

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

Remaining Pure at Heart

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Tatchan was already at my house when I was born. He got rid of weeds, put out garbage for collection, kept the store clean and did other duties. He was only able to count up to five on one hand. When he was sent on errands to buy six or more items, he would return with five. Tatchan was mentally challenged. More than fifty years ago, my grandfather took him into our home as a worker, since he had no relatives. Even beyond the age of 60, he could pick up a 30-kilogram rice bag without effort. He was the strongest man at our place.

According to my mother, Tatchan loved me and my elder brother very much. When we were babies, she used to have us play in a baby walker on the lawn. While doing yard work, Tatchan would watch us with delight. When I was a kindergartener, he gave me various species of insects he had caught in the yard, such as Japanese freshwater crabs, mantises, butterflies, stick insects, long-horned beetles, lacertid lizards, earthworms, green caterpillars and even centipedes. When my brother and I played in the water, he would gently pour water over our shoulders using a water pot. My mother said she could feel his gentleness as he took care not to splash water on our faces.

Tatchan could not throw anything away. He was often scolded by my father for storing old dishes and clothes that were supposed to be thrown away into his room. According to my mother, however, it was only natural since he grew up in the age of scarcity. His appetite was large. He always felt the urge to eat, despite that he had the same meals as anyone else. When loquat fruits were ripe, he would climb the tree to pick and eat them, without any fear of falling out of the tree. When he saw mature persimmon fruits, even the astringent type, he would eat them without hesitation, for which he was scolded.

Tatchan called my brother "Ri-kun," and me "Ta-kun." He stuttered,
"D-d-did you make a friend?"

and

"You are s-s-so cute and a g-g-good boy,"

patting us on the head. As toddlers and preschoolers, we wanted him to play with us. After we reached school age, however, it was Tatchan who wanted us to play with him. When having running races, we ran at a deliberately slow pace so that he would not fall over. When playing catch, we threw the ball gently enough so that he could catch it. On windy days, we enjoyed the feeling of air on our faces. We ate ice cream together. I loved to see Tatchan getting goodies gratefully, looking very happy.

One day, Tatchan was gone. I heard he was hospitalized with an illness. I missed him

very much. In our living room, a photo of Tatchan and us laughing together is displayed. My brother said he had a pure heart. Mother said he was a fine person and dedicated worker. Father said Tatchan was a valued member of our family.

I do not like the term “people with disabilities.” Tatchan had an intellectual disability, but he had pure heart more than anyone else’s. He worked, ate and lived a life of honesty. He never hurt anyone. He loved creatures. He embraced small living things. He was always smiling.

I think that there are many people like Tatchan in the world. Despite that they are working and doing a lot of good for others, they are often discriminated against. This is truly a shame. Tatchan did not hurt anyone. I cannot, either. I do have hard feelings about a person who was mean to me, but I cannot throw hurtful words at this person. I had thought that was because I was weak. But my mother said it was because I was always around Tatchan and my brother, who are tender-hearted. Tatchan, who had a childlike heart, sometimes got scolded. When scolding him, my parents used understandable words as if they were speaking to a young child. After being scolded, he would feel down for a while. But, with treats, he would soon regain his cheerfulness. My family members never hurt weak persons.

Without even knowing it, this feeling has been instilled in me.

On a final note, to write this essay, I learned about fundamental human rights. According to the Constitution, rights that we basically have simply by being a human should be respected, and should not be violated. The Constitution also maintains that the right of equality is the right not to be discriminated against. Is this right protected in Japan today? Aren’t people with disabilities discriminated against?

Knowing Tatchan, I realized the greatness of working earnestly. I think Tatchan was an wonderful person, who remained pure at heart throughout his life. To refer to people with disabilities, the term “the weak” is used. I would rather use “weak persons” than “the weak.” I sincerely hope that all people will be kind to weak persons. I want to be an adult who can reach out to people in need of help.