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# Prelude

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## A BABY IS BORN

Twilight was creeping closer and the good earth was barren and cold. The chill wind passed through the crack in the window molding, fluttering the cotton curtain turned colorless by the sun. The mist hung low in the valley and smoke curled up from the neighboring chimney, then suddenly floated sideways as if an unseen hand were holding it down.

I was cold physically and chilled to the marrow spiritually. Everything in the past seemed fruitless and the future seemed hopeless and desolate. A month had passed since I had been afflicted with a lung disease and had returned to the house in the country where my parents were living.

After the Second World War, people in Japan had lost everything—this stroke of misfortune came equally to all. But what was not equally distributed was good and bad health, and I drew the unlucky lot.

I recalled the day when our first daughter, Yuko, was born. Junko, my wife, had suddenly complained about the pains at dawn on May 1, 1945. It did not take much time to dress, as we always slept with our clothes on in order to be ready for air raids. I helped Junko down the stairs with utmost tenderness. Once outside I pulled the cart loaded with blankets and pillows while my wife walked beside me through the narrow lane into the field leading to the hospital not far from our home. The doctor, who had diagnosed the previous day that the labor pains would begin at the earliest two days from then, was surprised but still welcomed us in good humor,

even though we had disturbed her slumber. At 5:25 that morning, Yuko was born, a very tiny baby with wrinkles on her face. Glancing at the rather pathetic looking little creature, the doctor feared that she might not survive. But as we could not read her mind, we did not think for even a moment that the baby might be taken back to the darkness from which she had arrived. On this same day Berlin fell and Hitler died; old and evil disappeared and at the same time newness and goodness were born. I hoped that the newborn would bring light to people. In spite of her small body, she cried with vigor, demonstrating her wish to live. Junko, whose constitution was delicate, looked tenderly at the baby sleeping at her side. She had already forgotten the hardships and sickness the baby had brought to her, and now motherly tenderness was awakening in her.

Three days later, at about ten o'clock in the evening, she was awakened by the shrill sound of the siren announcing an air raid. She quietly rose, took the baby in her arms, and went down into the basement. There she sat in the dark, holding Yuko tightly to her breast, staring at the dark wall, emotionless. The small life had given her new hope and courage.

As the days went by, Yuko gained weight, thanks to her mother's milk, which was more than adequate even without sufficient food. We were happy despite poverty though I did not know what tomorrow would bring.

The war ended abruptly. I had heard the rumor three days before it actually happened that Japan would accept the treaty offered by the Allies, but I was reluctant to believe it. On August 15 at noon, however, all the staff at the Institute of Infectious Diseases to which I belonged were called to assemble in the big hall. It was hot. We heard the proclamation of the Emperor with tears and perspiration flowing down our cheeks. This was the end. It seemed as if we had suffered the past several years in vain. On returning to my room I thought once again, yes, indeed it was the end. The mice and eggs inoculated by the influenza virus had seemed so important an

hour before, but now the experiment was of no interest to me.

## SUZUKI'S VOICE

I felt the coldness creeping into the room, the small barren room which held only my mattress and sleeping items. I turned the radio on. It was always a consolation to hear various programs on the air.

“Mr. Suzuki, so your opinion is that all children can develop their abilities if they have a good environment from an early age.” It was the announcer.

“Yes, I am convinced that all children can develop their abilities or talents. People are apt to think that musical talent is something inherited but we all know that children throughout the world speak their mother tongue. But when we reflect on how difficult it is for adults to master foreign languages, we must acknowledge that the natural ability of children to absorb whatever comes to them must be very high. So I thought of the application to violin instead of to language, and to my own amazement I had remarkable success. Now we will have a demonstration. These children who will play today come from various family backgrounds—merchants, farmers, and medical doctors. The only similarity among them is that they all have had no music in their homes, much less a violin. We took them all as they applied, with no previous testing. I would like to make people understand talent can be developed and is not inherited.” It was Mr. Suzuki.

The children began playing their violins. The tone was clean and the tempo good. It was not at all like hearing children play. I was dumbfounded to hear such a wonderful performance by such small children. I forgot the chill and the desolate room.

From the beginning of my boyhood I loved music—adored it. But I thought that music was to be performed only by those who were specially gifted. The heavenly music that we all so enjoyed certainly could not be created by ordinary people! But what had Suzuki said? If I heard correctly:

“Every child can develop his ‘talent’.” Then according to his understanding, talent and ability must be the same.

I reflected on my own experience in learning English. Did I possess the ability from the day of my birth? Certainly not! It was my environment that made it possible for me to understand this foreign language.

## MY BOYHOOD IN THE COUNTRY

Until I was six years old, I lived in Okazaki, a small city in Aichi prefecture. Those were happy days for me. I was care-free and able to do what I wanted, just as any other boy in the world. My father was a merchant who sold charcoal and fuel. I was a younger son of the family. I called my mother “mommy,” which came out very naturally, but I was reluctant to call my father “daddy.” Something deep inside me, perhaps something instinctual, held my tongue from calling him thus.

As I said before, my life at that time was happy. In summer the nearby river was our major playground. We swam to our hearts’ content. I was always in the middle of games and pranks. Much against my will I had to go to kindergarten, where I not only had to wear a white apron, but also had to keep it neat and clean. The other boys in my gang didn’t have to go to kindergarten and throughout the morning they were waiting for my return. I envied their freedom and careless attitude. I hated going to kindergarten. I hated singing those childish folksongs, I hated marching hand in hand with girls and dancing those silly dances.

I always waited impatiently for the bell to ring dismissing the class. I was the first to jump up at the sound of the bell and run back home. As soon as I crossed the threshold of my house, I would cry, “Here I am; I’m back,” and, flinging down the bag containing my lunchbox, would go outside again. My gang was always waiting for me, waiting eagerly



After two months of rest, I went to school again. The opinions of the doctors differed. One said I had to rest for at least a year, and another said I could go to school on condition that I would take utmost care and never overtire myself. The latter was a professor in my school, so I gladly followed his advice.

I had another attack when I was in the third year, but I overcame it and graduated with good marks.

### MY WORK IN THE INSTITUTE BEGINS

I spent a year as an intern at St. Luke's International Hospital, then I applied for duty as a ship's surgeon, thinking that the pure air of the ocean would do me good. During a month on standby I commuted every day from my home to the branch office of N.Y.K. in Yokohama. This was indeed a gay time. I had money in my pocket as never before, ate lunch at fancy restaurants and strolled in Yamashita Park nearby. My bosom swelled looking at the big liners, fancying myself a surgeon on those luxury ships. But my experience turned out to be quite different from my expectations.

One day I received an order to embark on the S.S. *Genoa*, a steamer chartered by the Japanese Army for military transportation. There was no choice but to go. The ship left the port of Hiroshima for China, loaded with soldiers and arms. Much against my will, I had to cruise up and down the Yangtze River and the coast of China under dangerous conditions, risking my health as well as my life. After a year, utterly exhausted, I appealed to the military authority and was allowed to disembark due to my bad health.

After a month's rest, I was on a freighter bound for the United States. What a great difference there was between the atmosphere of China and the blue sea of the South Pacific.

After three years of life at sea, I felt healthy and wanted to carry on my studies. On my return I applied to the hospital where I had done my internship. Since there was a shortage of doctors in this hospital, the chief doctor gladly welcomed