

My Story

Yoshida Kojiro

よしだ こうじろう

Me in a Nutshell

I'm rather shy around strangers. Other people seem to have different impressions of me. Some say I'm quiet, but others probably think I'm quite talkative. Actually, I have both these sides. Depending on the time and situation, I can be quite aggressive and active. Apparently I look as if my mind is blank, but actually it's not that way at all; in fact, often after I've said something, I start worrying because it wasn't really what I wanted to say.

Just as I prefer the country to the city, I prefer natural to artificial things.

Growing Up

Preschool years

I was born in 1981 in the city of Nagasaki, Nagasaki prefecture. ³I had a big appetite after I was born. Usually newborn babies lose weight slightly, but my weight increased steadily. The doctor apparently told my mother that I was a child with a strong capacity for survival. I was told I slept a lot, didn't fuss, and was easy to take care of.

I was a quiet child who didn't talk very much. There were plenty of places to play in a natural setting around my house, so I often went out with an insect cage and a butterfly net to collect bugs. I read my encyclopedia of

insects until it practically fell apart.

Elementary school

When I was in third grade, my father was transferred by his company to a job in Himeji, ² Hyogo prefecture. ¹This was a traumatic experience for me. It may be an exaggeration to say that Nagasaki and Himeji are two different cultures, but there were certainly a lot of things I wasn't used to. First, the language—the dialect—was different and I also felt a gap between the kind of people I was used to and the character of the people of Himeji. The environment we lived in was also completely new. In Nagasaki, our house had been surrounded by *mikan* orchards, so after I got home from school, I would just go out looking for bugs and play in the woods and fields. Although there are parks around our house in Himeji, not many children played outside. Usually they gathered at someone's house to play video games.

The differences in environment and language left me completely bewildered, and it was pretty difficult to get used to my new surroundings. There were times I felt isolated from my classmates and the people around me.

In October of the year we moved to Himeji, I fell from high recreational equipment during a school outing, broke my left arm, and had to be hospitalized for two or three weeks. When I

was well enough to go back to school, it was arranged that I would study in the school infirmary instead of the regular classroom. During that time I often talked to the school nurse, and she listened to me patiently and was very kind. Then, when fourth grade started, the school nurse was transferred to another school. I couldn't go to the infirmary any more and I didn't want to go to school. I shut myself up at home. My parents worried about me and did their best to take me on outings, to the ocean or to the rivers to fish. During the summer holidays we went on extended vacations and in the winter we went to the Shinshu area where I got my first experience skiing.

During that period, I found the pets I kept a big comfort. I had a turtle, two cats, and a dog. My menagerie now, by the way, consists of four turtles, three cats, two dogs, and four birds. Along with animals, I also like plants, and I've learned a lot of plant names. Now, too, I like taking care of plants and often stop by the local garden shop to buy a new potted plant or two.

Junior high school

When I started junior high school, the students in my classes were all different from before, but I still couldn't get over my reluctance to go to school and I still had trouble fitting in with the other students. Relations with my family members were not so good. For a while I hardly talked to my parents, big brother or younger sister. I ate about once a day, but that was all. I spent most of my days reading books that happened to be around the house. I shut myself up in my room and didn't see anyone. I didn't even have anything to do with my pets.

Around that time I sensed the expectation of my parents that I would excel, following the model path of getting into a top high school and a university, and then going on to a white-collar career at a good company. I really wanted them to understand my position, having been unable to live up to their expectations about the path I should follow. I didn't say that to them right out, however. I didn't think saying it would do anything to resolve the situation. Defiantly, I thought it didn't matter what happened to me. And yet, at the same time, a desire began to grow very gradually in me to lead a normal life and go to school like everyone else.

Finally I reached the turning point. In October of my third year in junior high, I went to school after a long absence. During English class, the teacher began to tell us about three private high schools located in the prefecture. One of them was Ichikawa High School. In Himeji some people don't have a very good image of private schools: there is tendency to think of them as the places where students go whose grades and test scores are not good enough to get into the public schools. However, listening to the teacher's explanation, I began to think that maybe private schools might have strong points not found in public schools. I knew that a person like myself, with a poor class attendance record in junior high school, would be at a serious disadvantage applying to a public high school, which invariably stresses regular school attendance and class performance. Ichikawa High School had a system according to which they would accept a certain number of students recommended⁵ by my school. If I could fit the requirements to

be recommended, I had a chance of being admitted to Ichikawa even if my confidential report ⁴ was not that favorable. When I realized that possibility, I began to feel a ray of light was shining my way. I thought to myself that this might be my last chance to get on track to a normal education. I went to my teacher right away and told him that I wanted to be considered for a recommendation to Ichikawa High School. The teacher understood my desire very well, and set down the condition I would have to fulfill: I had to start coming to school regularly, starting the next day. When I did start commuting to school, I found my classmates friendly and encouraging. My homeroom teacher also cheered me on, and I convinced myself that “all I have to do is just do it” and I started commuting regularly to school and even attended extra classes at *juku* (cram school). It all paid off, and I was accepted. My parents were really happy—as was I—when I managed to get into the high school I had chosen myself.

High School Life

Entering to Ichikawa High School

When I started attending Ichikawa High School, I tried my best to act cheerful and friendly so as not to create a bad first impression. I was also determined not to be bullied and made fun of like I had been in my previous schools. I joined the *kyudo* (Japanese archery) club and I made a lot of friends. I also discovered the challenge of setting a goal for myself and working hard toward that goal. For example, when the *kanji* proficiency test was to be held two months later, I decided to take it and

studied hard to see how good a score I could get. I worked hard and I achieved my goal. Then I set myself another target to strive for. For the first time I began to feel that I was getting through school on my own efforts.

I also realized that there are a number of paths one can follow. The students who graduate from Ichikawa choose different career paths. Some go to work right after graduating, others go to vocational or technical school, ⁶ and others go to university. I realized that there are more paths than just the one my parents had imagined for me. My perspective on things was broadened and my attitude grew more confident and positive. So far, I have never been late for school or missed a single day.

Japanese archery club

I joined *kyudo* (Japanese archery) club partly because a classmate from the same junior high school suggested we join and partly because I was already interested in *kyudo*. In third year, I became the head of the club. We have practice for about two hours after classes are over. I now hold the first rank in the *kyudo* ranking system.

Kyudo is a martial art, so it is kind of in between a sport and an art. In *kyudo*, the objective is not just hitting the target with an arrow; it involves learning a set of movements and manners that are to be followed from entering the archery ground to leaving it. It may seem a bit stiff and formal, but I think that this kind of discipline is important. Drawing the bow is the part of the discipline that I love best. When you draw the bow, your mind is completely empty; this moment when my mind is free of all fixed thoughts is the best.

By sticking with Japanese archery, I devel-

oped perseverance and tenacity. Up until then, I had always had trouble following through on something from beginning to end, but having kept up with *kyudo* for three whole years and having been able to lead the club as its head has given me a lot of confidence. The confidence that I can accomplish something on my own has now helped me to establish a goal for the future. I have set myself the clear goal of becoming a veterinarian.

About Ichikawa High School

At first I didn't have a very good image of Ichikawa High School. At the same time, I was also very hopeful that there I would have the chance to lead the normal student life that I had not had before. At Ichikawa there are all kinds of students—those who do nothing but study, those who get really involved in club activities, and others who are preoccupied with hobbies of their own. That extremely varied student body overturned all my preconceptions about the school.

After starting at Ichikawa, I learned that it can be fun to work hard at something. I have served as head of the *kyudo* club and carried on a normal school life I never imagined I could before. I owe a debt of gratitude to this school because it gave me my chance to start over fresh.

My Future

From the time I was small, I was familiar with the work of a veterinarian. Because I had so many pets, I often had to take them to the vet, and I took a natural interest in the profession of veterinarian. Then, when I learned by

watching TV and reading the newspaper that the work of a veterinarian involves treating not just pets but domestic and even wild animals, I became very interested in the work of wild animal protection.

Where once animals in nature could take care of themselves without any intervention by human beings, the way things are now, many will not survive on their own instincts alone. A bird that has swallowed a lead ball, for example, cannot survive on its own. Only humans can save animals that are hurt and injured as a result of human actions. I would like to help save wild animals like these.

I have sometimes been able to save the birds my cats caught. Often they could not fly when I rescued them, so I would take care of them. I felt indescribably happy when a bird I had looked after would fly away back to freedom. It seemed to me that I would be really happy if I could become a veterinarian and help cure lots of animals like that.

Family and Friends

My family

There are five in my family: my parents, my big brother, my younger sister, and myself. We're not a very noisy or exuberant family—we're actually rather quiet. For me, family is just always there. It is like a fact of life; if I did not have a family, I wouldn't know where I belonged. When I was in junior high school, I went through a period when I hardly talked to my parents, but seeing how happy my mother looked when I told her I wanted to go to Ichikawa High School made me feel very happy too. My father is totally absorbed in his

work, and I always thought that he wasn't interested in what we kids were doing, but recently, since we started to talk about what I should do after graduation, I learned that he did care a lot. I was really glad to know that too.

My mother is the one who understands me best. She also loves animals and plants, and because we have those interests in common, we often talk. When I have to decide something, I usually think about the situation and decide by myself, without consulting anyone. Actually, though, I usually pretend to consult with my mother about things. For example, when I decided to take the Step Test (English proficiency test), I mentioned it to my mother, "I'm thinking of taking the English proficiency test." I don't know whether my mother already know that I had decided, but she supported the idea, saying "That sounds like a good idea." So then I knew she approved of my decision.

When I was in second year of high school, my mother said to me that "We would be happy if you could get into a good school and find a job in a good company." What she said confirmed what I had thought back in junior high school, but since I had already set myself the goal of becoming a veterinarian, I wasn't upset. Rather, I realized that it's perfectly natural for parents to have certain expectations of their children and that it would actually be rather sad if they had no expectations of you at all. I began to understand that I had actually been very fortunate that my parents had high expectations of me.

My friends

Friends, for me, are people with whom I can act naturally, without reserve. For example,

when I'm feeling depressed about something, I don't have to tell them all about it, I can just enjoy their company and, in the course of having fun with my friends, I eventually get over whatever it was that was bothering me. I often tease others, and I know that whether or not someone can be a friend depends on whether you can tease them knowing they won't misinterpret what you say and that you have a good understanding with them.

My Town

Town where I live: Himeji

The best thing about Himeji, as far as I am concerned, is the old castle⁷ built in medieval times, which has been designated a world heritage. The area I live in, called Shiromidai, means "Castle View Heights," and in fact we do have a good view of the castle. The nightscape, when the ramparts are lit up and the castle seems to float above the city below, is really impressive. The downtown part of Himeji, which is rather crowded and chaotic, holds little appeal for me. I'm not much for the razzle-dazzle of city life. The area around the castle itself is always crowded with visitors, local and from other parts of the country and the world. I think of Himeji as a constantly bustling city with Himeji castle at its center.

Town where I was born: Nagasaki

I love everything, without exception or reason, about Nagasaki, the town where I was born. Even now, whenever I see the streets of Nagasaki shown on television or in the news, I feel the urge to go back there. I know, however,

that such feelings come from nostalgic memories of the past, and I know that the past is past. Even though I might want to go back there and revel in happy memories of my childhood, the present is more important. I can say that now because I have finally been able to carve a secure place for myself at Ichikawa High School.