

NO ONE'S PERFECT

Part IV

English	Chinese	Notes
<p>4- A Whole New Journey <i>My Experience as a Young Adult</i> <i>(translated by John Brennan)</i></p> <p>Confusion The Next Step</p>		
<p>Epilogue</p>		
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<p>A Whole New Journey <i>My Experience As a Young Adult</i> This chapter and Epilogue translated by John Brennan</p>		
<p>Confusion</p> <p><i>Breaking My Heart</i></p> <p>If you're talking about yourself in Japanese, you have your choice of a <u>number of different words meaning "I" or "me"</u> and <i>boku</i> is one of them—the most <u>boyish-sounding one</u>. <i>Boku</i> appeared everywhere in the book I wrote: <i>boku</i> did this, <i>boku</i> did that, <i>boku</i>. <i>boku</i>, <i>boku</i>. Me, me, me.</p>		<p>a number of different words meaning</p> <p><u>boyish-sounding one</u></p>

I was twenty-two years old. My book, which practically was me, had been read by a whole lot of people and had even been translated into English under the title *No One's Perfect*—the book you're reading now.

The Hirotada Ototake who appeared in its pages—make that “Oto-kun”—was now famous. This was the start of a painful period for me, worse than anything I could have imagined, but maybe that was unavoidable. Writing the book the way I did, I suppose I was probably trying to ingratiate myself with people, making myself out to be cute and boyish. I mean, I don't really talk that way. *Boku?* Please!

If I could do it all over again ... Well, wishful thinking seldom gets you anywhere, but if I somehow got permission from heaven to take another shot at life, I'd probably turn back the clock to the time before *No One's Perfect* was published. Looking back on the long, jam-packed two-and-a-half-year period since the book came out—definitely not a period of happy memories only—I'm not sure I'd want to walk that line a second time.

“Hey, look! There's the guy who wrote that book, what's-his-name, Otoboke-san!”

It was a pretty funny way to mangle my name and I

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laughed when I heard it, but the laughs were few and far between. Mostly I heard the same comments over and over.

“I read your book.”

“It was so moving.”

“Keep on fighting.”

It felt as though the same words were rubber-stamped on every conversation. Not only that, people wanted to take pictures of me and get my photograph. Take pictures? Get my photograph? What was I, a movie star? Maybe not, but all of a sudden I was famous, like one of those people on the other side of the TV screen who sign photographs and get their pictures taken.

I was used to my normal life as a college student, and this sudden change threw me for a loop. Wherever I went, people stared and whispered. I was bombarded with curiosity, well-meaning or otherwise. Think about it—imagine trying to deal with all these people I didn’t know but who knew me. People would wave. People would come up and start talking to me. Riding around in my wheelchair, I was pretty easy to pick out; people would spot me from the other side of the street and call out to me. If it hadn’t been for the people around me who looked after me, all this

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attention definitely would have driven me crazy.

Then again, it wasn't only me who had to put up with all this attention. The people around me—my family, friends, and girlfriend—fell victim to it as well, and that's when I really got angry. Angry but powerless to do anything about it. I had seen ads for magazines like *Women's Weekly*, *Herself*, and *FLASH* on trains and in the newspaper, but it had never occurred to me that one day those same magazines would make my life miserable.

Just a little longer, if I can just wait it out a little longer, all this commotion will die down. That's what I kept telling myself, trying like crazy to keep from losing my patience, but this only encouraged certain people to take advantage of me. This, in turn, led to a steadily escalating series of incidents, things that were way out of line. In the end, having hired a lawyer to file a legal complaint, I had to suffer through six months or so of the type of treatment usually reserved for people accused of major crimes, watched over the whole time by photographers from various magazines who camped out in front of my house.

My girlfriend and I had been meeting more or less secretly, but for some reason it kept getting harder and harder for us to get together. To put it more

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“It would be nice if we could meet without having to sneak around.”

Hearing those words and knowing that even then, somebody out there might be taking your picture, there’s just no way you can really enjoy a night out.

“At the moment, I don’t have a girlfriend. The girl I was going out with? We broke up.”

This was an empty lie, an excuse I made up to tell the press. Meanwhile, my heart was breaking. Doubt and confusion had me surrounded, and I wondered if I was always going to have to go it alone.

Oto-kun’s Troubles

Fifteen years or so before all this happened, back in elementary school, I had once been singled out by a mother who was struggling with her screeching son. “Look,” she told him, pointing at me, “if you don’t start minding your mother you’re going to turn out just like he did.”

After my book came out, I received a letter that included the following lines: “We have a three-year-old son. Our fondest hope is that he turns out to be someone like you.” Someone like me—what kind of

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guy do they think that is, anyway? The selfish guy who thinks only of himself? The young lecher gawking at every good-looking woman in sight, even when he's out on a date? No, they don't know that guy.

Pure, honest, handsome. Cheerful, fun-loving, energetic.

It may sound one of those motivational slogans some schools adopt to inspire their students, but that's the image people seemed to have of me. Of course, there were a lot of people who saw right through the image and recognized the real me, but those were mostly younger people. To people a couple of generations older, I could do no wrong. I could see it in their faces when they waved at me on the street—the faces of people watching a toddler frolic on the stage. Not at all the sort of look a grown man would get.

This was only natural, because the person they were looking at wasn't me, the Hirotada Ototake who actually exists, but Oto-kun, the high-spirited boy who ran around the school playground. These truly were the faces of people watching a child frolic on stage, performing in a show called *No One's Perfect*.

But I do exist. Not as a cartoon super hero, not as a living teddy bear, but as a human being. Here I was, a grown man about to graduate from college, and I

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was living my life tethered to the ghost of a ten-year-old kid. You might say I was just feeling the weight of all that love coming my way, but that wouldn't be quite right. It was Oto-kun they loved. It wasn't me being deluged with requests for speaking engagements, it was him.

After my book came out, it got to the point where I was receiving over three hundred of these requests per day, usually by phone or fax. I didn't accept a single one. No matter how persistent they were, no matter how well I knew the person who was asking, I wouldn't give in. The gap was too wide.

The flesh-and-blood version of Hirotada Ototake, the image of the person who actually existed, just didn't jibe with the image that existed in the minds of the people who read my book: Oto-kun the innocent, Oto-kun the little angel. I was somehow aware of disparity between my two images and so I kept on refusing these requests. If I accepted I'd be trying to do what couldn't be done—I'd have to try to impersonate the Oto-kun that everyone was hoping to see. Knowing that I'd be surrendering my identity if I went down that road, that I could no longer be who I am, I just made up my mind not to do speaking engagements.

on the stage

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So here's just twenty-year-old guy, just some college student, turning down invitations left and right. You'd think people wouldn't put up with such a bad attitude from someone like that, but actually, when I explained my situation honestly, almost everyone understood how I felt. Once in a while, though, somebody's patience would snap and I'd get an earful.

Angry voice on the telephone: "We're not a for-profit organization, we're volunteer group acting out of sheer goodwill. So why won't you cooperate with us?"

This from a "goodwill" organization so intent on proclaiming its own goodness that my own wishes never even entered the picture.

If it had been a job, a matter of duty, I probably would have done it, but I was still a college student at the time and there were a whole lot of other things I wanted to do instead. When I had accepted invitations to speak in the past it was only because I felt like doing it. Now I didn't feel like doing it anymore, so why do it?

As I listened to the exasperated voice on the other end of the line, my thoughts drifted: "Well, Oto-kun's in demand anyway. What about me, though? I wonder where Hirotada Ototake's needed?"

Representing Nobody But Me

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At the same time I was receiving requests to do speaking engagements, I also had quite a few more opportunities for media exposure. At first I took advantage of some of these opportunities, thinking it would be fun, and it was. Crowds of adults coming to Waseda just to hear me speak, media people hustling around making sure they got this hotshot kid on tape, journalists madly taking down every word. What wouldn't be fun about that? I even appeared on Tetsuko Kuroyanagi's TV show, which sent my friends and relatives into a frenzy.

Over time, though, I grew tired of that whole scene. People kept asking me the same questions, over and over.

“How did you come to have such a cheerful personality?”

—Because I've managed to get this far just fooling around with my friends.

“You mentioned the wonderful way your parents raised you. What did you mean by that?”

—Why don't you read the book? It's all in there.

“Where did you find the inner strength to overcome so many hardships?”

—Hardships? What hardships?

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Of course, Ototake, being a good boy, couldn't really be so flippant. I had to chime in with the same polite answers every time, and I got tired of it.

In no time at all, what was tiresome became painful and what was painful became worrisome. What really worried me were some of my own comments, recorded in articles printed after the interviews were over.

“People with disabilities lead happy, enjoyable lives.” “Conditions aren't as bad as people thinking.”

I was speaking for myself, stating my own opinions, but if you read one of these articles you'd think I was speaking for everybody. I worried that people might jump to the wrong conclusion: “Oh, so this is what being disabled is all about.” After all, this was Hirotada Ototake speaking, one lone individual, not the appointed representative of people with disabilities, not a spokesman to the rest of the world. Nothing I had to say was anything more than one guy's version of the story—“Here's the way it is for me”—but even so, my comments were interpreted as if they somehow defined “disabled people.” This was no good at all.

Why did I write *No One's Perfect* in the first place? To shatter the stereotyped image of people with disabilities. I wanted people to know that not all of us

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are quiet, serious, and hard-working—there are fun-loving, scatterbrained, lackadaisical disabled people too. Since a lot of people read the book, I guess you could say I achieved this goal to some extent. But the fact that the book sold so well, much better than expected, created a whole new problem: people who read it started seeing Oto-kun as a stand-in for “disabled people,” leading them to assume that all disabled people were cheerful and fun-loving.

That’s not quite right. Sure, I myself have plenty of fun, but I don’t know about anybody else. Maybe the next guy is discriminated against and suffers serious hardships, or maybe he’s free to live his life the way he wants to, like I do. How would I know? That’s why I decided to stop talking about it. I don’t know enough to say anything useful about someone else’s situation or about disabled people in general.

And yet, whenever I’d see an interview with me in a magazine, there I’d be, talking about “disabled people.” Certain expressions I had used such as “in my case ...” or “I don’t know about anybody else, but ...” were edited out, leaving the impression of some puffed-up, book-smart college boy grandly presenting his personal theory on “the disabled.”

Barrier-Free Leader

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Around this time, I took a job working on “News no Mori,” an evening television news show broadcast on Japan’s TBS network. I was what they called a “sub-caster,” a kind of auxiliary newscaster, which meant I had to go to various places and talk to various people. I was still a college student at the time and each new day was a stimulating experience. Those days, spent in the company of enthusiastic and attractive colleagues, were precious to me. And yet I eventually decided I had to leave that behind, too.

I remember it was getting cold out—I had just started wearing a coat—when I started having doubts about the job. Was this what I really should be doing? It was fun, and this kind of life was definitely a good one. Working with people who had so much talent and experience would teach me a lot. I wanted to keep on doing this if I could. On the other hand ...

When I thought about what I should do after graduating, I kept going back and forth. Needless to say, I didn’t want to give up this enjoyable and highly fulfilling life, but I was tormented by the thought that I might have to. I was troubled by the same kind of doubts I had experienced after the magazine interviews—the sense that my real identity would be transformed into that of a spokesman for the disabled.

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Having struggled to get my own message out in the book I wrote, I was now starting to learn through my “News no Mori” job how interesting it was to be a medium for others who were trying to get their own message out. But on the most important point—what message to convey—I was still plagued with doubts that I couldn’t seem to get past.”

“Barrier-free transportation facilities.”

“Barrier-free shrines and temples.”

“Barrier-free schools.”

I appeared on the news show once or twice a month, with most of my assignments developed to “barrier-free”-related topics like these. At first I was too preoccupied with the importance of getting out the message to have time to even think about anything else, but gradually I began to wonder. Was this really a good thing, doing nothing but this “barrier-free” stuff?

Not that there was anything else I could do, of course. Politics, economics, crime, newsworthy accidents and mishaps—I’d never get anywhere trying to report on things like that. But I didn’t think, for that reason alone, that it was necessarily best to go on just handling “barrier-free” stories. It was all too likely to simply reinforce the image of Ototake-kun, the

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representative of “the disabled” who reports on “barrier-free” topics.

What did I know about all that, anyway? All I know about is my own experience. I never intended to make “disability,” “social welfare,” and “barrier-free” the bywords of a movement led by myself. I wasn’t ready for anything like that. Still, based on the way I was handled by the media and on my work for “News no Mori,” that’s probably what people expected of me. It seemed as though maybe the public wanted me to play the role of an opinion leader for disabled people.

When I realized that this was the case, I made up my mind to quit my job with “News no Mori.” If I kept on doing it just because it was fun, I’d inevitably be confining myself to one narrow role in the future. I had my regrets, but when I took a long, calm look at the situation I was in, it was readily apparent that this was the right thing to do.

I still had a life to live, though, and after I graduated I’d have to start making a living as an adult. What to do? I decided to start over with a blank slate and take my time thinking things through.

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<p>The Next Step</p> <p><i>Got it!</i></p> <p>A new year. People were all excited <u>about the new millennium</u>, which was a word I'd hardly ever heard before. I started looking for a job. My friends <u>had embarked on the search</u> for post-college employment exactly one year before, so I was <u>a full year behind everyone else</u>.</p> <p>For me the key was still conveying a message. My year on the job with "News no Mori" had taught me the value of <u>conveying a message effectively</u>. I wanted to convey some kind of message to people and I wanted to find a job that would enable me to do that. <u>That</u></p>		<p><u>about the new millennium</u></p> <p><u>had embarked on the search</u></p> <p><u>a full year behind</u></p> <p><u>conveying a message effectively.</u></p> <p><u>That complicating factor</u></p>

complicating factor would be the “barrier-free” thing, the drum I had beaten so loudly in my book.

Since that was why the world had noticed me in the first place, there would be a virtually unbreakable connection between Hirotada Ototake and the subject of the barrier-free movement. It’s not that I had lost all interest in the movement, of course, but working in that area was another matter.

I had received letters and other communications from a lot of people telling me I was the leader of a movement to achieve social welfare for people with disabilities, and this made me uncomfortable. Immersing myself in the world of social welfare and calling out at the top of my lungs for a barrier-free society would be one way to do things, but I kept wondering if there might not be a different approach. I thought there might be a more effective way of appealing to people. As time went on, my thoughts were increasingly drawn in that direction.

The attention I’d received in the media over the past few years had made me pretty well known. I suppose I might have become the most famous disabled person in Japan. But working in the social welfare field wouldn’t be the right thing to do.

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It was the “just you'd expect” part that was the problem—the idea that a person with disabilities would inevitably follow a preordained path and pursue a career in social welfare. Comments like “just as you'd expect” could be traced to this kind of stereotype. It amounted to placing limits on people's abilities, and I'm against that. Disabled people being active in fields that have nothing to do with social welfare—that's what it would take to bring about a society that's truly barrier-free.

Once I had set aside the notion of a career concerned with disabilities and the barrier-free movement, the question was, What's left? Answer: nothing. I had been useful to the media, but that was because I was disabled, a guy in a wheelchair. If I set myself apart from all that, I was just another happy-go-lucky college boy. What's left? Nothing.

It was right around this time that I received a request to write something for the *Asahi Shimbun*, a daily newspaper. The opening of the baseball season in Japan was just around the corner and they wanted me to write a guest column about that. I'd been a big sports fan ever since I was a kid, and I quickly agreed to do it. I got excited just thinking about what to write,

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and that made me sit up and take notice: hey, look how fired up I am!

I'd never been good at writing. I'd always vastly preferred talking to people. Shutting myself up in a room and sitting alone in front of a computer had always belonged to the category of painful experiences to be avoided if possible. This was different, though. Just thinking about my column made me feel good, lighthearted. I felt a kind of glow rising up from way down inside me that I'd never felt before. So that's it, I thought. I finally got it. Sports!

Looking For a Job

Wherever published material is sold in Japan, especially bookstores and convenience stores, you're likely to see rows of people standing in front of the racks poring over the latest magazines. They're taking part in a time-honored practice called *tachi-yomi* (literally, "standing-reading").

For those of us who go around in wheelchairs, *tachi-yomi* is a bit of a challenge. It's almost impossible to squeeze into a spot near the rack among the people who are already there, and even then my arms are too short to reach the magazines. There was one magazine I always went for anyway, though—a sports magazine called *Number*.

Just thinking about my column made me

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Number, which is published

Number, which is published by Bungei Shunju, is touted as a “sports graphic” magazine, so it had beautiful photographs. These weren’t posed shots or portraits—turn the page and you’d see players in action, radiating power and energy. This was a magazine that fully revealed the beauty of sports. If I could get an article printed in here, I thought ... A jolt of excitement ran through me, and I actually shivered.

When I think about it now, what I did next seems pretty crazy. I asked an acquaintance who was an editor to contact the people at *Number* and tell them I wanted to work for them. Somehow he got through to the editor-in-chief, and then came an eternity of waiting.

I waited and waited but heard nothing. After a couple of weeks passed, I decided it had been unrealistic to get my hopes up. However I looked at it, it just didn’t seem possible for a guy with no experience to start writing for *Number*. I was on the verge of giving up and chucking the whole idea when I got a call from my friend.

“Good news: the head guy himself will see you next week.”

The interview was held in a tearoom at a hotel. The

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editor-in-chief was accompanied by a young member of the editorial staff. I was uncharacteristically nervous.

“So, Ototake-san, what kind of things are you interested in writing? Were you thinking of reporting on games, for instance, or ...?”

I could just see me reporting on games: “Today at Whatchamacallit Stadium, I watched a game between This team and That Team. That team won by a score of something to something. My favorite player, what’s-his-name, had a great day. Hip-hip, hooray!”

No, that wasn’t the kind of thing I wanted to write.

“Well, I’m interested in that kind of thing too, but what I’d really like to do is interviews with the athletes.” “Hmm. You mean you’d, um, cover the human angle. That might work. Say there’s a guy who was injured, he’s been in a slump ever since. Now he’s waiting to break out of it and you capture the drama of that. Yeah, that might work.”

“Well, that’s not quite what I had in mind. I was thinking more about the younger players who haven’t made their mark yet.”

“Younger players. And why is that?”

“Well, in my case, I’m at the point where I’m about to graduate from college and go out into the world, and I’ve got a certain amount of self-confidence, but I’m

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also a little scared. I figure it's probably about the same for these athletes. They're supposed to have complete confidence in themselves and believe they have what it takes, but actually they're not quite sure they'll be able to make the grade. How do they deal with those contradictory feelings when they're playing? I mean, I guess I feel we've got a few things in common, and I thought I might write stories that focus on those things."

"I see."

There was just one problem—my name. For a general-interest magazine, the well-known name of Hirotada Ototake, author of *No One's Perfect*, might have been an asset in terms of attracting publicity. That wouldn't matter to *Number* readers, however. They were interested in good sports writing, not famous names. True fans of *Number* would probably find it a little weird to see Hirotada Ototake's byline in the magazine: in some ways it might even be seen as lowering the magazine's high standards. Unfortunately, Hirotada Ototake is who I am.

All right, then, it suddenly occurred to me, I'll stop being Hirotada Ototake. I'll change my name and write under a pen name, like Taro Yamada or Ichiro Tanaka. That way I'd be able to head off a lot of

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Of course, I wasn't entirely sold on the idea. Changing my name would mean writing off everything I had accomplished so far. Still, I'd do it if it meant that I'd really be able to go to work for *Number*. After all, I was starting over from zero anyway, so this might be the perfect opportunity.

After I told the people at *Number* about my feelings on the matter, it felt as though a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I'd done everything I could. If it didn't work now, fair enough.

Another month went by before they officially decided to hire me.

The Best Possible Writing

As it turned out, I didn't have to write under a pen name. Hirotada Ototake was treated just like any other writer, though—no photo next to the name. Basically, I was free to interview any athlete I chose. It was on these generous terms that I began the series called "Field Interviews," which appeared in each issue. My first piece was an interview with a soccer player named Jun'ichi Inamoto, who played for Gamba Osaka, and my second was an interview with a baseball player, Ryota Igarashi of the Yakult Swallows. Both were up-and-coming athletes who

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were expected to come into their own in the new century. I'd been told that I'd be able to interview anyone I chose, and although it's often said the editors actually call all the shots, I found that I really was free to choose the athletes I wanted to talk to. That's the kind of environment it was, and it was all I could possibly want.

As more of my interviews were printed, I began to hear some comments on the series. Generally speaking, the consensus seemed to be that it was well done, quite interesting and accurate, but that it was the sort of work that could have been written by anyone. After all, this was written by Hirotada Ototake—why didn't he inject a little more of himself into his writing?

In a sense, I was doing what I had set out to do: producing work that would be considered acceptable even if I weren't the guy in the wheelchair who wrote *No One's Perfect*. That's how I wanted people to read my writing. At first I had simply wanted to be a writer, but now if I wanted to become a really good writer I had a problem. I'd have to have an appealing and highly original style and perspective. Originality—that was the wall I ran into.

Being a disabled person and being famous offered

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me all kinds of possibilities in terms of original perspective, but if I did it that way it would mean a thing. When I left “News no Mori” and plunged into the world of sports writing, I said good-bye to dealing with “disability” and the whole “barrier-free” campaign. I couldn’t see myself reopening that whole chapter just to earn a little short-term praise.

There was another thing. I had a good reason for sticking to writing that was “the sort of work that could have been written by anyone.” I myself had been freaked out by the menacing aspects of the mass media. People in the media take something they consider to be news-worthy and blow it out of all proportion, and when they lose interest they turn their backs on it in the blink of an eye. A college kid who has written a best-seller is easy prey, so I was afraid. If you set out to make your living by drawing attention to yourself, sooner or later you’re going to get burned. I could go around saying, “Hey, it’s me, Ototake, the *No One’s Perfect* guy,” but the day would come when nobody cared anymore. I had to be ready when that day arrived and I could only do that by being ready to be nobody special. Even if I lost my present job and everything that went with it, I had to acquire the skills necessary to make a living as a

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sports writer. For that reason, regardless of whether it was intended as a criticism or not, I felt a sense of relief when I heard that my work was “the sort of work that could have been written by anyone.”

The Ghost

I really enjoyed what I did. I went to sports fields and stadiums, talked to athletes I was interested in, and tried to convey the athlete’s positive qualities to my readers. It was the job I had longed for, and every day I felt a sense of great fulfillment and good fortune. This went on for several months, until one particular day ...

It was at the Sydney Olympics, where Hidetoshi Nakata, Shunsuke Nakamura, Jun’ich Inamoto, and the other players from Japan’s “golden generation” were expected to win a medal in the men’s soccer competition. I was there covering the team’s progress for television. There was no match that day, nor was it a travel day. We were in Canberra, where the Japanese delegation had borrowed a field for a light workout. I was watching the team practice from the sidelines.

“You ...”

A Japanese man, somewhat older than me, had come up to me.

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convey the athlete’s positive qualities to

was there covering the team’s progress

nor was it

watching the team practice

He's another sportswriter, I thought. Gotta be polite, get on his good side. Being a newcomer, I was overly concerned about making a good impression on the other writers and the rest of the press corps.

"What in the world are you doing here?"

"What am I doing? I'm covering this."

"You're covering this?"

He was pointing at the soccer field, a big smirk on his face.

"You're an amateur, kid. What do you know about soccer?"

This made me angry.

"For one thing, I'm doing a series for *Number* that's been running since July."

"What, that? A few months doesn't make any difference. What the hell do you know about soccer? They're just using you to try to drive up their ratings. You can call yourself a journalist or a writer if you want, but you're really just another TV celebrity."

Oh boy. This was more than enough to send Japan's most defenseless man into a tailspin. I didn't even have the heart to talk to the rest of the staff. I shut myself up in my room, replaying that scene over and over again in my mind and trying with all my might to come up with some kind of self-justifying excuse.

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, replaying that scene over and over again in my mind trying with all my might to

It's not as if

Everybody has to go through a rookie season, I told myself. It's not as if I've been exploiting the fact that I'm famous. And I've worked so hard at it ...

But it was just as he said. I probably had been hired for this assignment just because I was the guy who wrote *No One's Perfect*. As he said, compared to the other sportswriters I didn't know a thing about soccer. And this didn't only apply to the TV assignment; the same was probably true of my job with *Number*. If I'd been just some kid right out of college and I'd said, "Hey, how about letting me write a series for your magazine?" they would have slapped me silly. The only reason they even considered it was because I had written the book.

It was no good. I had hoped to put the genie back in the bottle, leaving behind the fact that I was the famous Hirotada Ototake in order to enter the world of sports journalism, but I couldn't escape. I felt like giving up.

Haunted by a ghost called *No One's Perfect*, I lost all motivation to do anything.

Style

The next day I got a call from my editor at Number back in Japan.

"Oto-kun? You know the interview you did with

, compared to the other sportswriters

didn't only apply to the

just some kid right out of college

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Kinjo of the Yokohama BayStars? They loved it. They say they want to run it not as part of the series but as a special article. What do you think?”

I jumped for joy—no kidding, I actually did, I was so happy I wanted to cry. I had found my calling after all.

I don't think the guy who said those nasty things to me in Canberra held any particular grudge against me. They wouldn't say it to my face, but there are probably other sportswriters who feel the same way. For all I know, maybe most of them do, but there's nothing I can do about that. I got my start in a different way than they did and I've been very busy, so I guess it's only natural that I'd stir up some resentment.

Now I just have to come through. With the lucky breaks I've had, if I strike out now I'm sure I'll hear a whole chorus of jeers and catcalls. If I put in a solid performance, though, sooner or later they'll accept me. All I can do is wait for that day to come—or rather, all I can do is do everything in my power to make that day come soon.

From the day of the phone call on I felt the glow come back. I had set a new goal for myself and I was now firing on all cylinders. I had so much energy to burn I even surprised myself. I was determined to do a

the interview you did

I was so happy I wanted to cry

it's only natural that

just have to come through

I'll hear a whole chorus of jeers and catcalls

All I can do is wait for

all I can do is do everything in my power

From the day of the phone call on

now firing on all cylinders

good job, to turn out really good stories. I had a new outlook now: I wasn't going to be just another writer producing "the sort of work that could have been written by anyone." I was going to be a terrific writer.

That would mean breaking through the wall that I had come up against when I started writing for *Number*—the quest for an original voice. Not the originality of being in a wheelchair, not the originality of being a famous guy, but the original voice of Hirotada Ototake, the writer. Now if I only knew where in the world to find that voice.

When I looked back on my past, I realized why I had wanted to focus on interviews in my work. As my disgruntled senior colleague had pointed out in Canberra, I couldn't claim to have much knowledge of or experience with baseball or soccer or sports as such. If you wanted to know what a certain team would accomplish by using this or that strategy, or how some other team turned the game around and won at the end by putting in a certain player in the second half, well, there were a lot of writers who had better eyes for that kind of thing than I did.

What I want to do is show what the athletes are like on the inside; that's the conclusion I had arrived at. What was this guy feeling at that crucial moment?

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What makes him compete? What's he thinking about now? That's the kind of thing I wanted to convey, and I truly believed I could. This is why I wanted to do interviews. Naturally, I also have to go to the stadiums and ballparks where these guys work to see them in action firsthand, but for me victory and defeat are determined not by what happened on the field but by what happens in the interview. For me, victory depends on how much I can draw out of the guy I'm interviewing—that's the kind of writer I want to be. I know where I'm headed now.

People will tell an interview a lot when they feel they can trust him. Because they'll open their hearts to someone like that, they're willing to tell the truth, even about things that are hard to talk about. This isn't just something I dreamed up—I swear it's true. I know it's true because it's happened to me, because I've been interviewed so many times.

And that's the point. I'm the writer who knows better than the others how it feels to be pumped for information and put on the spot. If I can hold on to that feeling and make contact with the athletes, I'll definitely be a writer they can trust. By faithfully printing words that are spoken honestly, I can make the unique voice of Hirotada Ototake heard.

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firsthand

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From out of all this

assert itself in

<p><u>From out of all this</u> came a change that began to <u>assert itself in</u> my writing. As my articles gradually have begun to win more widespread approval, other publishing firms that were taking <u>a wait-and-see approach</u> have begun to <u>contact me with</u> possible assignments. Of course I'm not ready for that yet. I can't claim to be able to write something that satisfies my own standards every time. I still have so much to learn. But the main thing is, I don't feel lost anymore. Now <u>it's just a matter of</u> perfecting my own style and <u>putting in a lot of effort</u> on a lot of assignments. I don't think I'm going to worry anymore about what anyone will say or what people will think of me.</p> <p><u>I'm supposed to be</u> a self-confident guy, but I think it will take a little more time until I develop true self-confidence. I hope someone out there <u>has a good thought for me</u> as I undergo this process. Now that <u>I'm determined to</u> stand or fall on the basis of my writing, I'd like to think someone's <u>pulling for me</u>. I don't know what's lying ahead of me once my self-confidence <u>really kicks in</u>, but I'm sure there's <u>another thrilling barrier waiting to</u> be hurdled.</p>		<p><u>a wait-and-see approach</u></p> <p><u>contact me with</u></p> <p><u>it's just a matter of</u></p> <p><u>putting in a lot of effort</u></p> <p><u>I'm supposed to be</u></p> <p><u>has a good thought for me</u></p> <p><u>I'm determined to</u></p> <p><u>pulling for me</u></p> <p><u>really kicks in</u></p> <p><u>another thrilling barrier waiting to</u></p>
<p>Epilogue I was <u>idling away the time</u> in a boat on the shore.</p>		<p><u>idling away the time</u></p>

Lulled by the warm sunlight, I fell asleep. When I opened my eyes, the boat was in the water, driven by a rare offshore breeze, and I was drifting out to sea. The shore was receding into the distance, along with everything on it and everyone I knew. There was nothing I could do about it: the place I came from was fading out of sight.

That was me, a little boat carried out into the open sea. At first I was lost in sorrow and bewilderment. I kept waiting for a chance to return to the shore, but it was hopeless. When I realized I'd drifted so far out that I'd never get back, I finally took a look around me.

I was bathed in sunlight, and the surface of the sea sparkled brilliantly, almost blindingly. It was such a vast expanse, I could keep going forever and never reach the end of it. I had thought I was all alone, but I realized that, when I looked really hard, I could see people out there waiting for me, new friends. Maybe this wasn't so bad after all. Maybe this was a good place to be.

This book has definitely left me with a lot of baggage to carry around. I can no longer smile in my old carefree way and say I'm happy. I don't blame the book, though. It's true that I've lost some things along the way but there's no denying the fact that the book

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has given me things I never would have had without it.

So many encounters with so many different people, and so many great opportunities. I've met countless people since *No One's Perfect* came out and many of these were wonderful encounters that brought me love and inspiration. Without a doubt, thanks to these experiences I've grown.

In my media work, including my jobs with "News no Mori" and *Number*, I overcame difficulties and acquired valuable experience. The only reason I had a shot at those jobs in the first place was, of course, *No One's Perfect*.

I don't think I'll be looking back anymore. The role of a soul in anguish just doesn't suit me. I've been adrift in a new world for two and a half years now and I've finally resolved to make my way in this world. This is where I'll live.

I don't want to have any regrets. Now that I've made my decision I want to break free and run with it to my heart's content. Fortunately, there's plenty of sunlight to bask in here. I want that light shining down all over me, and I want to keep giving off a glow of my own. I'd like to shine brightly enough to be seen by my parents, standing back on that distant shore.

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This new edition of *No One's Perfect*, relating my present life as well as my past, is dedicated to my parents, who have showered me with love for twenty-five years.

Hirotsada Ototake
Spring 2001

love