

Justice Minister's Award

What My Brother Taught Me

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We are a family of five – my parents, my sister, my brother, and I – my brother has Down syndrome.

It is said that one in about 800 to 1000 have Down syndrome. People usually have 46 chromosomes but those with Down syndrome have 47. Generally, people with Down syndrome develop more slowly but the pace of development varies with the individual.

My brother was born when I was five. Now I am thirteen-years-old but I still remember the time when he was taken to a hospital in Kumamoto by an ambulance, right after he was born. His skin was very white and I could not hear him crying. I was worried very much. It was painful for me that I could not meet my brother and I could not do anything to help him.

Fortunately, his heart surgery was successful. While he was hospitalized, I could visit the hospital but could not see him directly. When I saw him through a window during the designated visiting hours, I was shocked and lost for words. Tubes were placed in various parts of his body including his nose and chest. Back then, I could not understand why such a small boy should go through such suffering.

Three months later, he left the hospital. When he was a year and a half, he learned hand signs to tell us what he was thinking. At the age of two, he learned to walk. My brother was developing at his own pace and gave us great energy and hope.

When I was twelve, I read two articles that were very shocking for me. One article was about antenatal diagnosis. Being introduced to Japan in 2013, the diagnosis can tell with 99% accuracy whether a baby inside the mother has a disability or not. After the diagnosis, about 800 mothers decided to abort their babies because of the disability.

The other article mentioned that Iceland is aiming to be a society where no baby will be born with Down syndrome. I cannot understand why the country wants to aim for such a society.

Our family feels that only good things have been happening since my brother was born. For example, I used to believe that winning, such as winning in sports, is the most important thing. However, my brother enjoys playing sports with other people, attends competitions with pleasure, and smiles and waves to supporters even when he is the last runner in a marathon competition. He made me think that becoming number one is not the sole objective of playing sports.

My mother told me that she met many different people since my brother was born and she started to understand the feelings of others. She said she feels so grateful to my brother because she learned a great deal, thanks to him.

My brother motivated my father to establish a business that supports the social participation of people with disabilities. He says, thanks to my brother, he found a productive job that he can enjoy devoting himself to.

As mentioned, my brother is an essential member of our family. It is completely wrong to aim for a society without Down syndrome. Just like other people, each person with Down syndrome has a different personality. However, many of those with Down syndrome I have met are good at making relationships, cheerful, and kind. Although they are not good at studying or playing sports, and their development is slow, they make people around them very happy. So does my brother. I believe such people are very important for our society.

Unfortunately, some people in society believe people with Down syndrome have no value. Are these people seeking to be the perfect human being? I fear the society which takes someone's life because they are not perfect. Would that society recommend abortions if slight disabilities are identified in fetuses? I am concerned about our future.

Different individuals with their distinct personalities brighten our society and enrich people as well as countries.

One day my mother asked me, "If it is possible, would you want to get rid of the Down syndrome disability in your brother?"

I thought that I definitely did not want to do that. My brother, as he is now, is my precious brother. My brother develops slowly, his pronunciation is not perfect, and he is not good at sports, but, my cheerful, entertaining brother is the perfect brother for me, just as he is.