

My Story

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Me in a Nutshell

I'm the kind of person who always tries to adapt to his surroundings. I often suppress my own feelings or responses because I don't like to disturb the atmosphere I'm in. Actually, though, that's not a big effort for me; I just do it naturally. Since I'm the youngest child of a big family, probably I acquired the habit without noticing. With my friends, I'm known as one of those who sets the mood of a gathering. I think I do tend to be more thoughtful of others than some. One of my shortcomings, however, is my distaste for methodical tasks.

My motto is "Say something different from what you said yesterday," and my priorities change depending on the time and the situation. What appeals to me is the idea of flexibility depending on the time and situation. I try to avoid getting trapped by convention.

Growing Up

Preschool years

My very first memory is that I was lying down, and when I opened my eyes, the kindergarten teacher and a whole bunch of kids were staring at me. I must have been around five years old, but I have no memory of anything before that. I thought it was very strange that I should have no other memories, and thinking it over very carefully, I came to the conclusion that I must have been a robot before I woke up in the kindergarten. Of course such a thing is

impossible, but when I was small, I was convinced it was true.

I was rather spoiled as a child and a bit of a crybaby. In preschool, I guess I would deliberately start crying in order to get the teacher on my side. The youngest of six children, I was a favorite of my grandmother, who often took care of me.

Elementary school

In elementary school I was known as the "Famikon Kid." Like most boys in those days, we did practically nothing but play video games. I'd sit down to play right after getting home from school and, even when I went to my friends' houses to play, all we did was play video games. My dream that time was to make a game of my own. By the time I was in fifth grade, I'd lost all interest in school work. I wasn't interested in reading at all. But one day I happened to borrow a book from the library. It was *Brown shonen no jikenbo* [Encyclopedia Brown, Boy Detective].³ From that time, I've been hooked on mysteries.

Junior high school

Not much changed when we went on to junior high school. There were more students in the school, arithmetic became mathematics, and there was the new subject of English to study. I had a great time in junior high. I think it was around that time that I began to think for myself. In elementary school I was a pretty obedient kid, never doubting my teacher. I was part of a small group of students in the

relatively small world of the elementary school. In junior high, groups from more than one elementary school came together, so the smaller groups that had existed before began to break down and our communication with students from other groups really increased. I think we started to think about things more seriously and carefully around that time. We began to doubt our teachers and sometimes resist or rebel against what they said.

I was feeling rebellious around that time and I actually did join a group of what they call “no-good” students who rebel in any way they can, wearing jewelry, skipping classes, breaking school rules, and whooping it up raucously on whatever occasion there might be. There were about ten of us. My role in this group was as “clown,” making others laugh with some caustic or sarcastic comment. Just as I had been the clown in my family circle, I played the joker in my clique at school.

It was around this time that I started to write stories. I was reading fantasy stories similar to role-playing games and I thought that even I could write stories like that. I wrote a kind of fantasy story and submitted it to a contest. The first time, my entry was quickly eliminated, but the second time I submitted something, it got past the first screening. If I could have improved it with some reworking, it might have had a chance, but I was still pretty green, so it didn't make it.

Then, when I was in third year of junior high school, I read Ellery Queen's *The Tragedy of Y*. Compared with that, the stories by Akagawa Jiro ⁴ and other mystery writers I had been reading up until then were nothing. That story gripped me from the start and held me spellbound. The revelation at the end made me literally shiver. I was pretty overwhelmed when I realized from reading this book what it takes to

write a real mystery. Even now, after having read a lot of stories in this genre and knowing how high the standards of writing are, I still consider this story by far the best.

Unlike high school, when we would go see movies and plays and discuss them and test our critical powers among ourselves, my three years of junior high were fun years of messing around with my friends.

High School Life

Entering Yamabuki High School

When it came to deciding what high school to aim for, my mother recommended that I try Tokyo Metropolitan Shinjuku Yamabuki High School. Yamabuki is a public school that offers four different programs of study. ⁵ One attraction was that you can create your own schedule of classes. When I found out that it also offered a good selection of computer-related subjects, I decided to take the entrance examination. I was still not really interested in studying, but now I realized that I really had to study. I would have a lot of trouble trying to write fiction without a solid grasp of conventional wisdom and my thinking would be distorted and illogical without broadening my horizons. I wanted to learn how to think in a more orderly, disciplined fashion, and that made me want to try computer programming.

I entered the Yamabuki High School evening school program (the Fourth Division, in which classes are held between 5 and 9 p.m.) for a vocational course in Information Technology Studies. I would get up at nearly noon and go to school in the late afternoon. My school day was quite different from most high school students. When I started third year, I took a part-time job to earn spending money, working the 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. shift at a gasoline station on

Tuesdays and Fridays.

Yamabuki's requirements are more flexible than most high schools, so nobody falls behind or ends up having to repeat a year. The basic requirement is to gain 80 credits⁶ within a maximum of six years. If you want to take it easy, you can take it easy; if you feel motivated to study, you can study. I am only sorry that we are allowed to take only up to 30 credits' worth of courses per year. It seems to me that it should be permitted if someone wanted to take 40 or even 80 credits a year and graduate in one or two years. I don't think I'm the only one who thinks so.

At Yamabuki, since each student draws up his or her own schedule of classes, we are not part of a cohesive unit of students following the same general curriculum. There isn't any emphasis on group activity, so we each follow our own schedules at our own pace. The freedom is nice, but if you don't have self-discipline, you can get yourself into trouble. For example, suppose you have a class during a certain hour, but a friend you want to be with has no class during that hour. You might be tempted to cut that class to spend time with the friend. Yamabuki goes by the rule that each student is responsible for his or her own affairs. I think it is a good thing to expect high school students to discipline themselves on their own, but it is rather hard on us because we were never really taught how to do that. In elementary and junior high school we are always part of a group and always under the firm control of a teacher. I think it would be good if children were taught self-discipline and individual responsibility starting earlier on, in elementary or junior high school.

Drama club

I'd been interested in plays from the time I was

in junior high, in fact, from elementary school days. When we put on school plays (*gakugeikai*) in elementary school, I thought I was pretty good at acting. In junior high school, however, the drama club was made up almost completely of girls, which kind of put me off.

In high school I joined the drama club without hesitating, and as a third-year student, I've written about twenty scripts, including short skits. That doesn't leave me much time to write fiction. In the autumn, when we are getting ready for the high school drama club competitions, we really buckle down and rehearse the play we're going to enter in the competition from morning until we have to go to classes. The rest of the year, however, we're more like just a group of like-minded friends. We often get together from morning, but all we do is chatter about trivial things, joke around, give each other a hard time and generally fritter away the time. We antagonize each other by our own egotistical behavior and openly mock and berate each other. We go off to eat lunch somewhere together and spend the rest of the time talking about things that have no relation to play acting. We often act as if the whole world revolved around us. I guess it's kind of like living in a dream.

About theater

Theater is probably the most *dasai* (outmoded), unappealing media of any today. No matter how hard you try, it is not polished or alive. Even if we use black-outs, or sets, or other stage techniques, it does not have the immediacy of visual media. Unlike with radio, you can't count on the imagination of the audience, and unlike film, you can't edit the performance. It certainly cannot attempt to offer massive amounts of information as can television. But still I love theater. I love that wild, uneditible

rawness.

I want to do in theater what you cannot do with film and television. What you want to convey in theater, I think, is not something so prosaic as: “this is what life is like.” You want to transmit a kind of electricity, a flash of inspiration or insight. In theater I don’t think we have to convey a “message.” I don’t want to ask the audience to learn something from the play, I simply hope they will find their feelings and sensibilities aroused by what they see on the stage.

What I treasure

The most important things to me are myself and the environment that surrounds me. I’m in touch with my environment (which can be the people immediately around me, the world, or even the universe) and influenced by it, just as I influence it as well. I observe and accept things just as they are, and my mind works in response to things as I perceive and understand them. I think this whole process is really important. I want to be flexible and receptive and not be tied down by conventional thinking. I can’t explain what I mean well in words, but perhaps it’s special exactly because I can’t explain it. I think I will just go on searching, keeping an inquiring mind.

“Healing” is all the rage these days. It’s the theme of television programs, art, and popular songs, and there are many how-to books on healing. This trend really turns me off. Artists try to win popularity with pop-art paintings inscribed with comforting phrases or soothing verses and publishers put out books explaining how to “heal” yourself—and everything they write or express is completely trite, obvious, and common sense. The way they present that kind of thing is just too presumptuous. People are easily fooled into making such simplistic,

ordinary homilies their golden rules for life.

But I don’t see how they can do that kind of thing. How can they be satisfied just to swallow whole the answers provided by people you don’t even know? How can they just take such answers as conclusive and go on through life in carefree fashion without asking questions themselves? I think I have answers that even I cannot yet put into words. I’m attempting to give expression to my ideas by writing fiction.

My Future

I want to try writing true detective stories and mysteries. Why mysteries? It is this mystery format that appeals to me. I’m fascinated by the idea of trying to see what I can express in this particular style of fiction. I love the idea of writing, like that of Ellery Queen, that is highly refined, in which everything and every character is part of the intricate plot of the story and part of a pattern that leads to the solution to the case. I want to write stories that people will appreciate not just out of admiration for the trick and the solution to the case but because they feel the story was compelling and moving to read. That is probably the meaning of a genuine mystery.

Family and Friends

My family

There are eight in my family, my parents, my three sisters, my two brothers, and myself. When I was born, my mother was 39 and my father 51. The eldest of my three sisters and two brothers is 14 years older than I and the youngest is 6 years older. They all helped look after me.

Both my parents worked, but because it was such a big family we weren’t all that well off.

My mother was especially busy. She had a number of part-time jobs and worked from early in the morning until late at night every day. Busy as she was, though, she would always come to school when we had class visitation day or other functions at school. At the time, I took it for granted, but now, when I think how hard it must have been for her, I'm really grateful.

My brothers and sisters all helped with the housework. Even during junior high school I didn't feel like rebelling against such a great family. My family was a great source of stability for me. I felt secure because I knew my family cared for me and would look out for me. It's really important to be on good terms with your family. I played a role in helping to keep my family close from the time I was little: I was the clown who made everybody laugh.

My friends

A family is a group that embraces and supports individual behavior; friends are a group that recognizes and encourages us. Friends exchange ideas and stimulate each other to improve. Sometimes friends are easier to get along with than family members, but sometimes you cannot treat them as intimately as family. Unlike relatives, who are linked by kinship ties, friends more easily drift apart when they are separated. For that reason, I want to spend time with and keep close to the friends who are most special to me.

My Town: Tokyo

Tokyo ¹ is a city where you can buy books from all sorts of other countries, and, what's good above anything else, almost all kinds of books in Japanese are easily available here. Japan, especially, Tokyo, which incorporates many

languages and cultures, is the epitome of information. Another thing I want to emphasize is that Tokyo is just an ordinary city—it's just another local city like the other cities around the country.

Still, my story could only happen in this city. I think I'll probably never move away from here. My hometown is always going to be Tokyo.