

# **Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Minister's Award**

## **To Create a Future Where We Shine**

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We are a family of six: my father and mother, grandfather and grandmother, brother, and me. My brother is a sweet boy, and he just started his first year of junior high school this year. Ever since I was a little child, I have dreamed of fighting with him. I know this is strange, but the dream has not come true.

My brother was born in September 2003. When I was told I would have a brother, I jumped for joy. When he was born, he had serious jaundice, just as I'd had, and he had to have a blood transfusion three times. The transfusions did not help improve his symptoms. He was resuscitated after lapsing into a near-death state, and left with severe brain damage called cerebral palsy. Because of this, he can't talk, walk, or eat.

On family outings, we sit him in a wheelchair. I noticed some passers-by staring at him and heard small children asking their parents why he was in a wheelchair. As a little girl, I wondered if my family was not normal, and the question grew bigger within me each time we went out.

When I was in kindergarten, we went to a summer festival. There, I noticed many people looking at us, so I couldn't help asking my mother: "Why are they staring at Kanau?"

"Because they think he's pretty."

Unfortunately, I didn't think they did. I said that no one came to tell us he was pretty. My mother replied, smiling warmly: "You'd feel too shy to tell a stranger you think he's pretty, wouldn't you? If no one tells him he is, we can."

I think my mother tried to tell me that I should take him as he is and recognize his beauty, rather than pity myself getting stared at because I have a brother with disabilities in a wheelchair, a brother different from everyone else.

When I was in nursery school, my mother was already making efforts to help my brother to be accepted by everyone. When a friend of mine saw him for the first time, she asked, "Is he alive? Or is he a doll?"

My mother explained as clearly as possible so that the little girl could understand her. "Yes, he is alive. He is her brother. He is a bit sick, so he can't walk."

Then the girl said, "Nice to meet you." She held my brother's hand and became friends with him. I was delighted. By giving a clear explanation, my mother goes out of her way to help people around us understand his disabilities and they received him

warmly.

I love the poem “Bird, Bell, and I” by Misuzu Kaneko. The last line of the poem reads, “Each of us is different, and each of us is fine,” implying everyone has wonderful qualities different from those of others. This gives me courage. I believe that each person with disabilities also has something he or she is good at that encourages others.

Part of my brother’s charm is his smile. He looks really happy when he is listening to music or when he has many people around. I tell him what happened at school, and the smile he shows while listening to me is a source of energy for me. His smile has the power to comfort and energize people.

When I was in elementary school, my mother always came with my brother to pick me up. I couldn’t wait to see them after school because I love my brother. Just like my father and mother, I really hope that many people have a correct understanding of disabilities. So we actively put him among children whenever we can to create opportunities for them to interact with someone with disabilities, hoping to help them become adults who will build communities and society without prejudice and discrimination. Some of my friends saw my brother in a wheelchair with a feeding tube and said he looked gross. Yet most children came around, smiling, each time my mother and brother showed up to pick me up. They touched his cheeks and hands, saying “He’s cute!” He made more and more friends. Thanks to my brother, I became popular. My parents were worried that other children might look at me with prejudiced eyes and bully me, but they never did. On the contrary, I think they have a better understanding of illness and disabilities through their interactions with my brother.

My brother is a treasure of my family. My parents decided to name him Kanau before he was born so their earnest wish that he would have been born safely would come true (*kanau*). Despite his disabilities, he stays strong and continues to widen his circle of friends. We are leading a day-to-day life in which our local community, school, and many other people understand disabilities and support us. I firmly believe that people with disabilities have human rights, of course, and their lives are as invaluable as everyone else’s. I am determined to support people with disabilities who, like my brother, are making efforts to create a place where they can shine as themselves.

To create a society where everyone can live comfortably, I want to cherish the days helping disabled people so that we can lead a truly rich life.