to the myID mobile learning electronic schoolbag, exploring how school digital-learning products could truly be used.
  Impact: That experience allowed me to see earlier that education technology is not merely a pile of functions. The real question is whether schools, teachers, parents and children are willing to use it.

- **Late 2014 to early 2015 | Chapters 1-2**
  Event: I began forming and building GRWTH, thinking about how education technology could serve not only schools, but also connect families, students and the community.
  Impact: This turned the education problems I had seen over many years into an entrepreneurial problem I had to carry myself.

- **2015 | Chapters 1-2**
  Event: I left a stable position and, together with several co-founders, Jay and an early team, began building the first version of the system from zero.
  Impact: That departure was no longer just a job change. It was putting my values into a system that had not yet been proven.

- **From September 2015 | Chapter 2**
  Event: The first version of the system began being introduced for use in schools, and the first pilot schools and early training sessions gradually began.
  Impact: This was the first time the idea was truly used by schools. Trust moved from persuasion into actual use.

- **2016 to 2017 | Chapter 2**
  Event: GRWTH moved from early adoption into daily use. Home-school communication, growth journals, dream activities and support from education-sector friends gradually built broader trust.
  Impact: This made me clearer that what GRWTH needed to protect

was not surveillance, but letting children be seen.

- **2018 | Chapter 3**
  Event: GRWTH moved beyond home-school communication and student growth records toward payment, content and community connection.
  Impact: This taught me to connect scattered schools, families, the community and providers into an ecosystem that could operate.

- **2019 | Chapters 3-4**
  Event: GRWTH Pay received external recognition. The company completed a new round of financing, and amid social and market headwinds faced pressure around resources, team and product expansion.
  Impact: Recognition from outside did not reduce the pressure. Instead, it forced me to learn financing, to lead a team, and to hold the bottom line against the wind.

- **2020 | Chapter 5**
  Event: Class suspension and the pandemic disrupted everyday education, and also made the need for education technology clearer.
  Impact: Crisis taught me that goodwill and business could walk together, and it also truly tested the company and the team.

- **2021 | Chapter 6**
  Event: The company entered a more complex stage of capital, governance and growth. After success, the pressure truly began.
  Impact: Success brought greater responsibility, and pushed me into the pressure of capital, governance and choices about direction.

- **2022 | Chapter 7**
  Event: The voices of my body, family and inner self became impossible to ignore. On September 30, I formally left GRWTH.
  Impact: I finally admitted that some costs could not be postponed forever. Letting go became part of protecting myself and my family.

- **2022 to 2023 | Chapter 8**

Event: After leaving GRWTH, I re-examined the experience, ability and life choices accumulated over many years.
Impact: This allowed me to see that what those years left behind was not a title, but a set of abilities that could be used again.

- **2023 to present | Chapter 8**
  Event: At the end of 2023, I formally began life in the United Kingdom and started my second life, bringing the abilities left by entrepreneurship into investment, consulting, education-sector AI applications and family life.
  Impact: This made me understand that a new life is not about clearing away the past. It is about using oneself again in a different place.

- **2026 | Epilogue**
  Event: I organised this experience of entrepreneurship and departure into a book, looking back at the relationship between dreams, the journey and "who I am."
  Impact: Writing allowed me to place dreams, wounds, relationships and "who I am" together again and look at them as one.

Looking back, this timeline is not an upward line. It is a road from building, to carrying, to letting go, and then to understanding myself again.

Note on Sources and References

This book is centred on personal memory, but it was not written from memory alone.

In the process of organising it, I referred to my own public posts, work records, past written materials, public media reports, and a timeline reconstructed afterward. These materials helped me confirm dates, the sequence of events, changes in roles, and the context of the time. They also helped me avoid placing what I understood later back onto the person I was then.

Yet the more material one has, the less it means everything should be written out.

Some materials belong to private conversations. Some involve the internal operations of a company still in business. Some are only fragments of emotion from that time. Some would draw the reader's attention toward individual people. Even when such material is true, it may not be suitable as the body text of a book.

My principle has been this: only what helps steady the time, background and necessary context enters the text. Details that cannot protect other people, cannot protect the company, and cannot help readers understand the events are better left out.

The small amount of public information and media context in the book is used only to steady time and background. This is not a complete reference list, and the book is not written as a research report. Private messages, internal documents and work records are used only for verification; their original wording is not directly presented.

If some parts are written with restraint, that is deliberate. A memoir is not a reckoning, and it is not testimony. The role of source material here is to help me place time, context and responsibility accurately, not to spread every detail out on the table.

Acknowledgements

At the end, what I most want to say is thank you.

Thank you to my family. In entrepreneurship, what the outside world often sees are products, results, interviews, awards and milestones. But the people who truly bear the daily weight are often at home. Thank you for still giving me a place I could return to during the days when I was busiest, most tense, and least able to stop.

Thank you to my father and mother. From the time I was very young, you were willing to add a computer to our home. By the time I was in junior secondary school, you also let our home have a modem, so I could set up my own BBS. At the time, you may not have known where these interests would eventually take me. But you always gave me room to learn according to my own interests, and later to choose my road according to those interests too. Looking back, that trust was the earliest soil that led me into the worlds of computers, the internet and education technology.

Thank you to Jay. Much has already been said in the book; more, in truth, does not need to be written out in full. You saw me at my most driven, and you also saw me at my most exhausted, most stubborn, and least able to care for myself. Without you, I would not have walked this road to where I am today.

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What you gave me was not only opportunity. At different times, you taught me how to enter an industry, how to change direction, how to build products, how to look at business, and how to build a company. When I needed to leave my comfort zone, you also gave me new demands and trust, allowing new abilities to grow in me.

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Thank you, too, to the days that brought pressure, disagreement and pain. At the time, I may not have known how to be grateful. Later, I understood that much growth does not happen in favourable conditions, but when you can no longer move forward using the old methods.

Finally, thank you to you, the person reading this book.

If you once walked with me, may you read here a note of my heart.

If you are still on the road, may you find in someone else's story a little strength to keep walking.