

My unfinished business

The older I have become; the clearer images of bygone days have come back. I forget what I ate last night but I clearly remember what happened to me many years ago.

My mother was like that. She remembered what happened to her in the early days of her marriage. She came from a poor family and married a man from a rich family. She experienced a lot of ordeals. Even when she became old, she used to keep telling me about them.

Now, she is 92 and has got Alzheimer. All her memories have faded away. Where is she now?

Is she plunged into the deep sea looking for something? I hope she is in a peaceful place. I sometimes fear that I might be like her, forgetting everything, even people who I love. While I have a sharp brain, I decided to do things that must be done.

I remember I have unfinished business which has been stuck in my head. It dates back to 2008. I was reading a Sunday paper; one article caught my eyes. It was about a French diver Jacques Mayol. He had a favorite place in Kyushu, Japan. It is Karatsu. He spent a lot of time there. A woman whose name is Harumi became his acquaintance and helped him as an interpreter. She is Japanese and the proprietress of a Japanese inn whose name is Yoyokaku. What I became interested in was not the famous French diver, Jacques Mayol, but a woman who can speak English. What kind of woman is she? I became very curious.

Luckily, I had a plenty of time at that time, because I had taken early retirement in March. I had been working for a long time as an English teacher in public schools. No matter how long I had been a teacher, my speaking ability was terrible. When I heard that that woman was also an English teacher, my curiosity grew bigger and bigger. How come she was able to speak English? I suddenly wanted to see her. Before I realized it, I had already started packing for a trip. It was March in 2008.



(with Harumi-san)

I stayed at her inn for only one day and had a wonderful time. The inn is old but had the latest technology. Meals were delicious. Okouchi Harumi is the name of the proprietress. She took time for me and we walked in the garden and she took me to a cafe. What she had been doing was not only running a business but devoting herself to protect the local culture and introduce it to the world.

I was so impressed with her. It was my first meeting with her but I already admired her and wanted to be like her

She keeps her journal both in Japanese and in English to introduce Yoyokaku to the world. Without thinking much, I promised her that I would like to write my memory of my stay at the inn. After I returned home, I began to read her journals and I knew the big difference between her and me in our English levels.

I couldn't write a single sentence and so I didn't send my writing.

She waited for my writing and left space for me. What a terrible thing I did to her kindness.

(Harumi-san's greeting pages)



Now, I have to finish my unfinished business.

What should I write to fill the blanks of thirteen years?

I am going to write about an Australian couple whose names are David and Ann. They have visited her inn several times.

They are my friends and frequent customers at Yoyokaku.

David once wrote about my son's wedding in Harumi's journal.

When I found David's article written about my son's wedding, I was so happy.

It stays here forever and has become my treasure.

Why were David and Ann at my son's wedding? Why did I become friends with them?

I think this is worth telling. I hope you will enjoy my story.



Let's start my story.

This is my son, Yoshikazu.

This picture was taken when he was around 20.

He loves Japanese culture and tradition.

He was wearing his grandfather's KIMONO in this picture.

He never tried to understand other countries' cultures, saying that

(my son Yoshikazu on New year's day)

Japan is the best, there is nothing to learn from other countries. He never wanted to go abroad saying why do I have to leave the best country. His devotion toward his own country is wonderful, but as his mother I began to worry about him. If he keeps this idea, he will end up becoming a narrow-minded person who doesn't accept other countries and their cultures.



I wanted him to understand there is a world outside Japan. I was an English teacher and loved America and its culture. How did my son become to hate them? I want to change his mindset.

There was a city homestay program and I joined the program. Two young, attractive American girls came to our house. I thought Yoshikazu would show interests in them. The boys who showed interests were not my son but his friends. They rushed to our house to

(two American girls in Kimono)

see the girls and talk with them. My son and his younger brother neither showed interests nor talked with them even though they stayed two days. I felt very awkward with their response to the girls. My former English teacher came to my house. I thought this would be another chance to touch another culture. It again turned out to be a failure again.

She tried to enter my house with her shoes on.

She had previously stayed in Japan for six years. Yoshikazu's hateful feelings towards foreigners got stronger and stronger.

He said, "they don't respect our culture, they should learn before coming".

He graduated from university and got a job. The day when he would step into the real world was coming. If I let him work in this condition, he was just a young man of ignorance without having a broad horizon.

The last resort was to ask David to take care of him. Yoshikazu had never been abroad before.

David and I have been friends for a long time. At first, I found his name on an internet site. I sent him an email and our mail exchange started. It was around 1993.

We became friends and we visited them first in Australia in 2001. We met David and Ann in



(David and I)



(at a restaurant in Melbourne)

Melbourne. My husband I had a good time. They are really nice people and they have visited us several times. I thought David was a reliable person. He would be a good influence on my son. I asked him to take care of my son. I got his "Yes" answer.

The biggest trouble was waiting for me.

I helped him get a passport, booked a flight.", checked the train schedule to the airport.

I did everything for him, because I was so desperate. This might be the last chance for him to see the world. But Yoshikazu never showed any interests in going to Tasmania, saying, " why do I have to go to Tasmania. I don't want to go."

After everything was ready, he was still reluctant, "Mom, why don't you go? I'll stay."

That was a last straw that broke the camel's back. With his words, I lost myself and yelled at him. I was furious.

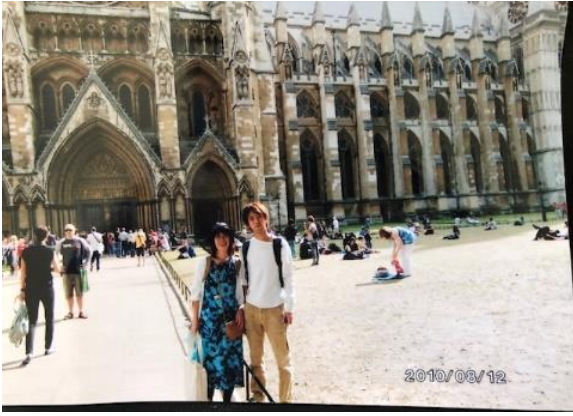
I was a kind of crazy at that time.

"All right. You don't need to go. I will give up. I was wrong." I don't remember what I said exactly. I was so mad and disappointed in him. He was surprised at my anger and finally he said, "All right, all right. Mom, I will go if you insist."

In 2003, he left for Tasmania. David sent a message "The eagle has landed" when he arrived.

He spent six days with them. David treated him not as a guest but as a member of the family.

He took care of sheep, painted walls and helped David build a glass house. He had a chance to visit many places and did a lot of talking with David. After returning, he didn't say much but I was able to see a big change in him.



He began to study English very hard. He went to a special school for TOFEL. Every Saturday he took tests until he reached a level high enough to study at a London university. I never thought he would study abroad. In 2010, he went to London and studied there for two years. I had a chance to go to London, too.

(yoshikazu and I in London)

After meeting foreigners who never understood each others country's culture, Yoshikazu met David and they spent some time together. David has a deep love and understanding towards Japanese culture and history. At the same time, he of course knows his own country very well. Yoshikazu used to say "David knew this, David understood our culture."

That made him realize that he, himself was a narrow-minded person who knew only his own country. David helped him open his eyes to the world. I can't thank him enough

When Yoshikazu decided to get married, David and Ann were the first on the invitation list.

Now you understand why they were invited to my son's wedding.

David wrote a wonderful article about it. Please visit the page.

I hope you will enjoy reading it.

Harumi-san, thank you very much for giving me a chance to write.

We would like to visit you again.



at a Japanese inn at Yanaka (Tokyo)



Nezu shrine (Tokyo)



Kouchi (Shikoku)