

# My Story

## Mizushima Yu

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### Me in a Nutshell

I'm an optimistic, easygoing type of person. But I'm also forward-looking, ambitious, and full of curiosity. When I'm doing something I like, I devote all my energy to it. I think I'm the friendly, sociable type. Once I decide someone is trustworthy, I open up and show myself completely and honestly.

On the other hand, I tend to be rather thin-skinned, so even a little thing can make me feel depressed. One reason is that I'm a supersensitive about what others think. I wish I could be a little more thick-skinned sometimes.

Once a friend remarked, "You're sort of neither red nor blue, but more like purple—like you have different sides to you." That comment made me really happy, and now I really like purple!

### Growing Up

#### Preschool years

I was born in 1983 in Kawasaki, Kanagawa prefecture. <sup>1</sup> When I was in second grade we moved to the city of Yokohama. <sup>2</sup> We've been living there ever since, so I consider Yokohama my hometown.

Until I was five and my sister was born, I was the only child, and my parents gave me lots of love and attention. They gave me a lot of freedom, so it seems I learned to assert myself clearly from the time I was quite small. When I started kindergarten, they say that I was quiet

and well-behaved. I liked drawing pictures and having my mother read books to me.

#### Elementary school

In elementary school, my grades weren't especially high or low. I never had any trouble with my grades. Starting in fourth grade, for three years, I did rhythmic gymnastics as a school club activity. I joined the club because I saw the older kids twirling their ribbons and throwing balls in their performances, and I thought that was really cool and wanted to do it myself.

#### Junior high school

I joined the brass band club and played the flute. In the second term of my first year, I became a member of the student council and I got busy with meetings and other activities, and started to skip band practice.

We really had a lot of fun in student council—every day was a real blast. I loved it! My favorite memory of student council was when we launched a drive to raise funds to plant trees as a measure against desertification in a part of the African republic of Mali that borders on the Sahara Desert. I wrote the script for a play we performed at the school festival to raise money for the Mali tree-planting drive. Since elementary school I have liked writing reports and compositions. When I was in junior high, I wrote the script for a performance of "Snow White" we put on for the school festival. I also wrote an essay based on stories my grandmother told me about her

experiences during the war. That essay was put on display in a museum once.

## High School Life

### Entering Tsurumi High School

I was about to try for entrance to a private high school by recommendation, <sup>3</sup> but I found out that I didn't quite meet the necessary qualifications. So I decided to try to get into the public high school where the difficulty of the entrance examination was closest to my grade average level: Tsurumi High School. I didn't know whether I could pass the exam or not, but I decided to try. I did my best and I managed to get into the school.

The school regulations at Tsurumi are not especially strict. Instead of trying to tightly control the students, the school stresses our independence. I like this tradition. My general impression of Tsurumi students is that they are ordinary, decent kids, study so-so, and have moderate drive and ambition. There is a tendency among the students to think it uncool to try really hard. So the preparations and the enthusiasm for our school festival and other events are rather half-hearted. In a way that sort of atmosphere leaves you feeling a bit dissatisfied, but in another way, it makes for a calm, easygoing atmosphere that I really like.

### Photography

I belong to the photography club at Tsurumi High School. I initially joined because, unlike most of the other clubs, there aren't meetings you have to attend every day. You can take pictures and do the developing when you want. I like that. Soon after I entered the club, I went out to take pictures with some of the older members of the club. They were really nice to me, even though I knew virtually nothing

about photography. I did not even know how to install film in my camera. They told me: "Just shoot whatever attracts your attention. You can photograph whatever you like. You can even just imitate the photographs of others." That helped me relax and start taking pictures. Soon I really began to enjoy the sound and the feel of the shutter going. I realized for the first time that there are various ways of taking photographs, such as by changing angles. I enjoyed it so much that I took a total of more than 100 pictures in one day! Ever since, I have been really absorbed in photography.

I like taking photos of people. At first, because I was afraid to aim my camera at people I didn't know, or because I didn't think I should take their photos without permission, I would photograph mainly scenery, like flowers and buildings. The more often I went out to take photographs, the more accustomed I became to aiming my lens at people, and I soon began enjoying photographing them as well. Pictures of people, no matter who takes them, are always fascinating. As you gaze at such pictures, you wonder, "What kind of person could this be?" Or, "What kind of communication do you suppose went on between the photographer and the subject before this shot?" I think that's probably because I like people.

I have gotten to know many people by taking their pictures. When you are carrying a camera you can talk to people you wouldn't ordinarily approach on the street. To a woman carrying a little child, for example, I might greet her, "He's so cute. How old is he?" I really enjoy talking with all kinds of people while out photographing.

I think photography can be a kind of mirror of one's own thoughts. Even when I photograph a subject other than myself, all the pho-

tographs I take reflect my mood.

Among the photos of people I took during one period in high school there are none that show the subject facing the lens and no close-ups. The people in them have their backs to the camera or are taken at a distance, so it's impossible to tell who they are. That was a time when I didn't have much confidence in my ability to plan a photographic project or come up with original ideas. I was taking pictures to submit to a photo contest, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't formulate an articulate message or figure out how to get it across in my photographs. I wanted to be receptive to other people's ideas, but during that time I ended up being too easily influenced by other people's opinions. I knew I was still not very good at technique, but what I really couldn't forgive myself for was my lack of planning and conceptual skills. The photos I ultimately submitted were favorably received, but I didn't like them at all because I thought somehow they were not really my own photos. During that period, I didn't have much self-confidence, and I didn't get any pleasure from striking up conversations with people or taking their pictures, as I had before. Those pictures of people's backs and shots of distant figures reflected my mood. The pictures I take show clearly when my spirits are down. When I'm feeling good and in the swing of things I can take good pictures without even thinking.

### University entrance exams

I am still in my second year of high school, so I have some time until the college entrance exams, but concern about the exams is never very far from my thoughts. Students at my high school take it easy during the first two years of high school, but about the time they enter third year, many suddenly change: they

start attending *juku* (cram school) classes and studying hard for entrance exams.

I'm hoping to take entrance examinations to a university that offers sociology or political science as a major. That's probably because I'm interested in journalism. Especially if I major in sociology I'll be able to study a wide range of subjects. If I study the social problems I'm interested in, I can perhaps make a contribution to solving them. I'm looking forward to meeting all kinds of people in university, so I want to go to a university that has a number of different faculties.

## My Future

I want to pursue a career in journalism. I've always been fascinated by the special TV news and documentary programs. I think a journalist's job must be fascinating because you can go out to investigate topics of your own interest and convey the results of your findings to other people, and make a living at it. I want to be a journalist who is good at both photography and writing. Probably working for a newspaper may be the best way to start out. What I want to do is to deal with specific topics in depth and be able to take ample time for research, as when making a documentary focusing on a particular person. I don't care if I don't get an elite type of job. I'd rather find work I can enjoy, get really absorbed in, and continue for the rest of my life. My mother advises me to acquire skills that will enable me to work even if I get married. I know that it may be tough at times, but I would like to pursue a goal of my own.

## Family and Friends

### My family

Ours is a family of four, my parents, my sister, and myself. For me, my family is like the air. I take their presence for granted. But, I really appreciate my parents for their financial and spiritual support and for the way they have brought me up. The first social organization you encounter in life is your family. The members of a family are all different, and because these different people live together they may disagree or quarrel with each other. I think that the family is the first training ground in society for overcoming conflicts and building relationships with others.

### My friends

I have classmates and photography club members who are also close friends. At one time, I had a lot of trouble getting along with people, especially with my girl friends. During my first year in high school, for instance, a girl classmate who had long been a very close friend suddenly stopped speaking to me. I didn't know why and I got really worried. I didn't know for sure what I had done. I wondered what I should do about it. I wondered whether everyone else disliked me, too. For quite a while, I felt I couldn't trust anybody. I became afraid to say anything for fear it would be misinterpreted; for a while it took a lot of courage to say anything. I was afraid that I might say something that would make it hard to get along with my friends, or they might even hate me. I do tend to speak out frankly and straightforwardly. I never intend to be mean, but the way I say something may sound harsher to others than I think and perhaps hurt them. I still don't understand why this friend started

avoiding me all of a sudden. I'm afraid the way I said something to her was partly responsible. Also, some things that others can say to me and never bother me can hurt or bother others.

The reason I was able to go on with my school life despite those difficult relationships was that the photography club was like a haven. While I felt miserable because of the relationships with my classmates, I could still enjoy myself with the club members. Eventually I made a new friend among my classmates, and when I consulted her about my worries, she encouraged me by saying, "Come on, I don't think everyone dislikes you." From then on I began to get over that experience.

I still try to be careful about what I say to others and I do care about how others see me. However, I am not as nervous when I talk to my friends as I was for a while. Surely this is because I've made really good friends. When I'm facing a problem, they help me deal with it. They are the kind of friends who accept me for who I am. Without them, I probably would not have regained my self-confidence, and would not have been able to believe in others. I can see now how valuable an experience it was. In order to build strong friendships, you have to have faith in yourself and confidence in others.

## My Town: Yokohama

Yokohama has the second largest population of any city in Japan. Although there is not much greenery, it is a very nice place to live. You can easily find just about anything you might want. It is a dynamic, stimulating urban environment, with many movie theaters, libraries, museums, and other cultural attractions.

Yokohama has been the location of Japan's largest trading port since the country was

opened <sup>4</sup> to international commerce 150 years ago. For that reason, the cultures of many different countries mingle in the city. Since I was small I've always loved the area around Yokohama harbor especially. I'm always fascinated by how so many cultures come together in this city, and I think that's what makes it so pleasant. I still go for walks around the harbor and every time I make some new discovery.

I love Yokohama, but I want to have the experience of living in a different place, away from my family. There may be towns that will be even more interesting and even more suitable for me. If I could go and live in a new environment all by myself, I feel sure I would discover another side of me that is still hidden right now, and that I might grow as a person. By living elsewhere I will be able to see Yokohama from a different perspective.