

# NO ONE'S PERFECT Part I

## 中国語への翻訳

<p>①翻訳草稿 第3部、第4部から、訳し始めるほうが、better. とりあえず、全体を一通り翻訳する。 翻訳しにくい部分は、スキップする。</p> <p>②誤字脱字などのチェックを経て、教材用に清書する。</p> <p>③後日、機会を見つけて、未翻訳の部分などを推敲する。</p> <p>④補筆・改訂・鑑賞に耐え得る翻訳の完成。</p> <p>⑤著者に贈呈・趣旨を説明する。</p>	<p>不自然な文法訳、逐語訳ではなくて、「内容翻訳、意識」を中心にする。</p> <p><u>中国語への翻訳は、日本語原文を中心とする。</u> <u>英文は英文翻訳の方法・スタイルを参考にする。</u></p> <p>英語（泉原）</p> <p>日本語（弥谷さん） 中国語（張さん） 校正・チェック（泉原）</p>
<p>メリット merits</p> <p>①生きた言語</p> <p>②人生に対する真摯な気持ち・豊かなユーモア・困難を克服する強靱、堅忍不拔の意志力を体得できる。</p> <p>中国語の翻訳ができれば、著者にも贈呈して、張代表の文化交流、教育支援事業の趣旨を説明すれば、将来のSSQQB社にとっても、非常に有意義な事業となる。</p>	<p>その他のメリット</p> <p>①著者が22歳の時の、著作・自伝</p> <p>②早稲田の政経は早稲田の誇る優秀な学生の学科。</p> <p>③特に日本語駆使能力は抜群。大阪府の知事も同窓。</p> <p>④自分の半生との比較ができる。</p> <p>⑤英語翻訳も十数人のネイティブや日本人が協力して、熱心に仕上げたので、すばらしい英文になっているし、誤字脱字すらもほとんどない。</p>
<p>翻訳は SSQQBのオリジナル教材プリントに使用しながら、常に校正する。</p>	<p>作業過程・所要時間 英語（泉原）</p>

<p>①日本語学習          ②中国語学習          ③中国人にも、日本人の心を伝える。          ④英語学習          ⑤日・中・英のネイティブによる録音</p>	<p>①全文タイピング15h+②校正用録音5h+③本文チェック5h=25h          ④注釈しながら、再度校正する。          ⑤中国語翻訳をチェックしながら、最終の校正をする。</p>
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English	Chinese	Notes
<p>The Complete Edition            Hirotada Ototake            Translated by Henry Gerry Harcourt            With a new edition, translated by John Brennan</p>		
<p>Acknowledgements            The author would like to express his heartfelt thanks to Ichiro Ozawa of Kodansha for all that he has done to bring this book to publication.             The translator wishes to thank Editorial Director Stephen Shaw of Kodansha International, copy editor Kit Pancoast Nagamura and Ichiro Ozawa of</p>		<p>下線部分は、発音上の流れや、liaison（音の連結）を考慮に入れています。            文法や語法を体得するためには、「外観+音感」に注意することが肝要です。</p>

<p>Kodansha and the many people who gave advice and encouragement, especially Ann Flower, Josh Griffith, Marilyn Jean, Rebecca Jennison, Dana Lewis, Rebecca Lloyd-Jones, Mari Morisawa, Lucy North, Heather Willson, and Dominic Yenches and his friends at the Dave Cowens Basketball School.</p>		<p>文法的な語法を感得するための下線部の語彙の和訳は省略しています。</p>
<p><b>Contents</b></p> <p>Prologue</p> <p><b>1—The King in The Wheelchair</b></p> <p><i>My Preschool and Elementary School Years</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Little Tyrant</li> <li>A Heavy Door</li> <li>Takagi Sensei</li> <li>The Oto-Chan Rules</li> <li>My Favorite Subject is Phys Ed</li> <li>The Taste of Rice Balls</li> <li>The V Sign on My Back</li> <li>Otohiro Printing Inc.</li> <li>The Early Morning Runners</li> <li>Kanji Champion</li> <li>The Super Kickboard</li> <li>Disabled People to the Rescue</li> </ul>		

## **2—Full Speed Ahead**

*My Middle School, High School, and Cram School Years*

The Dribbler!

The Festival Guy

Yatchan

A Love Letter

Exam Capers

Twenty-Five Warriors

Water of Life

Math: 7/200 ...

Ambitions

The Joys of Cram school

A Miracle

## **3—The Barrier-Free Heart**

*My Time at Waseda University*

Beginner's Luck

A Waste of Potential

The Waseda Community Campaign

The Echo-Summer Festival

“He’s Okay.”

Into the Twenty-First Century

American Travel Notes

<p>On a Snowy Day  About My Father and My Mother  Barrier-Free Hearts</p>		
<p>Afterward</p>		
<p><b>4- A Whole New Journey</b>  <i>My Experience as a Young Adult</i>  <i>(translated by John Brennan)</i></p> <p>Confusion  The Next Step</p>		
<p>Epilogue</p>		
<p>Notes</p>		
<p><b>Prologue</b>  April 6, 1976. Cherry trees in full blossom, soft sunlight. A gentle day.  A baby <u>came squalling into</u> the world. A bouncing baby boy. It was an ordinary birth to an ordinary couple. Except for one thing: the boy had <u>no arms or legs</u>.  <u>Congenital tetra-amelia</u>: the condition of being born without arms or legs. It wasn't due to a difficult birth, or the drug thalidomide, whose harmful effects were</p>		<p><u>came squalling into</u>  オギャーオギャーと泣いて  生まれた  <u>congenital tetra-amelia</u>  先天性な四肢切断</p> <p><u>in the news</u> ニュースで  <u>get a shocked reaction just</u></p>

in the news at the time. The cause in my case is still unknown. For whatever reason, I arrived with an ultra-individual appearance that startled people. How many people get a shocked reaction just by being born? Probably only Momotaro, the fairy-tale boy who was found inside a peach, and me.

A birth is supposed to be followed by the joyful moment when mother and child first see each other's faces. But my father thought over what might happen. If my mother found out right after the delivery, before she'd had any chance to recover her strength, wouldn't the shock be too much for her? As she lay in bed, he said to her, "I'm afraid you can't see the baby right away—he's a little weak."

Two or three days passed. My father resolved to keep the facts hidden until my mother was fully recovered. It must have been a lonely struggle. It took strength.

"They say you can't see him for a little while longer because he has severe jaundice," he told her.

It's only recently that concepts like "informed consent" have begun to be taken up in Japan. The situation back then, in 1976, that a doctor's word was final. Even though it was their own health and happiness at stake, patience had no choice but to leave

by～によってショックを受ける

the fairy-tale boy who was found 見つけられたおとぎ話の男の子

thought over what

～について考えた

wouldn't the shock be too much for her そのショックは彼女にはあまりに大きすぎないだろうか?

lay in bed

ベッドに横になって

resolved to keep the facts

hidden until～まで事実を隠しておくことに決めた

for a little while longer

もう少しの間

severe jaundice

ひどい黄疸

concepts like "informed consent" インフォームド・コ

ンセントみたいな考え方

The situation back then

当時の状況は

everything to their physician. And so my father took the stance that he was simply following the doctor's orders.

Although she hadn't wondered what was going on at first, naturally my mother was worried and perplexed when she still wasn't allowed to see her own child after a week. She realized something serious must have happened, but at the same time there was an atmosphere that made it hard for her to come right out and ask anything. Of course she wanted to see her son, but she sensed this "something." She put her trust in my father.

The day of our first meeting arrived at last. Three weeks had gone by since I was born. On the day before she came to see me, my mother had been told that the reason she hadn't been allowed to see her son was not because of jaundice, but because of disability. My father couldn't bring himself to tell her the exact nature of the disability, but what he did tell her was enough for my mother. And she prepared herself.

The hospital, too, had done what it could do to get ready. An empty bed had been made available in case she fainted on the spot. The tension grew, for my father and the staff, and for my mother.

The big moment arrived, but not in the way people

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～という姿勢をとった

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The day of our first meeting

最初に会った日

On the day before she came

彼女が来る日に

the exact nature of the

～の正確な状態

in case she fainted on

彼女が気を失った場合

All the fears that she

might get 彼女が受けるか

<p>had expected. The words that burst from my mother’s lips were “He’s adorable.” <u>All the fears that she might get hysterical or keel over</u> turned out to be unnecessary. For nearly a month, she hadn’t been able to see <u>the baby she’d given birth to</u>. The joy of seeing her child at last was greater than the shock of his missing arms and legs.</p> <p>I think <u>the success of this first encounter</u> was especially meaningful. First impressions tend to stick. Sometimes you’re <u>still carrying them as baggage years later</u>. And when it’s a parent and child—that meeting is a profoundly important one.</p> <p>The first emotion my mother felt toward me was not shock or sadness, it was joy.</p> <p>At the age of three weeks, I was born at last.</p>		<p>もしれないという心配</p> <p><u>keel over</u>  卒倒する</p> <p><u>the baby she’d given birth to</u>.  彼女が生んだ赤ちゃん</p> <p><u>the success of this first encounter</u>  この最初の出会いの成功</p> <p><u>still carrying them as baggage years later</u>.  何年たっても引きずっている</p>
<p><b>The King in the Wheelchair</b>  <i>My Preschool and Elementary School Years</i></p>		
<p><b>A Little Tyrant</b>  <i>Napoleon</i></p> <p>Our life as <u>a family of three</u> began in a place called Kasai in Edogawa ward, <u>on the eastern boundary of</u> Tokyo. My parents had just moved to the area and didn’t know anyone there. I’ve heard of <u>parents who hide the very existence of</u> a disabled child by <u>keeping him shut up at home</u>, but mine certainly didn’t. They</p>		<p><u>a family of three</u>  三人家族</p> <p><u>on the eastern boundary of</u>  ～の東の地域</p> <p><u>parents who hide the very existence of</u>  ～の存在そのものを隠す親</p>



took me out and about with them all the time so the neighbors could get acquainted with me. My arms and legs are about eight inches long now, but in those days they were potato-like bumps on my torso. My resemblance to a toy bear made me an instant favorite in the neighborhood. (I've heard of "He's the cutest little doll" as a compliment for a baby, but "He's the cutest little stuffed animal," now that's new one!

I had already begun to exercise my talents as a problem child. I never, ever slept. I cried fiercely all through the night, despite the fact that I didn't sleep much in the daytime. My bleary-eyed mother thought she was headed for a nervous breakdown. I earned the nickname Napoleon, after the hero who is said to have commanded his troops on just three or four hours of sleep.

I also drank way too little formula—about half the right amount for my age, according to a child-care book my mother read. That just had to be too little. My usually calm parents anxiously sought the doctor's advice, but I went right on drinking the same amount. Perhaps ready to give up by this time, they tried a new approach.

"He's been highly individual ever since he was born," they decided. "So it's no wonder he needs a

keeping him shut up at home

家に閉じ込めたままにして  
took me out and about with them 一緒にあちこち連れて回った

get acquainted with

〜と知り合いになる

about eight inches long

8インチくらいの長さ

potato-like bumps on my torso. 胴体に付いているジ

ャガイモみたいなこぶ

the cutest little stuffed animal とってもかわいいぬ

いぐるみ

My bleary-eyed mother

寝不足の目をした母

on just three or four hours of sleep

3, 4時間の睡眠だけで

way too little formula

あまりにも少ないミルク量

a child-care book my mother read

different amount of formula or sleep. Let's stop comparing him with other children.”

That was pretty cool. And sure enough, in spite of getting so little sleep and formula, I grew rapidly and was never sick.

At nine months, I produced my first word. All I'd done till then was babble, but suddenly I went, “Happapa, happapapa, papa, papa.” My mother was a little put out that my first word was “papa,” but she kept telling herself that it was simply easier to say. And my parents were very happy that I'd started to talk.

From then on, they say, it was as though a dam had burst. By my first birthday I was known as Chatterbox Hiro. My father entertained himself giving me “lessons” with a set of wooden picture blocks he'd bought. He would show me one with a washing machine on it and ask, “What's this?”

“Wishwash”

“And this?”

“Papa-eye”(glasses)

“What's this, then?”

“Noothpaper.”

And so forth. These classes took place every evening when my father came home from the office.

母が読んだ育児書

stop comparing him with

～と比較するのをやめる

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blocks

絵が描いてある積み木セッ

ト

a washing machine on it

(それに描いてある)洗濯機

の絵

My mother, meanwhile,

My mother, meanwhile, had seen an article in the paper that warned, “Not reading to your child amounts to giving him or her a frontal lobotomy,” which prompted her to read to me in every spare moment. They were both pretty education-minded parents.

A year or so earlier, they had resigned themselves to the idea that I might spend my whole life confined to bed. Now their life—our life—was full of hope.

### ***A Barrage of Questions***

When I turned four, I started at Seibo Kindergarten. As it was on the west side of the city, to save a lot of driving back and forth we upped and moved to Yohga in Setagaya Ward, about ten minutes by car from the kindergarten. Since my first memories date from around this time, when I’m asked where I’m from, I say Yohga.

Seibo wasn’t specially set up for disabled children, but the basic policy was respect for the children’s individuality. There was none of the usual “What shall we all do now?” We each did whatever we wanted, within the rules. This approach was perfect for me. If we’d all had to do the same activities, there were bound to have been things I couldn’t do.

一方、母といえば、  
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confined to bed.  
寝たきりになって  
A Barrage of Questions  
  
my first memories date from  
  
the basic policy  
  
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I made friends at once, thanks to my arms and legs, or lack thereof. First, the other kids' attention was caught by a strange machine—my power wheelchair. When they looked closer, the rider had no arms and legs! This was a great mystery. The moment they spotted me they'd gather like a swarm of ants, touching my limbs and asking "Why, why, why?" Whenever this happened, I used to explain, "I got sick when I was in my mom's tummy, and so my arms and legs didn't grow." That was all they need to hear, and from then on we got along fine together.

It did get tiring, though, during the month or two that it took for the explanation to reach everyone, from my classmates to all the other children. Every day I was bombarded with questions. My mother says she remembers clearly the first time I came home whining, "I'm worn out." The teacher were concerned, too, as they saw what was happening; they asked whether I wasn't getting a headache or a stomachache when I came home. Leaving the grown-ups to worry about such things, I went on developing into a sturdy child—and then some.

***Doing It My Way***

Thanks to having short arms and legs plus a

made friends

lack thereof=lack of those

gather like a swarm of ants

used to

in my mom's tummy,

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did get tiring, though

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came home whining,

Thanks to having

wheelchair, I was a winner in the popularity department. I found myself always the center of a circle of friends. And, little by little, the typical willfulness of an only child began to kick in.

Among preschoolers, children just a few months apart in age can be at very different stages of growth. Because my birthday, April 6, fell just after the cutoff date for enrollment, I was the oldest in my class. You might say I had leadership potential—or you could just say I was a bossy kid.

Everyone would be playing tag in the playing ground. This was dead boring for me, since even with my power wheelchair I couldn't keep up. So I would wheel out and yell, "If you wanna play in the sandbox, follow me!" and, strangely enough, the kids who'd been happily chasing one another a moment ago would all troop after the wheelchair to the sandbox.

Once we got there, however, I couldn't build my own sand castles without hands. And so I gave the orders. Anyone who dared to say they wanted to dig a tunnel when I'd said to make a castle was asking for trouble.

"I said we're making a castle today. If you don't like it, you can go play by yourself." Since I could already talk up a storm in those days, it seems no one was able to stand up to me.

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Being so headstrong

Being so headstrong didn't lose me any friends, though. I guess they thought, "If I stay on the right side of Oto-chan, I won't be left out." This only encouraged me further. I became a real little tyrant, and gradually started getting smart with my parents and teachers as well.

While this lasted, I gave my parents a lot of headaches, they say, but there came a turning point when the problem solved itself. In my last year at kindergarten my willfulness vanished—though not, I have to admit, without a trace.

For Art Day, our class was putting on a play. The cast included "Gramps" the auto mechanic. Not a bad part, really, but nobody wanted it because the name "Gramps" sounded like a grumpy old man.

Finally my best friend, Shingo, shot up his hand and said, "I'll do it then." I thought that was a truly classy thing to do. I can still remember how pathetic it made me feel by comparison. So, not to be outdone, I put myself up for the next most unpopular part, that of the narrator. Even at six, I was probably desperate to boost my standings as a young man. I was already image-conscious in those days, I guess.

The narrator's part was voice only—in other words, I was behind the scenes. My narration went over so

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<p><u>well that some of the mothers said, “You should become an announcer when you grow up!” For a natural-born ham like me, always hogging the spotlight, it came as a revelation that a narrator could be so well received. I started to see how much cooperation it takes from all sides—including behind the scenes—to get something done. A preschooler whose world, till then, was centered entirely on himself had just grown up a little.</u></p> <p>After that, I discovered it was really fun to play together with other kids, I began to get along better with all my classmates; by the time we were almost out of kindergarten, I was going over to play at a friend’s place practically every day.</p> <p>Thus, one of the biggest problems of my preschool years was solved thanks to my being so image-conscious. But <u>a trickier problem</u> was waiting up ahead.</p>		<p><u>For a natural-born ham like me</u></p> <p><u>hogging the spotlight</u></p> <p><u>it came as a revelation that</u></p> <p><u>a trickier problem</u></p>
<p><b>A Heavy Door</b> <i>Slammed in Our Faces</i></p> <p>I expect all parents <u>feel a mixture of anxiety and hope</u> when their children are about to enter the new environment of school. For the parents of a <u>child with a disability</u>, though, <u>chances are</u> the anxiety outweighs the hope. First of all, <u>they run smack into the</u></p>		<p><u>feel a mixture of anxiety and hope</u></p> <p><u>a child with a disability,</u></p> <p><u>chances are</u></p>

question, “Is there anywhere that will accept our child?”

In my case, too, this has been a problem all along. My parents were faced with the stiffest barrier of all at the entrance to elementary school. I’ll bet they never dreamed they’d have so much trouble getting me a compulsory education.

Fifteen years ago, it was still taken for granted that children with disabilities would go to special schools. But these are schools for children whose educational needs differ from the mainstream. My parents weren’t convinced that “regular ed” was out for me. Did this kid who fancied himself a leader and bossed everybody around at kindergarten really need special ed? They had their doubts, which grew into a desire to have me attend a mainstream school.

Their wish wasn’t easily granted. They began by narrowing their sights to private elementary schools, since they thought it would be more difficult for a public school to accept a disabled child. They had also heard that private schools showed more understanding toward people with disabilities. But it was hopeless. My parents couldn’t even find a school that would let me take the entrance tests. The door was slammed in our faces, so to speak.

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Just when they'd half given up and begun to think I wouldn't even be given a chance to try regular ed, something came in the mail which changed the situation completely: a notice about a "Health Examination for School-Age Children." A checkup was scheduled for children due to enter elementary school the following spring, and a postcard announcing it arrived at the Ototake residence.

Amazing. It had come from the local public elementary school which my parents had ruled out from the start. Their hopes soaring, they dialed the contact number. As you'd expect, the school hadn't known that I was a child with a severe disability. The school officials seemed a little taken aback when the situation was explained to them, but even so they said, "Well, first of all, come in and see us." And so my mother took me to the checkups. This was my first encounter with Yohga Elementary School.

The "Health Examination for School-Age children" was a zoo. A herd of lively kindergarteners tearing around, kids bawling in the unfamiliar surroundings. In the midst of it all, I behaved myself as I went from one examination to the next and was even, I'm told, praised by the doctors. My mother says it gave her confidence: if I'd been praised for good behavior here, I

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the last of the

could surely handle school.

After the last of the medical exams, we headed for the principal's office. My mother must have been very tense. The fine points of the situation were beyond my understanding at the time, but I definitely got the sense that something was about to happen.

My first impression of the principal was that he looked kind. He turned now and then while talking with my mother, perhaps concerned that I'd be bored, and gave me a friendly smile. After I'm not sure how long, he winked at me and asked me a question: "Is there any food you don't like?"

"Mm... Bread!" At the time, I didn't like that soggy feeling in my mouth.

"Really? If you don't like bread, you'll have problems with the school lunches, you know. We serve bread nearly every day."

My mother's expression, which had been stiff with tension, brightened before my eyes. He'd as good as said okay. When we got home, she reported the great news to my father:"It looks like he's going to be able to go to a mainstream school, dear."

### ***From Heaven to Hell***

Our joy was short-lived. We did receive a favorable

must have been very tense

The fine points of the situation

got the sense that

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back to square one.

reply from the principal, “since you live in our district,” but then the local Board of Education said, “Not so fast!” The reason: there was no precedent for admitting such a severely disabled person into the regular educational system.

It was back to square one. For a while the Ototake household was stunned. There’d even been talk about school lunches. We’d thought it was a done deal, and so the setback came as all the more of a shock. But then my folks showed what they’re made of. They didn’t stay down for long before swinging back into action to find out what it would take to get me accepted.

There was only one thing to be done: keep on meeting with the Board of education. The main reason they’d called this temporary halt was probably the uncertainty that came from not knowing me. And who can blame them? It must have been hard to imagine that a person with arms only four or five inches long could write as well as his peers. If we could just clear up their misgivings, permission would surely follow. That was my parents’ approach.

The board members had endless questions. What did my parents do in this or that situation? My mother took me along to demonstrate in person what I could

a done deal

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do. I remember showing off various things. Writing with the pencil held between my arm and my cheek. Eating by using the spoon or fork on the principle of a lever against the rim of the bowl. Cutting paper by taking one handle of the scissors in my mouth, steadying the other handle with my arm, and moving my head. Walking on my own by moving my short legs in turn, keeping my body in its normal L-shaped position.

Everything I did seemed to take the board members' breath away. Or perhaps I should say it mystified them. After all, here was an armless, legless person, happily carrying out all sorts of tasks one after another, right before their eyes.

In the end, my parents' enthusiasm and my own ability won us permission to enroll. On one condition.

A typical first grader dashes out of the house with a "Bye!" in the morning, spends the day studying and playing, and announces "I'm home!" in the late afternoon. In my case, though, it was different. A guardian was required to accompany me from home in the morning, be on standby in the halls during classes and recess, and then accompany me home again. The burden on my parents would be colossal, but they were

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be on standby in the halls

would be colossal.

genuinely thrilled at this conditional acceptance, “if it means you can be in regular ed.”

The principal and many others, by their goodwill, had opened the door for me. There was only way to repay their kindness, and that was to enjoy school.

## **Takagi Sensei**

### ***No Helping***

When I look at the class photo taken the day I started school, I can't help reacting with a wry smile. The girl next to me is scrooching as far away as she can get, with a kind of wince on her face. And there's me beside her with a broad grin. That picture says it all. The cause of all the fuss, the one who had everyone worrying about how he'd take to school, is beaming away without a care in the world. It seems it was the people around me who were discombobulated.

The person with the most on his mind would have been the teacher I had for first through fourth grades, Takagi Sensei. (“Sensei” is a term of respect meaning “teacher.”) Takagi Sensei was such a veteran that the other teachers called him “Granddad Sensei.” When my enrollment was decided, I'm told he immediately came forward and asked to have me in his class. But with all his experience, he'd never been in charge of an

were genuinely thrilled at

the class photo taken the day I

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with a broad grin

about how he'd take to

were discombobulated.

The person with the most on his mind

armless and legless child like me before. Everything was new. The first thing that troubled him was the reaction of the other children.

“Why haven’t you got any arms?”

“Why are you riding in that car?”

Sometimes kids would come up to me and gingerly touch my arms and legs. Sensei says he was in a cold sweat over how to handle all this, but I was used to it. I thought of it only as a transit point on the way to becoming friends. I kept on repeating my usual explanation, “It happened in my mum’s tummy.”

The other children’s doubts were soon cleared up, and my classmates, at least, no longer asked about my arms and legs. That took a load off Sensei’s mind, but before long their growing confidence led to a new problem.

Takagi Sensei was very strict. Teachers who have children with disabilities in their class are tempted to do this and that for them, but he stopped himself since he knew it wouldn’t be good for me in the long run. As the kids in my class lost their fear of me, however, an increasing number of them wanted to help me. That was especially true of the girls—perhaps they liked to think of themselves as my big sisters.

Sensei was of two minds about what was

gingerly touch

a transit point on the way

to

kept on repeating

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mind

before long

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was of two minds about～に

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happening. On the one hand, he was pleased, since it showed a spirit of helpfulness developing in the class, along with understanding toward me. Naturally, he was reluctant to put a stop to it. On the other hand, though, he thought: if Ototake's friends help him all the time, he'll come to expect everything to be done for him while he sits back and waits.

After a struggle, Sensei announced his conclusion: "Let Ototake do the things he can do on his own. But when there's something he really can't do for himself, then you can help him." Everyone seemed disappointed, but being obedient first graders, they agreed. After that no one was in such a hurry to help me out.

Several days later, a new complication came up. There were lockers at the back of the classroom where we each kept an "arithmetic set," which held a ruler, marbles and so on, and a "tool box," containing paste, scissors, etc. We would all go and get items from these boxes whenever they were needed for a lesson.

But I was extremely slow. When Sensei told us to fetch something, I got off to a late start because I always waited until the initial rush for the lockers was over. It would have been near suicide for me to hurl myself into the thick of it. When out of my wheelchair,

On the one hand  
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of it

as I was in the classroom, I barely came up to the other children's knees. And once I did get going, in those days it would take me quite a while to open the tool box, get an item out, replace the lid, and return to my seat.

That day, I was once again wrestling with my tool box. Normally, a child who was already done would have said, "Here, let me," and taken the item to my seat, but just last week everyone had been warned not to help me. Although they all seemed uncomfortable about it, nobody offered to help. And the lesson started up again.

Finally I burst into sobs. The first tears I'd shed at school. They weren't so much tears of frustration as tears of loneliness at being left out. Sensei rushed over.

"Good work! You did very well to get so far by yourself."

I really howled then. A comforting word can sometimes do that.

Sensei thought: he shows no resistance to being set difficult tasks, but he hates to be singled out or miss an activity. But I can't keep the whole class waiting till he finishes. And it isn't good for him to be helped with every single thing.

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In this case, Sensei solved the problem by letting me use two lockers. I kept each of the boxes with its lid off in a separate locker, so there was no need to be always opening and closing boxes to get the tools out. That certainly speeded things up.

By coming up with ideas like this, Sensei took care to see that I could lead the same life at school as everyone else.

### ***Dethroned***

Whenever I went into the school yard, I was mobbed. Nobody had ever seen a child with no arms and legs before. Or a power wheelchair like mine. The two together must have been quite a novelty. Plus, it wasn't easy to see that I was steering the chair with my arms, and so it looked to the other children as though it was moving itself.

Recess was the only time when first graders from other classes and the older kids could come in contact with me. When they caught sight of me in the playground, they gathered like ants to a piece of candy. Some asked the usual whys, others wanted a ride in the chair. Then one of my classmates would come along and explain with a knowledgeable air: "It happened when Oto-chan was in his mother's tummy,

be singled out

the boxes with its lid off

quite a novelty.

まったく珍しいこと

caught sight of me

like ants to a piece of candy.

with a knowledgeable air

a circle around me two or

you know.”

I was the center of attention of the whole school. There was always a circle around me two or three deep, and children trailed along behind me when I moved from place to place. Being the center of attention was just fine with me. Perhaps mistaking the kids who trooped after me for my loyal subjects, I crowed happily that I was “like a king.”

One day, however, I found myself dethroned. By order of Takagi Sensei. “From now on,” he told me, “You mustn’t use your wheelchair without my permission.” He had taken his drastic step for several reasons.

First, there was the sense of superiority that the chair gave me. I was very pleased with my troop of followers, but he saw through them. They weren’t admirers, they were just curious about the wheelchair. In any case, the superiority complex they were giving me would undo his efforts to treat me like everyone else in order to break down the thought pattern, “people with disabilities are special.”

There was also my physical strength to be considered. The grade school years are a period of rapid growth, and I would no doubt develop too, in my own way. In the wheelchair, I would have fewer

three deep

trailed along behind me

for my loyal subjects

crowed happily that

found myself dethroned

taken his drastic step for

the sense of superiority that

undo his efforts to

to break down the thought pattern

have fewer chances to

looking to the future

chances to get my body moving. The way he saw it, looking to the future and the need to build up my muscles, the chair had no advantages and it had to go.

At the time, this was a very harsh order from my point of view. The wheelchair was, after all, my legs. Without it, as I could only walk by placing my thighs flat on the ground and shuffling my butt along, the school yard became immense. Getting around was going to take a lot of stamina.

Naturally, there was opposition. I'm told that for several days after I began walking around the school yard there was a stream of protests (mostly from women teachers) that this was cruel. The objections grew stronger in midsummer and midwinter. When you walk with your butt flat on the ground, you feel the heat or the chill more than other people.

There was also a problem at morning assembly time in the school yard. When assembly was over, the whole school marched to music back to their classrooms. Since we lined up in order of height, small in front and tall in back, I was at the head of the boys in my class. Sensei could only tell the others to overtake me so that our class would not be left behind. This left me all alone out there and added fuel to the pro-wheelchair argument.

had no advantages

by placing my thighs flat on the ground

shuffling my butt along

a stream of protests

in midsummer and midwinter.

with your butt flat on the ground お尻を地面にぴったりくっつけて

feel the heat or the chill

at morning assembly time

marched to music back to

lined up in order of height

But still Sensei wouldn't listen. He held firm to the belief that "we can coddle him all we like right now, but he'll have to fend for himself one day. My role is to think about what we really need to do for him now for the sake of the future."

I'd say he made the right decision. The middle school, high school, and college that I went on to attend have all left something to be desired when it comes to accessibility. I've often had to park my chair at the bottom of a flight of stairs and leg it(butt it?) around campus.

I believe the mobility I have today is entirely thanks to Takagi Sensei's guidance. If I'd been using the power wheelchair all the time from those first years, I would surely have become completely reliant on it. I try to imagine what my daily life would be like... I'm sure it would be very different from the life I lead now in terms of freedom, mentally as well as practically.

Sensei seems to have made the conscious decision to be strict with me. He recalls, "Even if Ototake thought I was scary, that was all right with me as long as he could later say, 'But I'm glad I had him for my teacher.'"

True strictness is true kindness. When I think of Takagi Sensei, I really appreciate the meaning of

tell the others to overtake  
me

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that

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himself

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<p>these words.</p>		
<p><b>The Oto-Chan Rules</b>  <b><i>What We Do with Our Hands</i></b>  Day by day, there were fewer <u>special arrangements made for me</u> in the classroom. <u>Not that</u> people were any less kind or considerate, but there were no longer problems even when no one <u>looked out for me</u>. It was a sign that I'd become one of the class <u>in a real sense</u>.</p> <p>In <u>the required</u> first-grade Japanese language textbook, there was a chapter on "What We Do with Our Hands." This was <u>downright awkward for</u> a teacher responsible for a child without any. As the first-grade classes reached that point in the textbook, even the other teachers <u>were concerned about</u> what Takagi sensei planned to do.</p> <p>"I have to admit <u>it gave me pause</u>, but I never <u>thought of skipping</u> that chapter," he says, surprisingly enough. "Being in contact with Ototake every day, I no longer <u>had the sense that</u> I was working with a congenital amputee. By then, I was able to treat him as one of my thirty-eight pupils." And, he added, "I suppose I might have been reluctant to deal with that chapter if the other children, or I myself, <u>had looked on Ototake as</u> 'a disabled person.'"</p>		<p><u>special arrangements made for me</u></p> <p><u>Not that</u></p> <p><u>looked out for me</u></p> <p><u>in a real sense.</u></p> <p><u>the required</u></p> <p><u>downright awkward for</u></p> <p><u>were concerned about</u></p> <p><u>it gave me pause,</u></p> <p><u>thought of skipping</u></p> <p><u>had the sense that</u></p>

I should explain here that the Japanese word for “hand,” *te*, can also refer to the arm. (There is another word, *ude*, for “arm,” but we tend to use *te* just as frequently.) At the end of the unit, Sensei asked us to write about what we had done with our hand/arms that day.

Everyone reported things like “I brushed my teeth” or “I did some writing.” I put down, “I climbed onto a chair.”

Strictly speaking, you don’t climb onto a chair, you sit on it, and hands aren’t involved. But when I sit on a chair I have to hoist myself up onto the seat, and this requires holding the chair in place with my short arms. So, I wrote, “I climbed onto a chair using my *te*.”

None of the kids teased me about this. They accepted it as obvious: “It’s true, when Oto-chan sits on a chair, he uses his *te*.” Perhaps Sensei had such an outcome in mind when he tackled this unit.

### ***No Holds Barred***

As you can tell from my uppity attitude at kindergarten, I was pushy and I was stubborn, and as a result I clashed with my friends fairly often. Most of the time it went no farther than an argument (my specialty), but occasionally we came to blows. Before I

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tell you about one fight, maybe I should explain that in Japanese elementary school, the teachers often let the kids sort out disputes among themselves without intervening. And in any case they're not in the classrooms at recess, which was when this happened.

“It was your fault, Oto-chan. Say you're sorry!”

“No! It was your fault. You say sorry!”

“Oh yeah? Come on up and make me, then! I dare you!”

My adversary was standing on a desk, out of my reach, pulling faces. In a rage I rushed the desk and knocked it over, sending him tumbling off. Then I hurled myself at him.

“Hey!” he shouted. “NOW you're gonna get it!” He took a swing at me, but since his target was barely knee-high, he missed. When he switched to attacking with his feet I was a sitting duck. But there's a die-hard streak in my nature—he wasn't getting away with that.

Launching a counterattack, I grabbed his leg as he kicked at me and held on for dear life. As he struggled to break free, I hung on by the skin of my teeth. Literally.

Chomp.

“Yeowww!!”

let the kids sort out disputes

make me

pulling faces

In a rage

rushed the desk

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hurled myself at

took a swing at

switched to attacking

was a sitting duck.

a die-hard streak in my nature

Launching a counterattack

In return for being kicked around, I'd bitten him good and hard. I must have developed a stronger jaw than most people, since I often did manual tasks with my mouth. There were distinct teeth marks on his leg. He was really hurting.

When you take someone on, you don't stop to calculate the odds. In this respect, it was no different from a "normal" fight... And in this corner, Hirotada "The Fung" Ototake!?

### **Wanna Play?**

Looking back on their schooldays, most people with disabilities say that the part of the day that hurt the most was recess—the very time that ordinary children, unless they're real bookworms, would surely say is their favorite. Why is this? Because for disabled kids the forty-five to fifty minutes of a class period pass quickly enough while they sit quietly in their seats, but during breaks, when they can't join in the fun their classmates are having, they feel a greater sense of isolation. And they can't wait for recess to be over.

Did I suffer through recess? No way. Like the other children, it was the time I looked forward to most of all. You may be wondering what a kid like me looked

held on for dear life

hung on by the skin of my teeth

In return for

good and hard.

did manual tasks

take someone on

to calculate the odds

In this respect

Looking back on

the very time that

oin in the fun their classmates are having

the time I looked forward



forward to, what kind of games I played. The fact is I played the same games that ordinary grade-schoolers play—baseball, soccer, dodgeball, and the like. How in the world did I play baseball and soccer? Well, of course, I couldn't expect to do exactly what everyone else did. But that was no reason to give up on these games. All it took for me to be in on the action was some special rules. These were known as the Oto-Chan Rules, and they were invented by my classmates.

Baseball was my favorite. I held the bat under my arm and pivoted from the waist; this was my swing. And I could hit that ball. This was where an Oto-Chan rule came in: When it was my turn at bat, a friend would stand by on the other side of home plate, and the moment I connected he'd take off for the first base as an unorthodox pinch runner.

Another rule was written the day I slugged one to the back of the infield. For me, it was a long fly.

“Wow, Oto-chan, that's what homers are made of.”

“Hey! Let's decide a home run mark for Oto-chan too.”

“Yeah, good idea!”

“We get a home run when we clear the outfield, so let's make it a home run when Oto-chan clears the

to

give up on

All it took for me to be in

pivoted from the waist;

my turn at bat

take off for

what homers are made of

make it a home run

infield.”

And so a new boundary line was drawn. Koshien Stadium, where the national high school baseball championships are played, used to feature a “Lucky Zone,” made by moving the left and right outfield fences inward for the high school games. We had an “Oto-Chan Zone.”

The guys came up with all sorts of rules in our other games, too. In soccer, as everybody knows, if you net a goal, you score one point. “Okay then, if Oto-chan gets a shot in, that’s three points right there.”

Three points in soccer is a major score. One of our players would dribble past the defenders to the goal area. As the goalie came forward, my teammates would slip a pass to me, ready and waiting. All I needed to do was take a shot on an open goal and I’d have chalked up a hat trick—three points in a single game.

The craziest rule of all was introduced in dodgeball. Namely, “If Oto-chan has the ball, several members of the other team have to come within a radius of ten feet of him.” At such close range I could throw with quite a bit of force, and after a while I was able to pick off an opponent, boy or girl, with about fifty-fifty accuracy. Inside the circle, though, I didn’t stand a chance of

gets a shot in

a major score

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At such close range  
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took this for granted

<p>dodging, and so my position was always on the outside. If I hit one of the opposing team, someone was allowed into the circle in my place.</p> <p>When the guys invented these rules, <u>it was not in the spirit "Let's play with the poor disabled kid."</u> They <u>all seem to have taken it for granted that</u>, as one of their classmates, I would fight with them and play with them. And I <u>took this for granted too</u>.</p>		
<p><b>My Favorite Subject Is Phys Ed</b>  <b><i>Jungle Gymnastics</i></b></p> <p>When Sensei once asked me what my favorite subject was, to his surprise I had <u>a cocky answer</u>: "Phys ed." I wasn't kidding, though.</p> <p>Then there was the following conversation with my parents:</p> <p>Me: "If I could grow either arms or legs, which do you think I want?"</p> <p>Parents: "Hmm. We give up. Which do you want?"</p> <p>Mw: "Legs!"</p> <p>Parents: "Why? If you had arms, you could do so many things for yourself."</p> <p>Me: "I don't mind, because I don't have much trouble. But if I had legs, I could play soccer with the guys."</p>		<p><u>a cocky answer</u></p> <p><u>Obnoxious as it was to</u></p>

Obnoxious as it was to say I didn't have much trouble after all the things other people did to take care of me, at the time I was serious. That gives you an idea of how much I liked to be active.

Takagi Sensei, on the other hand, was in a quandary over phys ed. How far should he go to include me, and when should he make me watch from the sidelines? His biggest worry, he remembers, was this: It's wonderful that Ototake's so willing to try everything, but there are things he just can't do. How do I persuade him to watch at those times without hurting his feelings? This conflict lasted for some time. Meanwhile, blissfully unaware of Sensei's troubles, I was up for anything.

Phys ed class began with exercises. As Sensei watched to see what I would do, I swung my short arms and bounced up and down in time with everyone's movements. "Okay," he thought, "Ototake doesn't have to do exactly the same exercise. He should do as much as he can of what everyone else is doing." Once he realized this, he says, it was easier to give me instructions.

If everyone did two laps around the track: "You go as far as that faucet and back." When they did the high jump: "We'll keep raising the bar for everyone else, but

in a quandary over

without hurting his feelings

blissfully unaware of

began with exercises

in time with

～に（調子を）合わせて

do as much as he can of

keep lowering it

when it's your turn we'll keep lowering it. See if you can pass under it without touching." Since having to sit out the action was what I hated most, I was delighted whenever I was given a new task.

Sometimes I figured out for myself how to join in. The high bar is popular in primary school PE. It looks like the apparatus that Olympic gymnasts use to do giant swings and handstand (only theirs is eight feet high and ours was more like three or four). But Sensei and I thought that this was one item I would have to miss, and I'd drop out of line and go over the jungle gym, where I'd cheer the others on in their struggles.

Then it hits me: "The bottom rung of the jungle gym is just about the height on me."

I tried gripping it under my armpits. When I clamped down, my body was lifted into the air. Looking over at the rest of the class, I saw them hard at work pulling themselves up till the bar at their waists, then swinging their legs back and forth. And so, gripping my bar, I tried kicking off against the ground. Wham—my body flew forward, then the rebound pulled me back. By repeating this, I could swing like a pendulum. From a jungle gym—ta da!—a gymnast's high bar.

having to sit out the action

what I hated most

The high bar

do giant swings and handstand

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The bottom rung

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When I clamped down

ぐっと力を入れたら、  
clamp down  
締め付ける・弾圧する

Looking over at

～のほうを見たら

### *Up, Up, and Away*

In January, when the class started jump-rope, Takagi Sensei's woes began again: how to include me? Although I'd been having a blast in phys ed so far, once the others started jumping rope I would get depressed every time PE came around. The funny thing is, in the end I was calling out to my friends, "Hey, c'mon and jump rope."

One day, sensei placed me between two of my friends who were turning a rope and told me, "Now when it comes, jump the way you do in the exercises." I tried several times, but it was no good. Just as Sensei himself was about to give up, the timing clicked and I managed to clear the rope just once. I wouldn't call it a jump, exactly, it was more like I made it just far enough off the ground for the rope to pass under me. All the same, Sensei was generous with his praise: "That's terrific, Ototake. Keep going! Watch your timing. Up, up!" I waited for the rope, chanting "Up, up" under my breath to get the timing right. Now I made it over three or four times.

That was my limit, though. It took a good deal of strength to launch my whole body off the ground by springing on my short legs. It wasn't like me to

I saw

～が見えた

the rebound pulled me back

started jump-rope,

having a blast in

started jumping rope

was calling out to

Just as Sensei himself was about to

the timing clicked

it was more like

All the same,

under my breath

whine, even when Sensei asked if I was tired, but after jumping rope I was always wiped out.

And yet, what a difference practice can make.

“Sensei, I can jump rope twenty-three times.”

“Really? How did you manage that?”

“I do it with Miya-chan. Watch, Sensei.”

My partner took up her position facing me, holding our rope at the ready. At the signal “Get set, go!” it started twirling. I had to jump, of course, but it’d be a no-go if my partner tripped, which was why I’d asked an expert skipper like Miya-chan to practice with me.

Up, up, and away. You could tell we’d been practicing. We were in perfect unison.

“Bravo, both of you! Keep up the good work and see if you can get past thirty.”

We buckled down to more practice. A skip, and a short rest. Another attempt, another rest. I don’t know how Miya-chan put up with such leisurely training sessions.

Thirty-four times. Our best yet. It might have been my imagination, but even Miya-chan seemed proud when she said, “Shall we show Sensei?” We went and found him to demonstrate the results of our intensive training. Perhaps because we were tense, we only managed twenty-nine.

get the timing right

It wasn’t like me to whine

wiped out

what a difference practice can make.

holding our rope at the ready

it’d be a no-go

which was why

in perfect unison

buckled down to

It might have been my imagination

was beaming

Still, Sensei was beaming as he said, “Well done!” Thanks to Miya-chan, I had umpteen times more fun than the other kids jumping rope.

### ***Hakone, Here We Come!***

Around the same time that we started jump-rope, something called a “marathon card” was handed out during PE. It was a route map of the famous Tokyo-Hakone long-distance relay race. Each time we ran the “marathon” (once around the school grounds), we got to color in one more stage on our maps.

This was another of those occasions when Sensei worried about how to include me. After thinking it over for several days, he made a proposition to the class: “How would it be if Ototake colors in four stages when he runs one lap?”

“Okaaay,” they chorused.

“Ototake, will that work for you too?”

“Yes, I’ll run every morning.”

You could say that Sensei had thought up an Oto-Chan Rule. This way I could run the marathon too without falling far behind in my coloring progress. I was raring to go.

The next day, I was Hakone-bound. The earlier I arrived at school in the morning, the more time I had

umpteen times more fun than

Around the same time that

long-distance relay race

the school grounds

color in

another of those occasions

After thinking it over for

colors in four stages

runs one lap

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was raring to

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to run. I took to nagging my mother to hurry up as we got ready to leave. But there was a worried look on Takagi Sensei's face as he watched me run.

Normally, being acutely sensitive to danger, I would never go near a crowd. I was such a stickler about this that, no matter how hot the weather or how thirsty I was, I would do without a drink if there was a bunch of people around the drinking fountain. In the marathon, though, we all followed the same route around the school. Since I run by shuffling my butt along in a sitting position, it would be hard for kids coming up from behind to see me. I had to be especially alert for those who were talking as they ran. The taller the kids—like the boys in the senior grades—the less likely they would be to notice me. Takagi Sensei was concerned that I might accidentally be sent flying.

As it turned out, though, he needn't have feared, because some of the older boys—sixth graders, no less—were worried about the same thing, and they ran with me. Since the pace didn't even amount to jogging for them, they took turns doing their own laps for the day, then circled back when they'd finished for a changing of the guard. So that other kids wouldn't kick me by mistake, the sixth graders gave me an

the more time I had

took to

a worried look on

such a stickler about this

that

In the marathon,

in a sitting position

kids coming up from behind

were talking as they ran

The taller \_\_\_\_\_, the less likely

be sent flying

no less

even amount to jogging

escort on all four sides.

A recent heavy snow had left muddy patches in the playground along the route. They swept me up and over these, saying, “You’ll get your butt wet.” They were a real running bodyguard team. Like me, Takagi Sensei was delighted.

Through this combination of Sensei’s ideas, my classmates’ cooperation, and the older students’ thoughtfulness, I was able to enjoy phys ed without ever feeling discouraged.

Sensei told me later that when he proposed the Four Stages Per Lap Rule, he was afraid that other children who weren’t good at running might object. But, as I’ve said, the whole class agreed. We’d spent the better part of a year together by then, and they had all come to understand me. They knew, “If you give him a head start, Oto-chan can do whatever we’re doing.”

In fact, it may well have been Takagi Sensei who was taught this. Because it was the kids who invented the original Oto-Chan Rules.

a changing of

an escort on all four sides.

swept me up and over these

They were a

give him a head start

## **The Taste of Rice Balls**

*Hey, That’s Cheating!*

I always looked forward to our school trips, which happened twice a year. Part of the fun, of course, was going on an outing with my friends, but an added thrill for me was the train ride. Since my family mostly used the car when we went out, I rarely had a chance to take the train. And so a school trip—getting to go on an expedition with Sensei and my friends and to ride the train—was the best treat ever.

In the lower grades, our excursions to nearby parts and zoos were easy enough in a wheelchair. But each year the programs were becoming a little more demanding. And with the upcoming fourth-grade trip, the pinnacle of difficulty lay ahead.

We heard the news as soon as school went back in the spring: “For our next outing, we’re going to climb a mountain.” What’s more, we were told, it was a tough climb even for an adult. And—the words formed themselves in my head—even tougher in a wheelchair ... This time, I thought, no matter how much I wanted to be in on everything, there was no way I could go. I’d have to get my mother to tell Sensei that I would miss the trip.

But Sensei wouldn’t hear of it. “I’m sure it’ll work out once we get there,” he told my mother. “Especially since it wouldn’t do to leave him behind halfway up.”

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In the lower grades

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reconnaissance trip

When Sensei went on the teachers' reconnaissance trip, however, the seriousness of the situation hit him. It was one steep mountain. For longer trips like these outings, I've always used a lightweight, collapsible manual wheelchair instead of the power chair, which is heavy and tricky to maneuver. But even with the lighter chair, some of the teachers doubted that we could make it. I heard they carried on a discussion all along the trail: "We'll never get the wheelchair up here," "We might manage it on a slope like this," and so on.

Strictly speaking, the reconnaissance party was supposed to do things like locating toilets, choosing rest spots, and making sure there was an area where everyone could be marshaled into line. But before they knew it, even the teachers of the other fourth-grade classes had joined in exploring one thing: "How do we go about bringing Ototake with us?" Room 4's teacher, a big man, offered: "I'll carry him on my back if it comes to that. Bring him along and don't worry." One way or another, it seems, the entire fourth grade had braced themselves to take me with them to the top.

The next week, there was a class meeting. A weird class meeting: the topic was "What to do about

tricky to maneuver

carried on a discussion

be marshaled into line

if it comes to that.

One way or another

had braced themselves to

Oto-chan?”

Sensei: “For our school trip, we’re going to Mount Kobo in Kanagawa Prefecture. We’ll be climbing the mountain. All right, everybody?”

Class: “All riiiiight!”

Sensei: “I’ve just been there with the other teachers, and the going’s really tough. What do you think? Still all right?”

Class: “All riiiiight!”

Sensei:” But remember Ototake is in a wheelchair. The other day, his mother told me he won’t be coming on the trip this time. What do you think?”

One of the class: “Hey, that’s cheating!”

This was such an unexpected reply that Takagi sensei couldn’t hide his surprise.

One of the class: “If it’s such a tough mountain to climb, it’s not fair that only Oto-chan gets out of going!”

Cries of “that’s right!” went up from the other kids.

They were the ones who would have to work extra hard if I went. It meant taking a wheelchair up a peak that was difficult enough to begin with.

And yet, what they came out with was “It’s not fair that only Oto-chan gets out of going!” It just didn’t make sense to them that this one member of the class

the going’ s really tough

told me he won’ t be coming

such an unexpected reply

that

didn’ t make sense to them

be excused from

be excused from an event. Which is how I, too, came to challenge Mount Kobo.

***Teamwork***

The heavens didn't smile on us. It poured on the morning of the big day. The plan in case of wet weather was to postpone the trip to the next day—so the downpour meant that, even if the next day turned out perfect, we would have to hike up a muddy trail.

On account of the rain, also, we lost the backup we'd been counting on. Ordinarily my mother would accompany me on class trips, but for the climb my father, being stronger, had arranged to take the day off from work. The following day, however, he was scheduled to go to Nagasaki on business, and there was no way he could take the time off.

With so much at stake, it rained. The fact that it cleared up by noon, turning into quite a nice day, only made me resent the early morning downpour all the more.

The weather stayed fine for the outing a day later. But there stood the mighty Mount Kobo, looming above us as if to say, "Climb me? Hah!" Even Sensei, who said, "I'm sure it'll work out once we get there," admits that suddenly he didn't feel so sure of reaching

a muddy trail

take the time off.

With so much at stake

the early morning downpour

looming above us as if to say,

worried half out of my mind

the top. As for me, I was worried half out of my mind: up there in a wheelchair? Was that possible? Mount Kobo looked so formidable, you had to wonder.

As soon as we set off, the trail headed steeply uphill for about five to ten minutes. It was not only steep but very narrow, and the ground was soft after the rain. There were spots where the tires of my wheelchair nearly got stuck. When the chair was simply pushed, we didn't make much headway. The front wheels had to be lifted and the chair half-carried up the slope at a rush. The next thing I knew, even the vice principal was lending a hand.

This wasn't an encouraging start. Could we really make it all the way to the top? Never having done any mountain-climbing before, I was knocked for a loop by the first slope. It looked like it ought to be named The Heart-Stopper, and my own heart felt ready to burst with anxiety.

For a while after that, apart from some ups and downs, the going was fairly easy compared to that first precipitous part. Since Takagi Sensei is not especially strong himself, he saved his strength for the really rough places and left the level stretches of the trail to the children.

By fourth grade, some boys are pretty big. Daisuke

didn't make much headway

なかなか進まなかった

at a rush

一気に

make it all the way to

～まで登り切る

knocked for a loop

度肝を抜かれた

ready to burst with

anxiety.

the level stretches of the

trail

and Shin, who were the biggest and strongest in the class, took charge of the chair. But big as they were, we're talking about the strength of ten-year-olds. On the bumpy trail, progress was slow with just the two of them pushing. We needed someone to go around and lift the front wheels when they bogged down, and clear stones and twigs out of the way. That role was taken on by some of the smaller kids who were quick off the mark.

Miya-chan took up a position on my right, Takayuki on my left, and when the wheels hit a snag they whisked them up and over. The two of them were in perfect sync. When the path steepened, Takagi Sensei and the other teachers took over pushing and we charged uphill. It was great teamwork.

Everyone was red in the face. Their necks were soaked with sweat, and because of the mushy ground they had mud up to their knees. "All-out" doesn't begin to describe the effort they were putting in for me.

I was choked up with a mixture of gratitude and wanting to apologize to everyone. This, plus the frustration of not being able to do anything myself, left me not even knowing what to say. I wished I could jump down and join in pushing the chair from behind. But since that wasn't about to happen, I just prayed

they bogged down

quick off the mark.

hit a snag

whisked them up and over

in perfect sync.

we charged uphill

red in the face

"All-out" doesn't begin to describe

was choked up with a mixture of

left me not even knowing



<p>and prayed that we'd reach the top <u>any moment now</u>.</p> <p>It was a long way to the top. <u>It felt as if</u> we'd been walking for three days already. But, at last, light appeared through the trees up ahead. Everybody <u>put on a burst of speed</u>. The last spurt brought us to the summit, and all at once <u>the view spread out before our eyes</u>. We had conquered Mount Kobo.</p> <p>"We did it!"</p> <p>"Sensei, look, look!"</p> <p>"Wow!"</p> <p>Shouts of excitement went up here and there. Some kids <u>sprawled on the ground</u>. Some drained their water bottles <u>without stopping for breath</u>. Some came over to shake hands and say, "We did it, hey, Oto-chan?" Whatever they were doing, they all had a great look on their faces.</p> <p>I knew I ought to go around and thank them, but I was worn out myself. For some reason I was <u>too limp to move</u>. I guess I must have been really pumped up in the wheelchair. <u>Which goes to show I was with everyone in spirit</u>. If I were asked, "What's the best food you've ever tasted?" it would be a cinch: "The rice balls I ate at the top of Mount Kobo."</p>		<p><u>any moment now.</u></p> <p><u>It felt as if</u></p> <p><u>put on a burst of</u></p> <p><u>the view spread out before</u></p> <p><u>sprawled on the ground</u></p> <p><u>without stopping for</u> <u>breath</u></p> <p><u>too limp to move</u></p>
<p><b>The V Sign on My Back</b></p>		

### *The Nightmare Returns*

In the locker rooms at school, for example, or when I'm away from home and someone helps me take a bath, most people have caught their breath when they see my back. They're struck by the painful-looking scars which run from my shoulders to the small of my back, as if someone had painted on a big letter V. These are the marks of a series of operations I went through in fourth grade.

I had my first operation while in kindergarten. Since bones grow faster than soft tissue, if something hadn't been done, the bones of my arms would have burst through and popped out the ends. Running sores did in fact begin to develop at the tips of my arms when I was five, and it was decided to operate.

The surgeon took some bone from my hip and inserted it in wedges at the ends of my arm bones to prevent further growth. Being so young at the time I don't have much memory of all this, but my parents remember it only too clearly. The strain of watching me go into the operating room. The seemingly endless wait for the surgery to end. And the months I spent encased in plaster casts in a hospital bed. They didn't ever want to go through that again.

have caught their breath

the painful-looking scars

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V.

burst through and popped

out

The strain of watching me

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for

encased in plaster casts

The year I turned ten

It wasn't over, however. The year I turned ten, changes started to occur in my arms. Where they'd been as round as potatoes, they gradually became pointed. At first, I didn't let it bother me. But after while I couldn't ignore it because the ends began to hurt.

It was a stabbing pain like nothing I'd ever known. We went to the hospital and had X rays taken, and sure enough, we were told that the bones were trying to push their way through again. I had entered a growth period and my bones were developing fast.

It hurt worse every day. Just the touch of my clothes brushing against my arms when I was changing would send sharp pains shooting up them. I was given special permission not to change for PE, but I must have really loved that class, because even with my arms hurting so badly it was the only one I never wanted to miss.

Soon, however, the problem began to interfere even with PE and playtime. First, I could no longer play my favorite ball games. There was no way I could handle a ball when even the touch of clothing against my arms was acutely painful. In the end, I couldn't even run. Because I run with a kind of hopping motion on my butt, my whole body moves up and down, and the jolt

like nothing I'd ever known

had X rays taken

a growth period

pains shooting up them

the jolt each time I landed  
着地する衝撃

It felt as if wires were being driven into me and

each time I landed made my arms throb. It felt as if wires were being driven into me and twisted around.

Since being active was such a big part of my life, it was slow torture to lose the things I could do, one by one. Finally, the situation we'd been dreading arose. The tips began to fester. A new round of surgery was decided on. It was scheduled for my fourth-grade summer vacation.

### ***The Surgeon Is Ready (I'm Not)***

My having no arms or legs gave the doctors all sorts of logistical problems in preparing for the surgery. First, there was the general anesthetic. Being small, apparently I require a different amount of anesthetic from other people. Since even a slight error in the dose can cause a serious accident, the anesthesiologist had a nerve-racking time.

Next, the blood samples and IVs. Ordinarily, I'm told it's easier to insert the needle into one of the blood vessels in the arms, but on me they're not there. The doctor stood with his arms folded, deep in thought. Then he had a bright idea which made me turn pale.

"I've got it. Remember when I took your pulse, I put my hand on your neck?"

That's right. He'd decided to use a neck vein to draw blood and put in the IVs. This was one thing I would

twisted around.

the situation we'd been dreading

began to fester.

logistical problems

施術上の問題

the general anesthetic

even a slight error in the dose

had a nerve-racking time  
神経をすり減らす思いをした

the blood samples and IVs

insert the needle into

stood with his arms folded

never get used to. The needle comes in right next to your face. No matter how many times it was done, I was scared to death.

On a hot midsummer's day—my fifth day in the hospital, but all too soon for me—it was time for the surgery. Somehow none of it seemed real until, with several hours to go, I had to put on that cloth thing they called a hospital gown. I thought, with a wrench, “It’s happening.” Anxiety washed over me in waves.

This operation would be different from the last. Muscle tissue taken from my back would be grafted onto my left arm, wrapping around the tip. The idea was that muscle, which grows faster than the other soft tissues, would be able to keep pace with the bone.

I was placed on the kind of stretcher on wheels that I’d often seen on TV, and was on my way to the operating room. Tears threatened to spill over when I parted from my parents, but I squeezed them back; it wouldn’t look good to cry. Thinking about it now, I’m impressed that I could worry about something like that. But after I was wheeled past my parents and the doors flapped shut, a single tear trickled down my cheek. For all my show of toughness, I was still a ten-year-old. I was scared.

Sensing this, a nurse spoke to me. “Are you scared of

made me turn pale

was scared to death

with a wrench

Anxiety washed over me in waves.

be grafted onto

The idea was that

keep pace with

stretcher on wheels

Tears threatened to spill over

I’ m impressed that

was wheeled past my parents

the operation?”

“Mm.”

“Everything will be all right. As soon as you get into the operating room they’ll give you some medicine to make you go to sleep, and when you wake up it’ll all be over. You won’t feel a thing.”

Just as she’d said, I was put under at once. As I lost consciousness, I felt the world spinning away from me, or me being sucked away somewhere. For some reason, a conversation between a nurse and a doctor that was going on right beside me is firmly fixed in my memory.

“How old is your son now, Doctor?”

“Mine? He’s thirteen. Already in middle school.”

“Is he as big as that already? What was his name again?”

“Ryutaro. Lately he’s started complaining that it’s got such complicated characters in it, in an exam it takes him way too long to wri----”

When I came to, it was evening. The operation had taken longer than the scheduled three hours. It was, as far as they could tell, a success.

### *The Blues*

In that particular hospital, unlike some where a

was put under

felt the world spinning  
away

is firmly fixed in my  
memory.

such \_\_\_\_\_ complicated  
characters

it takes him way too long to

had taken longer than the  
scheduled three hours

family member can stay and help take care of the patient around the clock, the nurse did everything, and visitors—even parents—were only allowed between 3:00 and 7:00 P.M. The day of the operation was no exception; at seven o'clock both my parents had to leave. "We'll take care of him now," they were told. "Please go on home."

I was too woozy after the surgery to care, but as one day passed and then another, I grew more and more lonely. As seven o'clock rolled around, I would kick up a fuss when I heard that my parents had to go, putting them on the spot by pleading, "Stay another minute." My mother remembers how hard it was to tear herself away.

The loneliness was partly due to my feeling weak after the operation, of course, but the main reason was my contact with the other kids—or lack of it. I wasn't ignored or picked on, but this was a hospital. Patients came and went all the time, and even if I got to know someone a little, they soon checked out. In the orthopedic ward where I was, many children came in for things like broken bones, and their stays were short. For a long term patient like me, it certainly wasn't an easy place to make friends.

And, it mustn't be forgotten, there was my disability.

around the clock

too woozy after the surgery

to care

would kick up a fuss when

putting them on the spot

how hard it was to tear herself away.

partly due to my feeling weak

In the orthopedic ward

for things like

make friends.

I don't mean to say that disabled people can't make friends. But nothing could have been farther from the minds of the other children, they were so startled at seeing me for the first time I was sure I could make friends if only they had a chance to get used to me, like the kids at school, but there wasn't time for that. They all left before we got to know each other.

Another thing making me miserable was that the hospital—perhaps afraid of shrieking youngsters tearing around—had a rule that barred visitors under the age of fourteen. Some of my friends wanted to visit, but that never came about. Since playing with them was my chief purpose and pleasure in life, not seeing them for nearly two months was as lonely as being plunked down in the middle of a vast desert.

Under these conditions, my usual high spirits vanished during my stay in the hospital. I was very discouraged. One day a nurse who noticed me moping stopped for a chat. I'd gone for so long with hardly anyone to talk to that I talked and talked. I told her about the operation, my school, life in the hospital, my favorite cartoon shows, and how lonely I was.

She listened with a twinkling smile from beginning to end, and when I'd finished she put her hand gently on my shoulder. How long since I'd felt such warmth?

nothing could have been farther from

that never came about

for nearly two months

as lonely as being plunked down in

a nurse who noticed me moping

I'd gone for so long

that I talked and talked

from beginning to end

That faint glow from my



That faint glow from my shoulder made me feel secure, and the tension snapped. Giving way to all the tears I'd been holding back, I burst into loud wails.

"I want to go home."

I was in a state where a small act of kindness touched me deeply. I felt the warmth of a caring gesture. I'd never been very appreciative of all that my friends and teachers did for me, and this episode may have taught me a lesson.

Takagi Sensei, who was hearing reports of how I was doing from my mother, says he could hardly stand it. When school started he proposed to the class that they all write me a letter. Their replies took him completely by surprise.

"Sensei, I've been passing around an exercise book and getting everyone to write a few lines."

"We're folding paper cranes. We're going to make a thousand cranes between the two of us."

"Yesterday I took some candies to the Ototake's house for him to eat in the hospital."

For the rest of my stay, I had everyone's good wishes to keep my spirits up.

The two months passed. The stitches were taken out and the plaster came off. I gazed fearfully at my back in the mirror. The scar extended from the tip of my

shoulder

and the tension snapped

Giving way to

burst into loud wails

was in a state where

d never been very appreciative of

proposed to the class that

been passing around

between the two of us

and ran crosswise down my back like the slash of a sword.

<p>arm, passed under my armpit, <u>and ran crosswise down my back like the slash of a sword.</u></p> <p>My father said, “You know, you’ll be having the operation on your right arm during winter vacation, Hiro. Then you’ll have the same scar on the other side, too. <u>It’ll make a V. V for Victory.</u>”</p> <p>Instead of being hard to bear, that scar began to <u>seem more like a medal.</u></p>		<p><u>It’ ll make a V</u></p> <p><u>seem more like a medal</u></p>
<p><b>Otohiro Printing Inc.</b></p> <p><i>Oka sensei</i></p> <p>In the fifth grade, we got a new teacher. He was <u>still in his twenties</u>, <u>a strapping</u> five-eleven former college football player. He was the one who had offered to carry me on his back on our hike up Mount Kobo. Being close to his students in age helped him understand the way we felt, and he was extremely popular.</p> <p>When I entered Yohga Elementary School, two teachers had asked to have me in their class. One was Takagi Sensei, the other was my new teacher, Oka Sensei. At that time Oka Sensei was still a “Freshman” himself and the principal decided he was too young to take on a child who required special</p>		<p><u>still in his twenties</u></p> <p><u>a strapping</u></p>

attention. But when Takagi sensei retired, Oka Sensei, as the other candidate, agreed to take over.

I was a little tense about beginning the fifth grade with a new teacher. We started with a big cleanup (a regular part of school life in Japan). I was holding a cleaning rag under my leg, the way I always did, and wiping the floor. Since I couldn't hold it with my arms, I couldn't wipe walls or desks, which left only the floor. Even then I could only use a dry cloth; with a wet one, the legs and seat of my pants would get soaked. Seeing me doing this for the first time, Oka Sensei asked me to come to the teachers' room. "We need to have a talk," he said.

Wondering what was up—was I in trouble all of a sudden—I followed behind him. When we arrived at his desk, he plunked himself down on the floor. The height difference of three feet or so shrank and we were on the same eye level at last. It was the first time I'd talked with him man to man.

### ***The Strange Contraption***

Sensei took some sort of machine from his desk and placed it on the floor in front of me. It was a word processor.

The cleaning jobs everyone does are a problem for

was a little tense about

was holding a cleaning rag

the legs and seat of my pants

Seeing me doing this

plunked himself down on

The height difference of three feet or so

we were on the same eye level at last

***The Strange Contraption***

placed it on the floor

you, aren't they?"

"Mm."

"And there are other things you can't do without someone to help you, aren't there?"

"Mm."

"Well, how'd you like to do your share for the class using this?"

In a sense, this was the opposite of Takagi Sensei's approach. Instead of opting for no special treatment, for having me do what everyone else did as far as I could. Oka sensei took the attitude, "If he can't do the same things, we'll find a trade-off." More than a difference in approach was involved here, I think, Oka Sensei was probably allowing for the fact that, as my classmates developed physically by leaps and bounds, there were going to be fewer and fewer things that I could do just like the others.

He was also aware of the fact that, in day-to-day school life, there were sure to be lots of things that I would need to ask him or my classmates to help me with. No doubt they would be happy to help. But how would I feel about having to ask all the time? What if I ended up feeling wimpy and helpless? He wanted to give me a job that only I could do, so that at times when I might start feeling small I could say, holding

do your share

the opposite of

Instead of opting for no special treatment

opting for

a trade-off.

**歩み寄り：相殺取引**

developed physically by leaps and bounds

be fewer and fewer things

aware of the fact that

No doubt they

feeling wimpy and helpless

my head high, “But I do this for everyone.” That inspired him to put me in charge of the word processor as my contribution to the class.

The words “I’ll do it.” were out of my mouth before I had time to think whether I could operate the keyboard with my arms or master the machine (not exactly being a whiz with technology). No eleven-year-old could have resisted this strange contraption that made letters and characters appear when you tapped its keys.

The next day, Sensei launched Otohiro Printing Inc.—a contraction of my name, which in the Japanese order (surname first) is Ototake Hirotsada. The logo was neatly lettered on a big manila envelope. “You’re the president. Go for it,” he said as he handed me the envelope, which would be used for receiving and delivering orders.

### ***The Secretary***

I was enthralled by the word processor. Partly because it was fun to fool around with, but more because I felt I had a mission: “Sensei has trusted me with this huge job. I’ve got to learn it quickly so I can be useful to him.”

It didn’t take too long before I could type up a draft

feeling wimpy and helpless

I could say, holding my head high

That inspired him to

before I had time to think whether

a contraction of my name

The logo was neatly lettered

he said as he handed me

was enthralled by

Partly because it was \_\_\_\_\_, but more because I felt

has trusted me with

so I can be

that sensei had dashed off in longhand, lay it out, and produce a decorative printout. Each day there were more opportunities for “Otohiro products” to make their debut in the classroom—notices for the bulletin board, handouts, details of class trips, etc.

It seems my job performance exceeded Sensei’s expectations. After a while I started receiving orders from other teachers as well as the music, art, and home ec departments. Perhaps, without my knowing, Oka sensei had been bragging, “Well, I do have an efficient secretary, you know.”

Looking back, I wouldn’t be surprised to find I was working harder than the kids with the cleaning chores. But I was having so much fun with the word processor that I didn’t care. In fact, I reveled in the astonished looks I got the first time I delivered the finished goods to teachers who, when they placed their orders, had only half believed that a limbless child could really do the job. And then there were the cries from my classmates: “Wow! Did you make this, Oto?”

Oka sensei must have been anxious at first. I expect he worried whether he was doing the right thing in deciding from the start that certain things were beyond me and giving me a different task. I might have taken it as discrimination. He also risked

a draft that sensei had dashed off in longhand

produce a decorative printout

notices for

Sensei’s expectations

home ec

Looking back,

was having so much fun with

I reveled in the astonished looks I got

delivered the finished goods to

taken it as discrimination

<p>planting the notion that “Ototake is special” in the other children’s head. But he took those chances.</p> <p>Underlying his decision there was probably the idea, “We must <u>make a clear distinction between</u> what he can and can’t do.” This becomes very important when a person with a disability goes out into the world and chooses an occupation. In giving me an education which looked not just to the present but far into the future, he <u>was no different from</u> Takagi sensei.</p> <p>The Otohoro Printing envelope <u>was worn to tatters</u> by all its comings and goings. I still have it carefully put away.</p>		<p><u>risked planting the notion that</u></p> <p><u>Underlying his decision</u></p> <p><u>make a clear distinction between</u></p> <p><u>was no different from</u></p> <p><u>was worn to tatters</u></p>
<p><b>The Early Morning Runner</b></p> <p><i>My First Race</i></p> <p>Since Yogha held its Sports Day (a kind of combination festival and track meet) in May, <u>we’d no sooner begun</u> the new school year than we started rehearsing. Until now, I <u>had sat out</u> the running races. I <u>did take part</u>, somehow, in things like dancing. I also joined in the game where teams compete to toss the most balls into a basket at the top of a pole. Since I couldn’t throw high enough, it was my job to gather the balls that fell on the ground and <u>pass them to</u> my classmates.</p>		<p><u>we’ d no sooner begun</u></p> <p><u>had sat out</u></p> <p><u>did take part</u></p> <p><u>pass them to</u></p>

As the one thing I really hated at school was being left out, I didn't like Sports Day much, to tell the truth. And to make matters worse, we were seated in sections by grade; when it was our turn to perform, I couldn't bear having to cheer everyone on from the empty bleachers.

And now my fifth Sports Day was approaching. One day, Oka Sensei came to me with an idea. When he asked, "What will you do this year?" I didn't know what he meant at first. Then he added, "Would you like to run in a race?"

He may have been encouraged to let me take part by the fact that I'd grown quite strong. I broke into a delighted grin, "I'll run." I said.

But it would take me at least two minutes to run a hundred meters. Even the slowest of the other kids took about twenty seconds. And so Sensei proposed, "How about if you start from halfway, Hiro? From the fifty-meter mark?" It bothered me a little, but since I wasn't confident about running the whole distance, I agreed.

I admire his courage. One reason why I hadn't been able to take part in track events before now was this: there was no guarantee that some of the spectators wouldn't take one look at me shuffling my butt and

was being left out

didn' t like Sports Day much

And to make matters worse

cheer everyone on from the empty bleachers

run in a race

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Even the slowest of the other kids

How about if

from halfway,

before now

there was no guarantee that



say, “Why are they making a child like that run in front of everybody? The poor boy. It’s very insensitive of the school.” To my mind, it’s this attitude that is discriminatory, but perhaps, it’s inevitable in Japan, where people tend to think “poor fellow” when they see a disabled person. But Oka sensei didn’t yield an inch to that way of thinking. As he saw it, “It’s not the spectators’ feelings that count.”

### ***My Best Friend***

I was great pals with a boy in my class named Minoru, who lived nearby. He was a really nice kid. After we entered fifth grade he gave me practically all the personal help I needed. He was also a first-rate baby-sitter on whom the neighborhood mothers depended. He had simple honesty written all over him.

Like many Japanese elementary schools, Yohga required students who walked to school from the same area to come in a group. There were no sixth graders on our block, and so, though only a fifth grader, it was steady, responsible Minoru who was asked to lead us.

I’m reminded of something that happened in our last year at middle school. That autumn, practice interviews were held to help students prepare to apply to private high schools. We all had to do one, whether

very insensitive of

it’ s this attitude that

didn’ t yield an inch to

“It’ s not the spectators’ feelings that count.

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entered fifth grade

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in a group

and so,

I’ m reminded of something that

practice interviews were

we were applying or not.

The principal, playing interviewer, asked me to name a person I respected. A model answer would have been along the lines of “my parents,” or a historical figure like Hideyo Noguchi, the bacteriologist, or Helen Keller. However, I hadn’t worked on my interview skills because I wasn’t trying for a private school, and I was stuck. After a pause, I hit on an answer.

“My classmate Minoru.”

The principal was obviously surprised. “Hm ... why is that?”

“You may not know, sir, but he’s a wonderful person. People our age tend to be wrapped up in their own problems, but he’s able to think of others first, and I respect him for it.”

At the end of the interview, the principal said, “I know what you mean about your friend. He’s a fine young man with a kind heart.”

I don’t want to give the impression that Minoru was a boring straight-arrow kind of guy, though. We used to hang out and do dumb things together.

We hung out in a threesome (people called us “the Terrible Trio”) with another classmate who lived in the apartment building opposite mine. He was a different

held to

be wrapped up in

think of others first

with a kind heart

a boring straight-arrow

kind of guy

hang out and do dumb things together

in a threesome

type from Minoru: assertive, a born leader and attention-getter, a big man in class who ran for every committee. He plunged right into everything at full tilt. One day, he brought us an interesting proposal.

“They say there’s gobs of money dropped on the ground the day after the shrine fair.” I’d never heard of this, but he could be onto something. “We’ll have to get up early, though,” he continued, “to beat the rush.” Listening to him, Minoru and I began to get a gleam in our eyes, and before we knew it we’d planned a scavenger hunt for the day after the fair.

The carnival was over. There we were at 6:30 A.M., sitting in a row on the stone steps of Yohga Shrine with Cokes and long faces.

“So where’s all the money?”

“The shrine guys must have got it when they swept up at dawn.”

“There was nothing but bottle caps. We’re out the price of these Cokes.”

Even as we grumbled, I was happy. We may not have found any money, but I was so happy to have these buddies to do dumb things with that I didn’t care. It was good just knowing they were there.

But to get back to Sports Day. When I was given the chance to take part in the race, my vanity wouldn’t

a different type from  
Minoru

at full tilt  
真っ逆さまに

gobs of money dropped on

be onto something

to beat the rush.

get a gleam in our eyes,

a scavenger hunt for

sitting in a row

with Cokes and long faces.

nothing but

to have these buddies to do

dumb things with

allow me to look like a klutz in front of all those people. When you run by dragging your butt there's no way you can do it with style, but even at that age, I guess, the need to look good was a factor.

I must have read too many comic books about aspiring boxers, because my first thought was “early morning training!” I'd never tried to run fifty meters nonstop before, but I figured I should be able to go the distance if I built up my stamina by running first thing every morning.

Since Minoru lived nearby, I invited him along for moral support. Two or three weeks before sports Day we began our crash training program, meeting at 6:30 for a run around the block. This took me half an hour. Except when it rained, we went out every day.

I was brimming with confidence. With all the training I'd put in, I was sure I could do myself credit when it came to the real thing. By now I could hardly wait for the race, and I didn't mind getting up at the crack of dawn day after day.

For Minoru, though, these “runs” were barely walking speed, plus there were rest stops. It was no training for him—it was more like an early morning stroll around the block. Yet he never looked reluctant and never once complained. When I arrived at our

It was good just knowing  
  
look like a klutz in front of  
  
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for moral support.  
  
our crash training program,  
  
Except when  
  
was brimming with  
  
do myself credit

meeting place at 6:30, he would be standing there waiting for me as if it were nothing special. Smiling as usual.

### *My Debut*

The big day arrived. The weather couldn't have been better—gentle May sunshine in a cloudless sky. Long before the hour of the fifth grade's hundred meters, my heart was hammering with excitement at my Sports Day debut. And then it was my turn. When a line was drawn at the fifty-meter mark, there was a look on people's faces that said “Huh?” I trotted out to take my mark. There was a buzz among the crowd. I felt kind of like a star.

At the sound of the pistol we were off. The other five runners closed the gap in the blink of an eye and left me in the dust as we rounded the curve. As I've said, even the slow kids could do the hundred meters in under twenty seconds. In other words, after twenty seconds there was no one but me on the track. It was a one-man show. I could hear shouts of “Go! Go!” Amid the applause that was gradually swelling. It made me a bit self-conscious, but I still enjoyed it.

Coming into the last ten meters, though, I was pooped out and slowing down. At that moment, Oka

barely walking speed

at our meeting place

be standing there waiting for

couldn't have been better

the fifth grade's hundred meters

was hammering with

a line was drawn

a look on people's faces

take my mark

in the blink of an eye

as we rounded the curve

<p>sensei's voice rang out: "Don't rest, run!" My joy at being in the race suddenly came back to me and <u>gave me a final burst of strength</u>.</p> <p>I <u>crossed the finish line</u> over twenty seconds behind the others. But I <u>felt an enormous sense of fulfillment</u> at having gotten there. To the applause of the crowd, I <u>lined up behind the banner that read "6<sup>th</sup>."</u> I was probably the only child in sixth place who looked as thrilled as if he'd won first prize.</p> <p>Before I went home, Oka Sensei asked, "Will you be running again next year?"</p> <p>Like a shot, I answered, "Yes, sir!"</p>		<p><u>made me a bit self-conscious</u></p> <p><u>pooped out and slowing down</u></p> <p><u>gave me a final burst of</u></p> <p><u>I crossed the finish line</u></p> <p><u>felt an enormous sense of fulfillment</u></p> <p><u>lined up behind the banner that read "6<sup>th</sup>."</u></p>
<p><b>Kanji Champion</b></p> <p><i>For Extra Credit</i></p> <p>Oka Sensei was a famous "idea man." He reserved the seat nearest the door for wrongdoers to <u>sit and think things over</u>; it was known as Devil's Island. When you left something at home, the rule was that you had to <u>write out line after line of kanji</u> (the Chinese characters used in the Japanese writing</p>		<p><u>sit and think things over</u></p> <p><u>write out line after line of kanji</u></p> <p><u>provided a way out</u></p>

system), but he also provided a way out: “Kanji Passes” were issued for good behavior, and by handing one over you could escape the drill when you’d forgotten something. His most cunning invention, though, was the way he designed his kanji tests, which worked like a charm on me.

The unusual thing about these tests was how they were scored. In a regular kanji test, you’re given a phrase containing a word that is written phonetically, and you have to fill in the right characters to match that pronunciation and correctly complete the phrase. For example, when you’re given “to \_\_\_\_? \_\_\_\_ the interior of a store,” plus the pronunciation *kaisō*, you fill in 改装(remodel). This much was also true of Oka Sensei’s tests, but then below each question there was a space for writing down all the homonyms you could think of for extra credit—all the words pronounced the same way but written differently and having different meanings. In the case of *kaisō*, ten bonus points would be awarded for 階層(stratum) and another ten for 回想(reminiscence).

Thus the maximum possible score on a test was not 100 percent. Scores of 150 or 200 were common. Everyone pulled out all the stops, since the harder you tried the more points you could earn. For example,

by handing one over you could escape

worked like a charm on

a word that is written phonetically

fill in the right characters to match

writing down all the homonyms

for extra credit

pronounced the same way but written differently

the maximum possible score on a test

Scores of

*kans* 感, 感想 (impressions), 乾燥 (drying), 歡送 (send-off), 間奏 (interlude), 完走 (finishing a race) ...

Sensei had his work cut out for him grading our papers, as some of the kids would go to any length, coming up with things like company names. He found himself constantly checking the dictionary to make sure there really was such a word. It took forever to mark the questions that gave us free rein, rain, reign.

The student with the top total score after five tests was declared class champion. That was me every time. Since I spent more of the after-school hours at home than other kids, the kanji championship, with all the painstaking dictionary work it required, was right up my alley. Another incentive was the fact that, by nature, I hate to lose.

There were two parts to the competition: first finding words and then memorizing them. But my dictionary didn't list enough compound words to give me an edge. Then an ad in the newspaper caught my eye, and it was love at first sight. That treasure trove of a dictionary, *Daijirin*, must have been at least four inches thick. At the thought of all the compounds it would contain, I sighed as though I were gazing at a juicy steak in a restaurant.

But it carried a hefty price tag. At ¥5,800 (about

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was right up my alley

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That treasure trove

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out of the reach



US\$20 at the time), it was out of the reach of a grade-schooler like me. Yet the goddess of kanji hadn't forsaken me. As luck would have it, it was December and the air was turning frosty—Christmas was just around the corner. When my grandmother inquired, "Hiro-chan, what do you want for Christmas this year?" I was ready, "*Daijirin!*" I must have come off as a very studious grandchild, but to me the kanji tests were like a game. The thick dictionary I was clamoring for was more like an expensive toy in my eyes than a study aid.

And once that toy was mine, my standing in the kanji test would be rock-solid.

### ***One Thing Nobody Can Beat Me At***

Although I held on to the title, my position was under constant threat from a rival who always came in second. She was the brightest kid in the class. She was usually amiable and quiet—the type who spent recess reading a book in the classroom—but when she did speak out, it was with a boldness that was unexpected in a girl. Even the boys were afraid of her.

One day, she declared war. "You've beaten me for the last time, Oto, got it?" Oka Sensei had evidently put her up to this by telling her that she shouldn't let me

was clamoring for

my standing in the kanji test

***Nobody Can Beat Me At***

held on to

came in second

spent recess reading a book

or words to that effect

go on acting like a big shot forever (or words to that effect).

Like a true die-hard, I took her up on it. “I’m going to be the champion next time, too.”

“Oh no, you’re not, I’m telling you, I can beat you at anything.”

“There’s one thing nobody can beat me at.”

“What? If it’s to do with school work, I’m as good as you.”

“No, that’s not it.”

“What is it, then?”

“It’s having no arms or legs.”

I wasn’t just saying this to get back at her. I was me because I had no arms and legs. And nobody else could be me. Though still a child, I was perhaps beginning in this way to take pride in who I was.

In Japanese class we had recently learned the difference between two words that are both pronounced *tokuchō*. There’s 特徴 which means “a distinctive feature,” while 特長 means “a distinctive merit or strong point.” In other words, the first simply refers to a difference, while the second refers to an excellent difference.

When we were set such topics as “Introducing Myself,” I used to write, “Distinguishing Feature:

Like a true die-hard

take pride in who I was

a distinctive feature

a distinctive merit or strong point

refers to a difference

Distinguishing Feature

<p>Having no arms or legs,” but from the day of that lesson, I remember, I <u>took to writing the kanji</u> for “Strong Point” instead.</p> <p>May be there aren’t too many people who could have understood what I meant when I said. “<u>There’s one thing nobody can beat me at. It’s having no arms or legs.</u>” But she did seem to understand, after she’d thought about it for a while.</p>		<p><u>took to writing the kanji</u></p>
<p><b>The Super Kickboard</b></p> <p><i><b>Fear of water</b></i></p> <p>In the summer of sixth grade, we faced <u>the distance swimming meet</u>. <u>The aim was for every sixth grader to swim twenty-five meters. That included me. But getting there was a long haul.</u></p> <p><u>To go back to June of my first-grade year:</u> In the two months since I started school, Takagi sensei had run into one new problem after another—PE, a class trip, Sports Day—and <u>cleared those hurdles one by one</u>. The wall that lay ahead of him now was swimming.</p> <p>At the time, I was just over two foot three. The pool, at more than three feet deep, was <u>way over</u> my head. Which meant I couldn’t go in by myself.</p> <p>And so Takagi sensei pondered—not <u>whether to</u></p>		<p><u>the distance swimming meet</u></p> <p><u>The aim was for</u></p> <p><u>was a long haul</u></p> <p><u>To go back to</u></p> <p><u>cleared those hurdles one</u></p> <p><u>by one</u></p> <p><u>way over</u></p> <p><u>whether to have me sit the</u></p> <p><u>lessons out</u></p>

have me sit the lessons out, but how to get me into the pool. His solution was to wade into the water himself with me in his arms. This was really going overboard, when you think of the stamina it required, and the principal worried that he was taking on too much and would wear himself out. But Takagi Sensei insisted that it was what the teacher in charge should do.

When it was decided to include me in swimming classes, I was half excited, half afraid. As I've mentioned, I've always had a keen sense of danger, ever since I was little. I would never go near a crowd of children in the school yard; no matter how thirsty I might be, I would do without a drink if there were people jostling around the drinking fountain. As for going into a pool where I couldn't touch the bottom, that was as dangerous as it gets. The fact that, with my round arms like potatoes, I couldn't wipe my face if it got wet may have contributed to my fear of water. In any case, I was filled with equal parts of delight at being able to go in with everybody else and terror of the pool.

On opening day, Sensei and I had a promise that we would go into the pool together, but in the end I balked. I changed into swimming trunks and got as far as the side, but I was too scared. He stood in the water,

with me in his arms

going overboard

was taking on too much

the teacher in charge

it was decided to

a keen sense of danger

people jostling around

As for going into

as dangerous as it gets

if it got wet

was filled with equal parts of

I balked

beckoning and coaxing: "Come on in and join us, just for a little while," but I kept going "No! No!" to the very end.

Sensei understood my fear very well, but he was determined to the point where I could float by myself. What concerned him was the possibility of my accidentally falling into water and drowning. He figured that if I could float on my own, I'd be able to hold on until help arrived. This was why he felt the need for special training in the pool.

***I Floated!***

At the next session, I made it in. At first I just got wet with Sensei holding me in his arms. This wasn't so bad. Next came putting my face in the water. I was okay as long as it only covered my mouth, but I panicked when it came over my nose. Somehow, though, with Sensei's assistance, I got to the point where I could duck under the surface. Now it was time to float.

With his hands supporting me, I lay on my back. My limbs tensed and my body curled up tight. When he talked me into extending my arms and legs, although his hands were still under me, I had the sensation of floating. But that was as far as I got. Every time he

beckoning and coaxing

was determined to the point

I made it in

Next came putting my face

got to the point where

lay on my back

curled up tight.

talked me into

asked, “Can I let go now?” the answer was an emphatic “No!”

Once, though, while I was practicing lying on my stomach on the surface and putting my face in the water, he snuck his hands away for an instant. It was barely a fraction of a second, but there was no doubt about it: I’d floated.

“Ototake, you did it!”

Sensei ran me through this again and again, gradually lengthening the time he let go. One second became two, two seconds became three. Eventually I was able to stay float for over ten seconds. But when I turned my head to breathe, I lost my balance and rolled right over. The problem was how to get beyond this point.

I never did succeed in breathing without flipping over, no matter how I worked at it. So, we decided the way to go was for me to propel myself forward until I ran out of air. But the question was how, since I couldn’t paddle with my arms. All I could do was flutter my legs, which are slightly longer than my arms. I fluttered them like crazy, but this didn’t work too well either. Since they’re different lengths, the more I kicked the further I veered off course. On a bad day, I went round and round in circles on the spot.

an emphatic “No!”

snuck his hands away

barely a fraction of a second

ran me through this

rolled right over

without flipping over,

flutter my legs

the more I kicked the further I veered off course.

went round and round in circles on the spot.

And then came

Six meters. That was the distance I could swim after five years' work. And then came the summer of sixth grade.

### ***A Craft Project***

For the distance swimming meet, students had to complete the full twenty-five meters, no matter what. The other children who couldn't swim the whole length of the pool were able to make it by putting their feet down once or twice on the way. But I couldn't touch the bottom. And so my goal for the year became to complete the lap using a floatation device. The first one I tried was a string of floats tied around my waist, but this was a flop because my head sank while my hips stayed on the surface. Next I tackled a kickboard, but this was no good either. As soon as I climbed on, it submerged completely. It didn't have enough buoyancy to support my weight.

Then, just when we were stumped, we came across some interesting information. We heard of a humongous polyurethane mat, nearly four foot square, called a "floating island." Maybe this would be able to hold me up.

Oka sensei went straight out and bought one. It was a whopper, all right, and took up a lot of space in the

complete the lap using a floatation device

a string of floats tied around

this was a flop

enough buoyancy to

when we were stumped

hold me up

a whopper,

took up a lot of space

classroom. We carried it down to the poolside for an impromptu craft project.

Sensei handled the carving tools—a paper cutter and kitchen knife—while his junior assistants followed his directions.

Sensei: "Now, Masahiro, you hold that end."

Masahiro: "Sensei, we've got to make it look really good, right?"

First, the front end was pared down to a streamlined shape to reduce resistance in the water. Next, the back end was shaped to my body. Since I moved forward by thrashing from the hips down, I'd be lying on the mat from my stomach up. It took a number of fittings to get it right.

Sensei: "Okay, Susumu, let's put Hiro on board and try it out."

Taking off his T-shirt, Susumu splashed into the water. He placed me on the mat and gave it a nudge from behind.

Susumu: "It's still no good. It'll only sink again, 'cos his weight is resting too far forward."

After many more adjustments, it was just about ready when there was a setback.

Minoru: "Sensei, Oto can't stay on with no hands, the mat's too smooth."

an impromptu craft project.

you hold that end

pared down to

the back end

by thrashing from the hips down

took a number of fittings to

gave it a nudge

when there was a setback.



All: “Oh!”

And so Oka Sensei punched in two round holes, one on the right and one on the left. They were exactly like a pair of eyes, making the mat look like a human face. Then he told me to stick my arms through. It worked: with my arms inserted in the holes, there was no risk of being separated from the mat.

That was how my partner for the summer was born. We christened it the “Super Kickboard.”

### ***Those Ladies Are Crying***

September 9, the day of the distance swimming meet, finally arrived. As the event was held jointly by three local primary schools, the kids from the other schools would be watching too. I was fired up: I’d have to make it look good.

When the boy’s twenty-five meters freestyle was announced, my adrenaline level started rising. It was time to show the results of all the training I’d put in with my partner—though, admittedly, even if it was called a freestyle event, swimming with a homemade kickboard was unheard-of. Then suddenly the last group was summoned. I was on.

“Group 19. In Lane 1, Hirotada Ototake, Yohga Elementary.”

punched in two round holes

stick my arms through

with my arms inserted in the holes

We christened it the “Super Kickboard.”

was held jointly by

make it look good

There's an extra big cheer, which is kind of embarrassing. As I mount the starting block, I feel my heart racing. At the crisp crack! Of the starting pistol I plunge in headfirst. Anybody watching for the first time might think I'd toppled in by mistake, but this is the "dive" I've been perfecting all summer.

When I surface, I paddle once, twice. Then Minoru and Susumu, who are waiting in the pool, scoop me up onto the Super Kickboard and send me on my way with a good shove. The long voyage has begun.

As always, I keep up a steady pace until about halfway. But the water is cold. My legs won't do what I want. The others plow ahead and are gone, and I'm alone in the large pool. You could hear a pin drop.

But all at once the silence is shattered by rousing cheers and applause—and it's coming from the other two schools. It's as if they'd been dumbstruck at the sight of me diving off the block and piloting my kickboard, and have only just snapped out of it. I'm happy to have the other schools rooting for me, but it's kind of a weird feeling.

When I finally finish the length, it has taken me nearly two minutes. Even so, there's a renewed round of applause from the other schools. It's what you might call an ovation, and it goes on and on.

feel my heart racing

At the crisp crack!

scoop me up onto

with a good shove

won't do what I want.

plow ahead and are gone

hear a pin drop

is shattered by

been dumbstruck

just snapped out of it

a renewed round of applause

what you might call an

Meanwhile, one of the boys in my class is reporting to Oka Sensei: “See over there, Sensei? Those ladies are crying!” He has a puzzled look in his eyes, as if it’s a very strange sight.

Sensei recalls that this made him happier than anything else that day. He said to himself: These children see Ototake simply as a classmate. As far as they’re concerned, the fact that he finished the twenty-five meters is not a big deal—the way they see it, one of them just did the same thing that they’ve all done.

And so Sensei found himself fighting back his own impulse to hug me and say, “That was quite a feat for someone in your condition.” Instead, he yelled, “One minute fifty-seven seconds? You never take that long!”

But these words carried an unspoken message that came from the heart: “Congratulations. You’ve got yourself some real pals who don’t see you as special.”

## Disabled People to the Rescue

### *A burden? A Drag?*

During the six years I spent at Yohga elementary, with many people supporting and watching over me, I gained more than I can say. I’m very glad that I was

ovation

the fact that

found himself fighting back his own impulse to

quite a feat

take that long

an unspoken message that

some real pals who don’t see you as special

more than I can say

able to attend a mainstream school.

I don't deny the value of special schools. Depending on the degree and nature of their disabilities, some children may need special education. But the important thing to consider is what each individual child really needs.

Back when I started school, it was automatically assumed that children with disabilities would go to special schools, or be placed in special classes within mainstream schools. The stereotype was that they just couldn't cope with the regular routines and coursework. This is simply not true.

True, when a person with a disability plunges right into the general community, in this case by entering a regular school, there are sure to be many things he or she can't do alone, and times when people are put to extra trouble. But remember how, at elementary school, the kids who caught on quickly helped the slower ones with their lessons, and the kids who could do a backward somersault on the high bar taught the ones who couldn't? Well, that same attitude is all it takes. If there's a child in the class who doesn't have the use of his legs, all it takes is for someone to push his wheelchair. If there's a hearing-impaired child in the class, then it's enough if her neighbor shares his

thing to consider

it was automatically assumed that

The stereotype was that

the kids who caught on quickly

do a backward somersault

逆上がり

all it takes

a hearing-impaired child

shares his notes

notes. That's all it takes for the people who are grouped together as "the disabled" to receive a regular education too.

But even today, when the parents of a child with a disability want him to attend a mainstream school, they are strongly advised against it. "Since there are special schools available for children like your son," they're asked, "Why don't you apply there?" One person for this response is a fear of criticism from other parents—above all, fear of the complaint that their children will suffer because a child with a disability will take up too much of the teacher's time.

Is there any truth to this idea that a disabled child is a burden and a drag on the rest of the class?

### ***The True-or-False Game***

In the fourth grade, we performed a gymnastic routine using sticks for Sports Day. It was a dance done in pairs. In previous years, my partner on occasions like this had always been Takagi Sensei.

That year, however, some of the fourth graders said, "We'll be Oto-chan's partners." Of course, my pair would go at a slower pace and would have to skip some parts. Since my partner would have to hold back, Sensei says at first he wasn't so sure it was a good

One person for this response

Is there any truth to this idea that

a dance done in pairs

on occasions like this

skip some parts

idea. But because the children themselves had volunteered, he decided to leave it to us.

Four days after Sports Day, at a parents' association meeting, I'm told the mother of my partner for the performance had this to say: "Thank you very much for pairing my son with Ototake. I just can't tell you how thrilled I was when they danced together and when he got to push the wheelchair in the final parade. Our son is very lucky." She came back to the subject a number of times.

Sensei was caught off balance: having half expected to be taken to task, he never imagined he'd be thanked. It seemed the other parents were watching over me with all the warmth that this mother's words suggest.

When our teachers visited the other students' homes, I'm told I was often mentioned. "It's certainly a plus for the others to have Ototake in the class," a parent would say. "And we can't help bringing him up as an example—you know, 'Look at how hard Ototake tries in spite of his handicaps. I wish you'd try as hard.'"

Once, when Takagi sensei was away, the teacher from next door took us for PE. Told to bring one ball per person from the storeroom, several children came

had this to say

was caught off balance

having half expected to be taken to task

半ば、叱られると思って  
いた

were watching over me with

carrying one in each hand

back carrying one in each hand. When she scolded them, they answered, “I brought one for Ototake.”

After seeing them take turns playing catch with me, she reported to Takagi Sensei, “The children in Room 1 are all really sweet, aren’t they?” I’m sure he beamed with pride.

At a reunion of my sixth-grade class a couple of years ago, Oka Sensei told me, “Thanks to your being with us, Hiro, this turned into a wonderfully thoughtful class where it was natural for everyone to help each other out when they were in trouble.”

He may have said this out of his own typical thoughtfulness, so that I wouldn’t feel inferior, but something tells me it wasn’t completely off base. A friend who teaches nursery school once remarked, “Since this spring, I’ve had a child with Down’s syndrome in my class. At first, as you’d expect, the children were frightened and kept their distance, but within a month or two the whole class began to develop a spirit of kindness, and it all revolved around the child with Down’s.”

I hear stories like this all the time. Just about every class that has a disabled child in it seems to turn out remarkably well.

At Yohga elementary, the effects weren’t confined to

take turns playing catch with me

At a reunion of

Thanks to

completely off base

teaches nursery school

a child with Down’s syndrome

as you’d expect

a spirit of kindness

one classroom, either. The month I started school, preparations were under way for the annual party to welcome new students, and the sixth graders in charge of the planning were reporting their decisions to the staff.

“For the party game this year, we’ve decided on True-or-False. If you think something’s true, you nod. If you think it’s false, you shake your head. The subjects will be—”

“Hold on a minute,” a teacher interrupted, thinking of the usual scramble to separate into “true” and “false” camps on opposite sides of the playground. “How will you tell who gets the answers right, with hundreds of people just nodding?”

“But, sensei. This year there’s Ototake. He can’t take part unless we do it like this.” The way the students said this, as if it were obvious, made the teachers look at one another, momentarily lost for words.

In today’s competitive society where one is always expected to excel, we’re losing sight of what’s obvious—when you see someone having trouble, you lend a hand. We’ve been hearing for a long time now about the breakdown of communities whose members used to help one another. It could be that the people

gets the answers right

look at one another,

when you see someone having trouble

the breakdown of communities whose



<p>who come to the rescue, the people who can rebuild a more fully human society, <u>will be people with disabilities.</u></p>		<p><u>It could be that</u></p> <p><u>will be people with</u></p> <p><u>disabilities</u></p>