

## Prologue

Sometimes I feel crushed by the feeling that I am different from other people. That feeling is more like the loneliness I feel in a square than like being alone in the dark. I see many people enjoying themselves, but I don't know anyone among them, and there is no one to talk to. Time just passes in the midst of it all. The sadness of spending time in idleness takes over me. I have had this feeling since I was a toddler that I am different.

I know that the feeling of loneliness is not unique to me. Everyone has experienced loneliness to a greater or lesser extent. Some people end up hurting themselves or even committing crimes, but fortunately for me, I have never reached that point. Maybe I just lived a sloppy life.

These days there are many cases of parents giving up their children for various reasons. Compared to the difficulties of children in institutions, my experience may be tiny. I did not want to put my past into words until now, but now that I am over 50 years old and have passed the turning point, I would like to look back at the path I have taken. I thought that by doing so I would be able to realize something about myself.

I lived in Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, with my father, mother, brother and sister until I was three years old. One day, my mother and her lover took me with them to live on the run, and three years later we were in Kurashiki, Okayama Prefecture. Then, about two months after I started elementary school in Kurashiki, my father and grandmother suddenly found us and took only me back to Otsu in the first grade. I was suddenly separated from my mother.

As a young child, I had no memories of Otsu until I was three years old, so my personal life with my family in Otsu, my life after the transfer, and everything else became very stressful for the six-year-old me.

From then on, I was forced to live as a motherless child and spent my school years envying my friends who had both parents. After graduating from high school and getting a job, at the age of 36, I had a reunion with my mother for the first time in 30 years. This experience became a treasure in my life because I had given up on seeing my mother again while she was alive.

My father's parents moved to Taiwan, which was Japanese territory before the war, and lived a relatively prosperous life there. My father was born in Taiwan. It was a time of 'give birth and multiply,' but my father was an only child for some reason. After the defeat in the war, he and his parents were forced to return to Kyushu, my grandfather's hometown, but soon arrived in Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, where they began to live. When they were repatriated from Taiwan to Japan, they left behind almost all the wealth they had accumulated in Taiwan, so life in Japan was like starting from scratch. He went through a difficult period where he had to go without food.

I (Takashi Fujii) was born in 1960 in Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, 15 years after the end of the war. According to my older brother (Kiyoshi), I was born in a place called Shiga Hospital in Fujimidai, Otsu City. On a hot Saturday afternoon in July, my brother said he stopped by the hospital room after school and saw me as a newborn.

My grandfather (Itsuo Fujii) died three years before I was born, so in my family were my grandmother (Kaori), my parents (Teruyoshi and Tomiko), my brother (Kiyoshi), who was nine years older than me, and my sister (Keiko), who was seven years older. I was the youngest child by far. My grandmother lived in a different house from us, so at the time of my birth, there were five people in the family - my parents and three children. However, I have no memories of that "family" of five. I have no memory of it at all. So the facts and episodes of that time are things that I learned to some extent after I grew up.

## 2 Childhood during the time of disappearance

By the time I was three years old, when I started to remember things, my family had disintegrated and my environment had changed completely. The earliest memories I can trace back are the following.

I was with my mother, and at her side was her mistress, Mekata Sukeo. My mother ran away from the Fujii family when I was three years old, taking her mistress and me with her. In other words, she 'disappeared' from my father. The family left behind was my father, 12-year-old Kiyoshi, and 9-year-old Keiko. My grandmother moved in with my father and his family to take care of them.

My mother's lover was originally a man who ran a kashiwaya (chicken shop) in the Ishiyama district of Otsu City. While my mother was disgusted with my father, who was a motherfucker and worthless, she grew closer to him, an active man she had met through Soka Gakkai activities, and eventually left the house. I vaguely remember the scene at the time of my departure. I took a train on the Tokaido line with my mother, and we headed west. Meanwhile, Kashiwa-ya's friend was riding his motorcycle west on the national highway. The three of us met at a train station somewhere in the Chugoku area and, relying on our acquaintances, began a new life. The fugitive life that began that way is my first memory of being a 'family'.

My father was a Mekata Sukeo at that time. I was imprinted as such. It was a joint effort between the two of them to manipulate my memory. Before I knew it, I was calling him 'Otô-chan'. As the days went by, the memory of my original father disappeared, and I had completely forgotten that I even had a brother or sister.

Life as a fugitive was extremely difficult. He lived in a hut-like dwelling that barely protected him from the night dew. However, the home was not permanent. I went to Kure in Hiroshima and Tokushima in Shikoku. There were several sudden moves. I remember that I had no household goods and that it was a casual nighttime escape.

Otô-chan was originally a kashiwaya, so he could survive with only one knife. I remember riding on his motorcycle and being taken to a series of chicken coops in the countryside. I remember my buttocks aching badly on the rickety road, which was not paved and full of dust and smoke. He may have been negotiating the purchase of chickens. I also remember accompanying him on a motorcycle delivery of chicken that he had cut up himself and put in a plastic bag.

The escape period was very different from what other young children experienced. Normally I would have played with friends and gotten toys to play with, but I have no memories of that. I was forced to live in the shadows at a very young age because we were poor and had no place to live for long periods of time because we were in the midst of the escape. I didn't have much experience playing with friends, and I was extremely bad at communicating with people, which cast a shadow over me for the rest of my life.

I didn't have much of my mother at home. I don't know if she worked or what. I was left home alone most of the time. I had no choice, so I often went out alone in the neighborhood. Kids my age usually went to kindergarten or nursery school, so I didn't meet anyone on the street. Every day I would just stumble along, and it would go on and on. But I had no way of knowing if I was unhappy or special because I had nothing around me to compare myself to.

Sometimes neither my mother nor 'Otô-chan' would come home at night. They went to a Soka Gakkai round-table discussion, and I usually had to stay home. I remember eating dinner alone that my mother had cooked for me. One time, the amount of side dish I ate was more than my parents expected, and 'Otô-chan' scolded me, asking why I didn't leave some for him. As for me, I only ate to satisfy my hunger. Still, I was far from full.

We moved from place to place and finally settled in the Mizushima district of Kurashiki, Okayama Prefecture. It was a room on the second floor of a two-story wooden apartment. There was no bathroom and only a communal toilet on the ground floor. There was no toilet paper in the latrine, so I used old newspapers that I crumpled up and rubbed together.

One day I had a little brother. I remember holding him. He was the child of my mother and 'Otô-chan'. My mother had not yet divorced my real father, so I think he was still my father's child on the family register. We were on the run at the time, so I don't know if she had properly registered the birth with the authorities.

One day, I was standing in a corner of a company playground in the Mizushima area, idly watching the players practicing football. One of the players noticed me, came over, and offered me a piece of bean-jam bun, saying, "Here, eat it. How did he know that I was hungry? I was hungry. At that time, the bean-jam buns made me the happiest I had ever been.

### 3 Spring, when I started primary school

It was the spring of my sixth year from my birth, and I was finally going to elementary school. Kurashiki Municipal Fifth Fukuda Elementary School was the elementary school I entered. My mother did not pay much attention to me. On the morning of the enrollment ceremony, my mother was not at home. She may have gone out on an errand. I was confused in the morning when I had to get ready. I had bought a school uniform, but I had to put on the sleeves for the first time that day. I didn't even have a belt for my pants, so I used the string from the front hanging, which was a business tool for 'Otô-chan'. I went to the school for the initiation ceremony alone because 'Otô-chan' had to work as well. I don't know where the school is. The only thing they told me was the direction. I was scared. I didn't even know what the initiation ceremony was about, so I just went to the school.

When I arrived at the school, it was kind of crowded and busy. But I didn't know why there were so many people and what they were doing. I was just petrified. After a while, the other children were taken by their parents and moved somewhere towards the classrooms or the auditorium, but I was left behind.

Finally, some of the teachers noticed me.

Teacher: "What class are you in?"

Me: "I don't know".

Teacher: "Where are your mom and dad?"

Me: "They are not here".

Teacher: "What is your name?"

Me: "My name is Mekata Takashi."

The teachers then looked for the name 'Mekata Takashi' in the list of papers posted on the wall. But there was no way. My name is 'Fujii Takashi' in the family register. The teachers probably had no idea what was going on. During my escape, I was brought up as a child of Mekata and lived as 'Mekata Takashi'. So I told them right then and there that my name was 'Mekata Takashi', but they looked puzzled. It took several teachers to finally confirm my identity. I don't remember whether I was able to attend the entrance ceremony that day or the crucial part of it. That was the beginning of my primary school life.

Later, my mother was called to the school. My mother informed the teacher of her request that she be treated as 'Mekata Takashi'. And so began my elementary school life as 'Mekata Takashi'.

Because of my life as a fugitive, I had completely lost my training as a child. Things that other children could do were difficult for me. I was inexperienced at everything - rock-paper-scissors, hide-and-seek, tag, counting - to say I was at the level of a three-year-old would not be an exaggeration. I was clumsy at everything, I couldn't move on my own, and I just followed behind others.

The smell of textbooks and crayons bitterly reminds me of the time when I started school and stumbled at the very beginning.

Anyway, my elementary school life began in Kurashiki. It was the first time I lived in a group with my peers. Everyone came to school every morning looking happy, talking and playing in the classrooms and on the playground. I just watch them from the corner. Also, when the teacher gives instructions in class, I watch the actions of the children around me and then imitate them, so I am always one step behind. I hate myself for it, but I can't do it because I don't get the point. This feeling of being behind has been a major stumbling block for me. From the bottom of my heart, I envied other children who could behave in a childlike and natural way.

As I mentioned earlier, my mother ran away in the night with her lover, taking me with her. She left my brother and sister at home in Otsu. Why did my mother take me? She must have had an easier life as a fugitive without me. Maybe it was because I was too young to be left alone. But did my mother love me? What I felt, at least as soon as I started elementary school, was a sense of inferiority and loneliness. What haunted me throughout was my own very awkward personality, which did not mix well with my other friends.

4 All of a sudden, I had to go back to my own father

One day in June, about two months after school, something big happened. My father finally found out where we were and came straight to the elementary school.

I was in the classroom when my homeroom teacher called me in.

"Mekata-kun, come here for a minute."

The teacher took me to the principal's office. In the principal's office, two strangers were waiting for me on the sofa. I think the teacher gave me an introduction at that time, something like "Your father and grandmother are here to welcome you," but I did not understand what the teacher was talking about. Later I gradually realized that the thin middle-aged man was my father, and the old man next to him was my father's mother - my grandmother.

I lost all memory of my past until I was three years old. I don't remember anything about my family before the disappearance. For me, Mekata is my 'Otô-chan'. When the headmaster told me, "This man in front of you is your father and this man is your grandmother," I just listened and had no idea what he was talking about. I didn't understand or agree.

Five people were sitting across from each other on the sofa in the principal's office. The principal, the teacher, my father, my grandmother, and me. The adults were discussing something. When the discussion was over, my grandmother took me back to my father's house in Otsu, Shiga Prefecture.

What is Otsu?

What does it mean to go home?

I had no idea what it meant and had to helplessly follow the decisions of the adults around me. My school days in Kurashiki City came to an abrupt end that day. My grandmother and I left the school and walked to the nearest station, Mizushima. My father, on the other hand, did not accompany us, but went alone to his apartment in Mekata to talk about taking me back to Otsu, I guess.

Until that day, my family consisted of my mother, myself, my mother's lover, 'Otô-chan', and the baby that was born between them. It was an imperfect family, but it was a community with a bond in its own way. So I didn't have a last word with any of them and was suddenly separated from them. Before I could do anything to resist, I was forcibly thrown into another world by my parents' selfishness.

And just as I was getting used to life in the elementary schools in Kurashiki, I had to leave my friends without even a friendly goodbye.

The JNR train carrying my grandmother and me left Mizushima Station for Ishiyama Station in Otsu City via Kurashiki Station. On the way, we bought lunch and tea at one of the stations and ate on the train. My grandmother tried to talk to me about something, but I could not understand what she was saying until the end. At that time, I could not imagine leaving Kurashiki as it was. It's like leaving in the middle of a class and traveling with an old lady you don't know. There are things in this world that you don't understand, I felt that way as a child.

The train arrived at Ishiyama Station in Otsu City. From the bus waiting area, I took the Toray Circulation Line of the Teisan Bus. I got off at the bus stop called Yakenoguchi, passed under the guard of the Meishin Expressway and walked up the gentle slope to my home in Zeze Yakinocho (now Wakabadai).

My grandmother said, "We are almost at Takashi-chan's house". I replied in a small voice with a vague "yes".

We finally arrived at the small old house. My grandmother opened the side rail door and let me into the house.

"Soon your brother and sister will be home from school."  
"Do you want some tea? Milk? Or would you like some water?"

Grandma says many things to me, but since I have no basic understanding of what this house means to me, I can only give her a rough answer. If I had the strength to ask questions, the things I didn't understand would have disappeared, but I was an extremely withdrawn child. I would sit on the tatami and stare blankly at the plaque on the wall above the shoji screen, which was out of place in this ramshackle house, that read "Merit Immeasurable(功德無量). Of course, I could not read the words at that time.

After that, my grandmother took me to the neighborhood to say hello. My grandmother happily introduced me to her landlady, Mrs. Ohira, and the woman across the street, Mrs. Hoguchi, saying, "Takashi has returned. Looking back, I can see now that the family's youngest son had disappeared and was eventually found and returned safely, but I was unaware that I had disappeared and suffered more than others, so when she said things like, "That was hard work," I could only laugh bitterly because I had no measure of how hard life was.

In the evening, first my brother came home from high school and then my sister from junior high school.

She said, "Remember, I'm your sister. From now on, this is your house."

I did not remember my sister, but I finally understood from her explanation that I would be living here from today onwards.

When my brother saw me, he picked me up and lifted me close to the ceiling. I felt very welcome. I couldn't help but say, "This is high!"

My life until yesterday and the life that is about to begin. There is no consistency between them and I am not prepared for it because it is not my choice. Life is predictable to a certain extent and includes acts of preparation for change, unless it is a catastrophe, war or incident. This event that suddenly happened to me was a great challenge for me as a first year elementary school student.

My father, my brother in his first year of high school, my sister in her second year of middle school, and my grandmother. These four plus me were a family of five. Anyway, a new day was about to begin.

## 6 Transfer to Zeze elementary school

Well, I have to go to elementary school tomorrow. I was in the middle of the first semester of first grade.

The name "Mekata Takashi" is written on every single textbook and notebook I brought back from Kurashiki, and on every single piece of stationery in the toolbox.

My sister said, "This is no good. We have to change everything to Fujii."

From tomorrow, I will have to change my name from 'Mekata' to my original surname 'Fujii'. Why do I have to change my name? Do I have any responsibility? I don't have the strength to face this fact and think about it.

My sister sharpened the characters for "Mekata" on the handle of a pencil with a small knife and wrote "Fujii" on each one with an oil-based pen.

I also had to erase and rewrite the names that were written in the textbooks and notebooks.

The next day, I went with my grandmother to Otsu Municipal Zeze Elementary School. It is a relatively long distance, four kilometers one way. It takes more than an hour for a child to walk. The house is on a hillside and the elementary school is on a plain near the shore of Lake Biwa. On the way to the school, we turned left and right many times.

When I arrived at the school, I first greeted the principal and then was shown to my first grade classroom. I was introduced to my classmates and made to sit in the front of the class.

Since I was suddenly transferred to a new school, my textbooks and the stationery in my toolbox were different from everyone else's. The pace of learning was also a little faster at this school, so from the very first day, I had to work hard to keep up.

At the end of the first day at Zeze Primary School, after standing up and bowing, it was time to leave the school. My grandmother had gone home first, so now I had to go back the way I came by myself. I changed into my sports shoes at the shoe box and followed the flow of people to the school gate, but from there I didn't know which way to turn. Earlier, I had just followed my grandmother, so I hadn't got to the point where I could remember the way. I half-heartedly danced back to the classroom once more. Fortunately, the teacher was still in the classroom.

The teacher said, "If you are near Fujii-kun's house, please go home with him. Oh, Fumizawa-kun is going in the same direction, so go home with him."

Fumizawa-kun: "Okay, Sensei. Fujii-kun, let's go home together."

Thanks to the fact that Fumizawa-kun was still in the classroom, I was able to return home safely. Anyway, it was the first time I had seen the streets of Zeze and walked around, so I didn't know the direction and distance. If he hadn't been there at that time, I'm sure I would have caused a big commotion involving many adults.

After that, I often left school together with Fumizawa-kun. I am very grateful to Fumizawa-kun, probably arranged by the teacher, for helping me by guiding me well when I came to a strange school and was unfamiliar with it. He helped me a lot.

Now I can't get in touch with Fumizawa-kun. I was told at a recent elementary school reunion that his contact information is still unknown. I would like to meet him and thank him.

## 7 Struggling early school years

Although I gradually became accustomed to school life, a combination of my upbringing and dramatic changes in my family environment meant that I was still a boy who was not very good at speaking or acting naturally with my thoughts.

One extremely embarrassing experience was peeing in class. Looking back, I was a weak-willed kid who couldn't even do that, although it could have been avoided if I had gone to the bathroom during recess. If the kids around me went to the bathroom, I would follow them; if not, I wouldn't. I think I was probably out of my head and out of my body at the time, and my autonomic nervous system was not in control. The teacher must have thought I was out of control when she saw me soaking wet on the lower half of my body, and my grandmother was called to the school that day. My grandmother flew in from home with a change of underwear and pants.

The school would occasionally give me homework and instructions to bring something from home, but because of my own unreliability, as well as poor communication between me and my family, I was rarely able to do the work of telling people at home what happened at school and what the school had to say. So, inevitably, I forgot a lot of things. I think I hardly ever met the requirements of the school.

I rarely found myself at the center of conversations in my household. Family conversations went over my head. In addition, my grandmother did not deal directly with my learning disabilities, but usually just instructed my sister, who was in junior high school, to "take care of Takashi's studies.

My sister was completely devoted to me, even though she was at an age when she was full of herself. My brother, a high school student, kept me company in extracurricular activities like collecting butterflies and cicadas, but kept his mouth shut about the things I was facing at school that needed to be fixed. No one in my family showed any interest in my problems at school. This was partly due to my inability to assert myself and my shy personality.

Also, as far as I could see, my brother and sister talked bad about each other and always seemed to be at odds with each other. I always thought that if they got along better, the house would be a little better.

My father is indifferent to education. Or rather, he seemed indifferent to the whole family. Even though my mother and I had disappeared from the house and he had finally managed to get me back, I was not flattered that he was taking proper care of me and the other three children as their guardian. I think my father still had lingering feelings for my mother, but my grandmother was relentless in her criticism of her. I sensed in my childish mind that this relationship was one of the reasons my mother left the house.

My father once took me to the zoo in Kyoto. That was the only time I ever went out with my father. I remember that it was such an unusual event that it was kind of creepy in reverse.

My grandmother was responsible for most of the food, clothing, and shelter in the house. To my father, my grandmother remained an overbearing mother. None of the children, who saw this on a daily basis, seemed to have any respect for my father.

## 8 Dreamlike events.

Although I was a shy and non-existent elementary school student, I attended school without missing a day, except when I had a fever from a cold. There was one incident that I will never forget.

There was a very bright and active girl in my class who was the complete opposite of my personality. She suddenly walked up to me as I was leaving school, kissed me on the cheek and walked away. It happened in a split second and I didn't know what had happened. I still think back sometimes and wonder what it was all about. How could I, a shy, passive, awkward person, have been chosen to be her kisser? I never had any special romantic feelings for her after that, but she is one of my dearest friends who went to the same middle school and high school. But we have never talked about that incident since then.

But fate is merciless. She died a few years ago. I would have liked to talk to her about many memories, including this 'event', but it's a real sadness.

## 9 The agony of composition time

It was during the primary school language class. The teacher instructed everyone to write an essay about Mother's Day.

The essay was to express my gratitude to my mother, but I don't have a mother. My mother suddenly disappeared from my life after one day in the first grade of elementary school. What would she want me to write about? I froze, unable to write anything.

The teacher noticed my condition and said, "Well, you can write about your grandmother".

I see everyone else slurring and moving their pencils. Yet I couldn't even bring myself to write about my grandmother alone.

I couldn't get my pencil going. I gave up halfway through, turned the manuscript paper inside out, and slumped down. In the end, I ran out of time without being able to write a single word.

What was painful was that this was the most difficult time. Guilt took over me. I didn't feel convinced that I had lost my mother, so I hadn't been able to sort out my feelings to the point where I could honestly face my mother and my grandmother and say something to thank them for what they had done. Nothing could be put into words.

In another class period, I was asked to write about someone I admired. I think I wrote about Edison or someone else, as appropriate.

Later, everyone's writing was put up in the classroom. When I looked, I saw that many of my friends had written about their fathers and mothers. This was a shock to me.

For me, the concept of respect was a feeling I had for celebrities and great people from the past, and I thought that respect for my own parents was impossible. The fact that there is such a thing as respect for parents in the world really upset me. This essay opportunity was the moment when I realised once again that I had no feelings of respect for my father.

## 10      Being quiet.

I was always described as "quiet" by the adults around me. This was a hard judgment for me. I wanted to be like other children, to speak my mind freely and be excited. Not being in the same environment as other children as a young child puts me in a special situation.

The report cards I received from the school always said that I was "too quiet" or "not a spirited student," and I was hurt every time I saw that. I wanted to talk and make noise like the other kids. But I couldn't find the words, nor did I feel the urge to jump up and down.

Sometimes I even got the reputation of being "serious". As for myself, I just don't have the same energy and enthusiasm as the other kids. I may have looked serious, but that was just how I looked on the outside.

## 11 Running is the only thing I can't lose.

There was only one thing I could be proud of, even though I was such a good runner. That is that I was a fast runner. Every year at Sports Day, there is a relay between classes with selected teams. I was chosen as an athlete for all six years. I was completely useless at everything except running, and I had no athletic talent, but I was the fastest runner in my class.

I used to feel inferior in most things in school, but I think I was helped a little by the fact that I was good at those things.

I felt very proud when my friends told me I was a fast runner, and it made me feel lighter. It was a very valuable experience for me, as I rarely experience being praised by anyone. However, in reality there are many people in the world who can run faster, so it goes without saying that it was just a feeling of superiority in a small world.

## 12 My first part-time job

When I was in the fourth grade, my brother delivered milk on a bicycle. I saw that and wanted to do something like that. I had never received an allowance before, so I thought it would be a good way to earn some extra money. There happened to be a newspaper man's son in my class, so I asked him about it and he put me in touch with his father. Thanks to him, I got to deliver newspapers every morning before school.

To be honest, it was hard to get up in the dim light and walk around with a heavy bundle of delivered newspapers under my arm. I regretted it as soon as I started. It is very hard work. The bundles of newspapers are quite heavy for me as an elementary school student, each house has a different entrance structure, different places to put the newspapers, and some houses have dogs that bark vigorously. And most of all, it was difficult to keep the newspapers dry on rainy days. But looking back, it was a valuable experience.

### 13 Having only a single parent

Every year the school distributed a list of students in the class. Nowadays, personal data is strictly controlled and such lists are no longer distributed, but back then there were no such restrictions and it was very generous. The list included everyone's address, phone number, parents' names, and even occupation or company name.

Only my mother's column on the list was left blank. In those days, it was unusual to be a single parent. Why was I the only one without a mother, even though she was not dead but alive somewhere? That made me feel really gloomy whenever I looked at that table.

During the sixth grade morals class, the teacher implicitly brought up the subject of me.

"In general, kids without parents should be more strong-willed and try harder, but somehow the kid in our class feel lazy."

That's the gist of the conversation. Even if I didn't mention names, everyone would know he was talking about me.

The teacher may have meant to give me a pep talk, but at that time I was very hurt.

I did not want to be in the situation I am in now, and I was forced by my parents to move back and forth between the two houses like a ping pong ball. I am sure that my teacher, who did not know this situation, could not understand the complexity of my feelings.

### 14 Father's second marriage

My father officially divorced my mother after a court settlement when I was in the third grade. After that, he had no partner for some time, but just before I entered junior high school, my grandmother's sister introduced him to a woman he met and remarried.

The woman was a bright and flamboyant woman who worked at the U.S. military base in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture.

I was not exactly happy about having someone other than my mother in the house, but it was up to my father to decide what to do, so I let things take their course.

She talked to me quite actively and even gave me some pocket money, so I was not too happy about it, but after a month or so she disappeared from our home. I guess she didn't fit into the poor and cramped environment of our house. It was a short time, but it was a precious time for me to experience an environment where I had a mother at home.

## 15 Middle school years

I attended Awazu Junior High School in Otsu City. At that time, it was somewhat cool to be a delinquent, but I was not a delinquent, I was not a good student, and my shy and passive personality completely overshadowed me in class.

My academic performance was not good, but I didn't have a vision of what I wanted to do after high school, so I didn't go to high school and planned to get a job. I also knew that the family finances were tight and I did not want to burden my parents.

But my grandmother told me to go to high school. If it hadn't been for that one word, I don't think I would have gone to high school, and my life after that would have been completely different. Looking back, I think that one word from my grandmother was significant.

I stumbled in my studies in elementary school and have problems with basic academic skills. Moreover, I did not study properly to recover from it. No matter how much I studied before the regular exams, it was not enough to get good grades.

In the area, there was Zeze High School, the top preparatory school in Shiga Prefecture, and Ishiyama High School, which followed it. In my heart, I wanted to go to Ishiyama High School.

One day, the advisor of the track and field club I belonged to, Matsumoto-sensei, said to me.

"Fuji, which high school are you aiming for?"

I answered "Ishiyama."

"You're crazy, aren't you? Of course, you can't."

He said in a strong tone of voice. Of course, you can't. His words weighed heavily on me. I had no words to say back. That was the reality. I was grateful to him for saying it so clearly. I then lowered one rank and set my sights on the newly established and second-year Higashiotsu Prefectural High School.

However, Higashi-Otsu High School was ironically the most competitive in the prefecture. If I failed, I would have to go to the private Hieizan High School, which I used as a stopgap. I didn't want to inconvenience my parents by going to a private school, considering the tuition fees. After the entrance exam, I waited for the announcement day with a prayerful spirit.

Luckily, I passed the entrance exam and was admitted to Higashi-Otsu High, but I was disappointed because some of my friends did not get in.

## 16 High school years A new me

In high school, the students around me became more mature and settled, and my mature and introverted personality became less noticeable. Although I was still awkward, I could finally see the field in which I existed emerging.

I had decided that I would get a job after high school, so high school is my last time at school.

Then, I should try to do something in high school that I have no regrets about.

From what I used to be, I was able to think quite positively.

My challenge was to run for the student council. My goal, in my own way, was to become vice-president in my first year and president in my second year. There are five slots in the student council: one president, two vice-presidents, one secretary and one treasurer. Only first-year and second-year students can run for office.

However, in the elections in the first year, I ran for vice-president but lost the election, sinking to the bottom of the list. In the second year, I really wanted to win. I ran for secretary and won. It was not what I had initially planned, but somehow I became a member of the executive committee of the student council. As it was a new high school, there was little precedent, so the whole operation was a bit of a fumbling process. Also, after I was elected, some members hardly turned up for meetings and were uncooperative, so it was quite difficult to manage.

But I am really glad that I had the opportunity to learn about planning and running things through student council activities. I am sure that the teachers who only knew me as the listless me from elementary school would have been surprised to see how much I had changed. It was around this time that I began to realize the importance of forging my own path.

He also had a part-time job when he was in high school. This job was cleaning the floor of a general entertainment place called Koyo Paradise, which was located on the shore of Lake Biwa. This job was introduced to me by Kenichi Yamamoto, whom I had known since junior high school and who became a classmate of mine in my first year of high school. Every day, entertainers would perform on the stage inside the venue. Sometimes I would pretend to be a janitor and sneak backstage. My favorite memory is getting an autograph from Ann Lewis.

Yamamoto-kun, who introduced me to that part-time job, is no longer with us. He died of illness in his mid-thirties. When I was in high school, I often had fights with him. Not arguments, but fist fights. It wasn't that we didn't get on well, but that we played around with each other. The pain from that time is remembered fondly now.

## 17 Track and field club in high school

Since my high school was established two years ago, there was only one athletics club when I entered, and the activities of the senior students were slow and almost dormant.

Ube and I, who were both from Shiga University Junior High School and had known each other through club activities since junior high school, joined the club after school and actively lobbied our advisor to upgrade the club from a dokokai to a kurabu. Soon after, new members joined the club and club activities officially began.

At the Shiga Prefectural Games in my first year, I won the 1,500-meter steeplechase and the 1,600-meter relay. The certificates I received were displayed in the hallway outside the principal's office until graduation day. It was the first certificate Higashi Otsu High School had ever won, and it was ours. It was a strange feeling to have my certificate displayed where everyone could see it, but my time was not that good, so I was more embarrassed than happy.

We didn't have a coach specializing in track and field, so we pieced together our own experience and knowledge from our junior high school days and went through the menu as we saw fit. Unfortunately, we were able to compete with other high schools in our first year, but from our second year on, our results did not improve as much as we would have liked. Some of the club members would even play catch with me, which was an embarrassing sight. I felt that I was not passionate enough, and at one point I considered leaving the club. In that sense, it was an incomplete club.

After retiring from the club in my third year, I continued to mentor younger students until just before graduation. I felt that was what I needed to do. Athletics training is hard, and it is difficult to put yourself through hard training. I tried my best to inspire the juniors by giving them drills and encouragement, but I don't know how they felt.

## 18 Career path after graduation

The majority of people in my high school wanted to go to college, but I was in the minority, the employed group. I had no concrete dreams about what I would do after high school. In the teachers' room, I looked through the list of job offers sent to my high school and tried to decide which ones to apply for.

Then my homeroom teacher, Mr Nakamoto, said to me.

"Fujii-kun, why don't you apply for an office job at Kansai Electric Power Company?"

Inside, I was worried that I was not good enough to take such a big job. I wasn't sure if I could get a job in such a big company with my skills, but I decided to accept the challenge.

I took the entrance examination at the Shiga Branch of the Kansai Electric Power Company in Nionohama, Otsu City. The atmosphere in the hall was tense. The competition was about three times as strong, so I honestly thought it would be impossible.

Later, I was fortunate enough to receive an acceptance letter. At that time, I was relieved and happy that I had chosen a career path, but at the same time, I was more worried about whether I would be able to make it in the real world.

One day, my English teacher, Ito, said to me.

"I'm glad you got a job. "

"Sensei, I'm going to quit my job one day." I replied cheekily.

"Most people fail." He said, "It is not so easy to quit the salaried life."

I muttered to myself, "Well, then it would be interesting to try to leave the business one day. It's a completely unfounded confidence.

Then came graduation day. I had a month and a half until April 1, the day of my induction ceremony.

## 19 Impulsive running away from home

In the spring when I was eighteen years old. I had nothing to do until I joined a company, so I decided to go to a company where my friend who was going to college was also working part time.

There, behind Ishiyama Station, is NEC's cathode ray tube factory. Hanging from an lift, I had to take the cathode ray tubes coming in and out of the factory from a rack and put them into a separate process. While I was working, I thought that if I worked for a company in the future, I would have to work every day even if I didn't want to, so there was no need to force myself to do a part-time job now. I regretted starting a part-time job with a half-hearted feeling.

I was neither a high school student nor a company employee, and I was left with a moratorium on my time in limbo. The tag of school life was lifted and I lost sight of what to do and how to spend my time.

I ended up quitting my part-time job at the NEC after three days. On the morning of the fourth day, I left home the same way, but without a destination in mind, I got on an up train on the Tokaido Honsen line at 8 in the morning. It was a local train to Yasu. From Yasu, I caught the next up train, which took me to Ogaki. I repeated this process, and it took me twelve hours to get to the Tokyo area.

I left without telling my father and grandmother, so it was like running away from home. I also had no idea what I was going to do or where I was going to stay.

My father had told me that my mother, who had been separated from me when I was six years old, was in the Odawara area of Kanto. I was sucked by an invisible force in the direction of the town where my mother lived.

However, I don't know my mother's exact address, so there is absolutely no guarantee that I would be able to see her even if I went there. In fact, I had no concrete motive to see her or meet her. I don't know what to say to my mother when I see her. It is too late now. I'm going to start work in the spring. The time when I need my mother has passed.

When the train carrying me arrived at Yaizu Station in Shizuoka Prefecture, two high school girls got on the train. One was named Ishida-san and the other Sagisaka-san. I chatted with them for a while on the train. From what I heard, the girls were going to Tokyo and stay at Miss Ishida's brother's apartment. The brother is a student at Teikyo University in Hachioji.

To my surprise, I was graciously allowed to stay at his apartment that day. Fortunately, everyone was kind to me, so such a happening encounter was possible. It was an act of youth. The next day, I went to Parco in Shibuya with the girls and we did some shopping. After a few days of this kind of thing, I ended up staying at Miss Ishida's brother's apartment for a few days.

In the transition between high school life and corporate life, I enjoyed in my own way a world where I knew no one. Thinking about the future filled me with anxiety. I closed my eyes as I listened to the Tokyo dialect spoken by the beautiful women sitting across from me on the Yamanote line.

Once I start working for a company, I can no longer waste my time like that. I let my mind go for a while. I suffered all through school, obsessing over what I didn't have enough of. From April, I will be a working adult, and I will be able to say goodbye to such sentimentality and shed my skin as an adult. This impulsive running away from home was a projection of my naive view of life. My family was naturally concerned. I wanted to be reckless for the last time because I wanted to work diligently when I entered the workforce.

## 20 Disaster on the third day of induction

April 1, 1979 was the day of the induction ceremony. The hall was filled with about 1,000 new employees. President Shoichiro Kobayashi's words in his speech, "Be a person who is useful to society through 'diligence, effort, and friendship,'" inspired me.

After the induction ceremony at the Kansai Electric Power Academy in Osaka, I returned to the Shiga Branch in Otsu and went to the Otsu Office, where I was further assigned. Including me, there were three boys and two girls in the same office as new employees. In a tense atmosphere, we were first greeted by the director and then given an overview of our work at the sales office by a representative of each section.

It was the night of my third day. I was completely exhausted from the unfamiliar life day after day, and at 8:30 p.m. I was asleep in my bed in my room with the lights out. Suddenly I heard my sister scream.

"Takashi! Fire!"

I jumped up and walked towards the voice. Flames and smoke were coming from the corner of the room closest to the entrance. I thought quickly to call the fire department, but the house suddenly went dark with a power outage because the wires had burned out. I could see nothing, not my feet, not my fingertips. I fumbled for the phone and dialed 119. I managed to find dial one and turned it twice, but when I turned dial nine, I suppressed my eagerness and counted the number of holes: one, two, three, four, five, seven, eight and nine. The phone was still working.

"Yes, this is the fire brigade", or my cry of "fire" was quicker.

"Where is the location?"

"Seven-Thirtythree, Wakabadai, Fujii. There's a fire, please come quickly."

In a mad rush, I called for a fire truck. The fire seemed to be in the bathroom. At that time, we shared a bath with a neighbor, Mr. Hoguchi. It was a Goemon-style bath where firewood was burned to heat the boiling water. We were both careful not to start a fire, but that day the fire somehow seemed to have spread to the building. Lost fires from baths are generally possible, but for us it was an impossible situation. The fire just kept burning and burning and burning the room.

All I could take out of the room were suits, ties, and shirts on hangers. I ran to the backyard with my clothes and hung them on the branches of a fig tree. I guess I thought I would not be able to go to work tomorrow, but it was a good decision on my part. These clothes were bought by my sister, a senior member of society, in Shinkyogoku, Kyoto, and cost almost a month's salary.

Soon a fire truck arrived and began pouring massive amounts of water on our burning house. Our neighbors volunteered to form a bucket relay and doused our house with water. Onlookers could also be seen in the distance holding a bottle of sake and watching the fire. Half of the house was burned in the fire and the entire house was filled with so much water that it was unusable.

Our family was at a loss as we were burnt out by the fire. For the time being, we were allowed to stay at the landlord's house that night. I could not even go to work in this condition. The next day I called the company and told them what happened. The company gave me three days off.

The timing of the fire was right after we graduated from high school and we had all just started our new lives on our respective paths. Because our paths had been torn apart by each other, I had no one around me to casually call on. I don't know anyone at work yet either. It wasn't an era like today where you can keep in touch with friends via the Internet, so there was hardly anyone who could know about my plight, which was very discouraging and lonely. My brother lived in Tokyo at that time, so there were four of us. I inevitably felt that I had to pull myself together.

Fortunately, we found a neighbor who took care of our housing. To be honest, it was a small place for four adults to live, but they were really helpful. We don't know what the future holds, but we will stay there for now.

A few days later, a large package of futons and blankets arrived from the Red Cross. I was really grateful for such goodwill and social programs.

## 21 After the fire

When I entered my burnt house again, the ceiling was wide open and the blue sky was shining through. I could smell the burnt columns and walls. The tatami mats were soaked with water from the firefighters' spray, and the floor was muddy. We were stunned to see our house transformed.

For some time after that, we were busy sorting through the household goods that had been destroyed by the fire.

I was at the point in our lives where I was supposed to be moving forward as a working adult, and the fire was a blow to my start.

## 22 Company life, starting up

After the fire, I returned to the life of a new employee for the first time in four days. I selflessly listened to the lectures of senior employees, and by watching and learning from them, I gradually developed an awareness and responsibility as a KEPCO employee. Even if I say something happened at home, it is not acceptable to anyone in society. To help me climb the ladder to become a person who could be accepted in adult society, senior employees sometimes gently and sometimes sternly guided us.

I was hired as an office worker, but I was also trained in the field on several occasions. I wore work clothes, a helmet, and even climbed a power pole. Doing it allowed me to understand how hard it is, which is different from just watching it. I also realized that I had not exercised for a while since high school and that my body had become too limp.

I was first assigned to the General Affairs Section of the Otsu Sales Office, which was responsible for the general management of the sales office. There were jobs in personnel, labor, welfare, land use, etc., but I was assigned to the materials department. The main task of the materials department is to manage the delivery and receipt of poles, transformers, and electricity meters used for the power distribution work at the sales office. I only dealt with such materials for power distribution, so it was a rather unspectacular job. Mark sheet slips are used for receiving and shipping materials. The slips are filled with coded code numbers, so it is necessary to memorize the code numbers for all items. If you don't remember them, you have to check the code table each time, which is time consuming. There were about 200 items. One day, an executive employee, Mr. Kubo, said to me.

"Go and memorise this by tomorrow. I'll test you."

He gave me a homework assignment.

In a school test, a score of 80 would be enough to pass, but in a company, mistakes are not allowed. You always have to give a 100-point answer. I think that is how I was trained in the company, one by one.

## 23 The decision to buy a house

After living in temporary housing for six months after the fire, my sister consulted me and decided to buy a second-hand house. It was in Omi Hachiman and the price was about 9 million yen. There was not enough money in the house to buy it. My grandmother's sister, who lived in Iwakuni City, Yamaguchi Prefecture, sent money to our house under the guise of sympathy for a fire. We used it as a down payment and took out a loan of about 7 million yen. My sister was the principal of the loan, but I was in charge of the monthly repayments. My sister is going to get married soon and leave home. Inevitably, I would be responsible for the house. I was nineteen at the time. I was spending almost half of my monthly salary to pay off the house loan.

My father was against buying a house. But my sister and I dared to buy a house. We were afraid that if we left it to our father, the money given to us by our relatives would not be used effectively and would disappear before we knew it. In the end, however, my father obeyed our strong will, and the four of us moved from Otsu to Omi Hachiman together. Both my sister and I had to move far from our workplaces, but it was difficult to find cheap housing in Otsu, so I think it was a choice we had no choice but to make.

## 24 Making the most of opportunities

I worked in Otsu's sales office for four years. The sales office is the place where we work closest to our customers. It is probably the closest thing the public has to the image of "Kanden. Ever since I joined the company, I had imagined that I would probably work at a sales office or its outposts called branches for many years, just like senior employees do, and then reach the day of retirement.

But Kansai Electric Power Company was more of an interesting place to work, where I could do what I wanted to do if I wanted to.

My first challenge was to apply to a national or public university. If I wanted to and passed KEPCO's internal selection process, I could take the exam, and if I passed, I could become a university student on leave. High school graduates in their second to fourth year with the company are allowed to challenge this system, but I had initially given up on the challenge because my academic ability was not good enough even in high school. When my fourth and final year finally came, I thought it would be a waste to pass up the opportunity, so I decided to give it a try and applied for the internal selection process. Luckily, I was selected. From then on, I worked hard, both in the company and as an exam candidate. Once a month, I stayed overnight at a cram school in Osaka for a training camp.

I wished I had taken up the challenge when not much time had passed since I graduated from high school. After four years, my daily life had almost initialized everything I had learned in high school.

I also took the Common First Examination and finally decided to apply to Kochi University. I arrived in Kochi by plane from Itami. It was my first experience of flying. The same day, I walked around Harimaya Bridge and Katsurahama Beach. The next day, I wasn't sure whether I had done well or badly in the exam.

The result was a failure. I was disappointed because I was expecting something from university life. But I felt that I had made it this far and that I had made a breakthrough. What I felt then was that there are things you can only experience if you challenge yourself. I decided in my heart that if there was anything worth challenging in the future, I would continue to challenge myself without flinching.

## 25 Looking overseas

After four years in the sales office, I worked in the accounting department of the Shiga branch, where I was responsible for organizing and managing the profit and loss budget for the entire branch. My next challenge was overseas training. KEPCO had a system whereby employees were given the opportunity to study in the U.S. for three weeks after their fifth year of employment. Every year, about seven employees out of more than 20,000 are selected to be sent.

Before the company-wide selection process, a selection meeting is held at the Shiga branch. One person is selected there first, but he or she has to pass a written English test and an interview. The English test was not too difficult for me, as I had only studied English as a hobby after graduating from high school, and I passed it. Then I had an interview with the branch managers. I was fortunate enough to pass this as well and became a branch representative first.

Having reached that point, I was even more determined to make it to the final round. The entire company had more than a dozen finalists from various branches and other locations. Here, half of them are rejected. Thinking that my contribution to the company and my future potential would be evaluated, I felt a little vulnerable, thinking that it was inevitable that I would be dropped. With a mixture of anticipation and anxiety, I went for an interview with a senior executive from the HR department.

And I managed to get a ticket to the US. For six months before I actually went, the company gave the seven of us special English conversation training. I was already having a lot of fun. My spirits were rising.

During the three weeks in the US, I was able to experience the American corporate culture and see the advanced technology first hand. It was truly an eye-opening experience for me and I learned a lot. The most memorable experience for me was visiting General Motors. At that time, General Motors was the largest automobile company in the world, and I was able to see their cutting-edge technology and how they used it in their production lines. This experience had a great impact on me and allowed me to understand the importance of always improving and striving to be the best in your field.

In addition to the company visits, we also had the opportunity to experience American culture and life. We went to a baseball game, visited tourist attractions, and had fun shopping. The three weeks flew by and it was an experience I will never forget. It was truly a dream come true, and I am grateful to Kansai Electric Power Company for giving me this opportunity.

## 26 A chilling incident

The third stop on the US training program was San Diego. We arrived and stayed at the Travelodge in the evening after visiting a cable TV company. It was a simple two-story building with only one door separating the outside from the inside. I shared a room with another group member.

Then the next morning. I woke up first and decided to get ready for the day, but I couldn't find my second bag that I had left next to my bed. I thought it couldn't be, so I searched for a while, and then the other guy noticed and got up.

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, my bag is missing."

He noticed that his own second bag was also missing. I approached the door. Lo and behold, the door was unlocked and a few centimeters open. The thief had broken into our room while we were asleep. Each of our bags contained all of our cash, cameras, and other items. What were we going to do? It was pitch black before my eyes. But only my passport and plane tickets were safe because they were in the pocket of my suit. Will I be able to continue my trip? The study tour has just begun.

I called the local police. After a while, two policemen arrived on a motorcycle. We gave them a full explanation. But they told us that they could not find us. We thought that this is what you expect when you are involved in a crime abroad, but it was still not satisfactory. In the end, the other members of the group thankfully gave us some money, so we were able to secure the minimum amount of money we could afford. Thanks to this, we were able to continue the study tour until the end. However, things remained uncomfortable throughout the trip.

The lucky thing about our room being broken into in the middle of the night and our things stolen was that we weren't awake at the time. If one of us had noticed a suspicious shadow and even called out, it could have been an attempt on our lives. I still get chills thinking about it.

27            I want a job where I can interact with people abroad

When I returned from my dream experience of training overseas, the reality of work was waiting for me.

The overseas training experience made me think that I would like to contribute to the company by working internationally. I wrote in the annual personal statement that I submitted to the company each year that I wanted to work internationally. At headquarters, the finance, fuel, and planning departments have a small number of international contacts. However, such jobs are dominated by employees from national universities, and it would have been unthinkable for a high school graduate like me to have the opportunity, but I continued to recklessly express my wish. It was through such actions that the future opened up for me.

The opportunity came to me by chance. In 1984, at the suggestion of Governor Takemura, the World Congress on the Environment of Lakes was held in Shiga Prefecture, and volunteer interpreters were sought in the preparatory stages. Since it was an international conference held on a large scale in my hometown, I felt the importance of participating and applied, regardless of my lack of English. On the day I attended the conference as a volunteer interpreter, I happened to be asked by a Sankei Newspaper reporter to interpret near the conference venue. The newspaper took a picture of me interpreting, which became an article, and the company knew about it. This was a good opportunity to promote me to the head office, and it led me to leave the provincial city of Shiga and work in Osaka, where the head office is located.

When I was twenty-eight years old, I was transferred to the head office accounting department. At the time I joined the company, I thought I would spend my entire working life in the local sales office, so I was surprised by this change. During my first two years in the accounting department, I had the humble task of writing checks. The amounts involved were in the hundreds of millions. It was a very sensitive job where even a small mistake could result in huge losses.

After that, I was given the job of overseas fund raising in the finance department. For me, this job was the most spectacular and memorable of my corporate life. KEPCO makes large capital investments every year, and the Finance Section of the Accounting Department (now the Accounting Office) is responsible for raising the funds. My workplace, the Foreign Capital of Finance Section, is responsible for raising the company's necessary funds from overseas markets. At KEPCO, raising overseas funds is mainly done by issuing overseas bonds. Overseas bonds are corporate bonds issued in foreign currencies such as U.S. dollars and Swiss francs. They are called overseas bonds in contrast to yen-denominated domestic bonds issued in Japan. At KEPCO, the amount of bonds issued at any one time was about 50 billion yen, and at that time we issued about twice a year.

My boss, Ken Takeda, was an expert in this field, and he taught me about this particular job from the very beginning. There are only a few people in the whole country who do the same job I do. Most of the work is done by Japanese securities companies and banks, but if you leave it to them, there is a risk that they will take all the good parts. Companies that issue foreign bonds (issuers) also need to get information from the market and arm themselves with theory, rather than just following the lead of brokers and the like. For this reason, I looked at English-language newspapers such as the Financial Times and the Wall Street Journal every day, as well as online information from Reuters and Bloomberg, to get information directly. European and U.S. securities firms were also an important source of information.

I also had to inform the executives in the accounting department about the status of the issuing market every step of the way, so I went to the executives' rooms every day. The experience of sharing information and opinions directly with the executives helped me broaden my perspective and was a really valuable experience for me.

When a corporate bond is issued in overseas markets, an English language contract is drawn up with the relevant parties. When drafting the contract, I manage the entire process with the assistance of the lead manager's securities firm, specialized lawyers and accountants. In the case of foreign bonds, since the currency is denominated in a foreign country, I enter into currency swap agreements with domestic and foreign exchange banks to convert the bonds into Japanese yen. I was solely responsible for this series of tasks. I could have been suffocated by those who did it, because I had to play fast and loose with banks and securities firms. I found the work very rewarding because it was in the client's interest to obtain funds at the lowest possible interest rate.

In addition, since the buyers of foreign bonds are overseas investors, it is necessary to make KEPCO well known to people overseas. For this reason, during my tenure, I traveled overseas every year with the directors to hold corporate briefings. In Asia, I visited Hong Kong, Singapore and Sydney. In Europe, I visited London, Paris and Luxembourg. I held meetings at hotels in each location and gave presentations in English using slides. This series of investor relations activities is called investor relations (IR), and our company was one of the few to be actively involved in IR activities before the term was established.

I did this work while working overtime every day. It was such a fun and exciting job that I wished it could go on forever. Of course, I know this is impossible. The more I enjoyed it, the more I dreaded the dejection that would await me.

## 28 Reuniting with my mother Thirty years since that day

I was 36 years old. On a trip to report the issuance of foreign bonds to the International Finance Bureau of the Ministry of Finance (now the Ministry of Finance), the regulatory agency, I went to Hiratsuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture, instead of going straight home.

At that time, my father had told me that my mother lived in Hiratsuka, so on my way back from a business trip to Tokyo, I decided to see how she lived. When I arrived at Hiratsuka Station, I stayed at a business hotel in front of the station. I didn't dare go there right away. I thought I would go after a night's sleep, when I felt more settled. I wondered what kind of place she lived in, and if I saw my mother now, whom I had not seen since I was six years old, would I be able to confirm that it was her? Would I be able to talk to her in person? I spent the morning in bed thinking about this and that.

The next morning, I showered and walked to Shonan Beach, relying on the address my father had given me. After a ten-minute walk, I arrived at the address where I thought my mother might live. There was a house that looked like it, but there was no sign, so I couldn't be sure. It was a shabby house, not a very respectable structure. Even if I knocked on the door and said something like "Please excuse me," I did not know what to say when someone came out of the house. On the other side of the street was a Sunday carpentry store. Maybe my mother shops there. I walked around the store to see if I could find someone who looked like her. There were no customers in the store who looked like my mother, who was about 70 years old. I walked around and around the store. It was an exercise in futility. I crossed the street again and walked toward the house.

As I approached the entrance of the house or looked at the whole house from a distance, the door of the house suddenly opened.

"Are you Takashi?"

My mother said as soon as she saw me.

"Yes." I replied.

"Yes, that's right. I recognized you right away. Please come in."

"Thank you."

My mother urged me to go inside the house. And I talked to her for about two hours over a cup of tea.

I haven't seen my mother for 30 years, but she has aged in a certain way, so it doesn't feel very strange to me. But the way my mother sees me must have been significant because of the 30-year gap between the ages of six and thirty-six, which is a 30-year gap between the two growth spurts.

I had no intention of blaming my mother, but she apologized to me over and over again for putting me through that experience. She also said something to the effect that she made the decision to run away because her relationship with my father was not going well. This made me feel sorry for my mother because I had inherited my father's genes. It is hard to put into words, but I could tell that her marriage with my father was hellishly painful for my mother.

I think that the Fujii family took a turn for the worse after my grandfather's death, and that the end was near when I was born. I heard that my grandfather was so skilled that he ran a calligraphy school at his home in Otsu. I saw a group photo of him with many adults who attended his calligraphy classes when I was a child, and I was impressed that there were such amazing people in my family. However, my father does not seem to have inherited any of his grandfather's greatness. I don't think I have much sympathy for my father, who disappointed my mother. It's not fair to take sides in a marriage, as some things can only be understood by those involved, but my father's *raison d'etre* is to be an example to me of how not to be.

"Not a single day goes by that I don't think of Takashi."

She said. She may have said this out of consideration for my feelings, but to be honest, I had my doubts about her words. I know it must have been hard for her as a mother to leave me, but it is not humanly possible to continue to be aware of something that is painful. I think it's human wisdom to try not to think about it when it's painful. But that is not the same as being unfeeling. So even if there were days when my mother forgot me, I would never hold a grudge against her.

I was also told that of our three siblings, I was the only one who had not yet been reunited with my mother. My brother and sister had met my mother several times individually. It was a sad realization that I was the only one left behind.

An old man came out of the back room. This man was Mr. Mekata Sukeo-san, who used to be my 'Otô-chan'. His current job is to collect unwanted items from people who have moved out of their homes. He said he was recovering at home because he had been injured at work. Mr. Mekata said.

"I've put you through a lot of hardship, Takashi-san. I'm sorry."

He said 'I'm sorry'. I was at a loss for words and could barely lower my head enough to touch the tatami mats and say "No". From my point of view, he may be the one who saved my mother.

Then two sons came out of the back. When I left my mother, she had a baby boy who was also over 30. Then another boy was born, and she had two sons. The younger brother is in his late 20s. I thought that my mother must have worked hard to raise them both. They are siblings to me, born of the same mother, but blood alone does not create a bond. I have that kind of relationship with someone else, and that is just all that matters.

It was almost time to leave. I was a little excited, so when I met them face to face, I could not ask them about their past in detail or confirm their stories. When I left for Hiratsuka Station, my mother followed me to the station to say goodbye. We walked hand in hand on the sidewalk leading to the station. My mind went back to when I was six years old, thirty years ago. I loved everything about my mother, even the wrinkles and crusts on her palms.

My destiny was drastically changed by adult circumstances. Because of this, I experienced many different experiences and emotions from other people. After reuniting with my mother for the first time in 30 years, I decided to accept everything that had happened in the past, and instead of resenting the past, I was grateful that it had nurtured and developed me.

Maybe the reason I ran for student council in high school, took on the challenge of overseas training at work, and am able to celebrate what I want to do at work is because I wanted to say to my distant mother, "I'm doing my best, aren't I? No, I am sure I am. I don't want to be conscious of my mother, but I feel that such thoughts are lurking in my deep psyche."

I said goodbye to my mother when we arrived at Hiratsuka Station. We waved goodbye with smiles.

The next time I came to Hiratsuka Station was about ten years later. It was during my mother's funeral.

I am so glad that I was able to see my mother again while she was still in this world. A small decision to stop in Hiratsuka on my way back from a business trip in Tokyo turned out to be a very wonderful decision.

I got married when I was twenty-eight years old. I married a woman two years my junior from the same high school. We first met at a high school reunion when I was 21. Over the course of many dates, we became close, and although we drifted apart over the course of our relationship, we started dating again and got married seven years after we met. Soon after, they had a girl and then a boy three years later. However, the marriage failed in its thirteenth year, when I was forty-two years old, when it broke up. My own parents were divorced and I thought I would not repeat such a mistake, but life is truly ironic.

### 30 The challenge of becoming an entrepreneur

When I worked for a foreign bond issuance section in the finance department, I felt really rewarded and thought I was blessed. But it did not last forever. After seven years in the finance section, I moved to the budget section of the same headquarters. I was responsible for preparing and managing the company's profit and loss budget. It was interesting work because I was close to the management of the company, but I had trouble adjusting to the atmosphere of the workplace. I tried to improve teamwork in various ways, but instead I felt marginalized.

The Internet was just beginning to take off, and I became more interested in Internet applications and technology than in the business of the company. Eventually, I started planning to start my own company. I wanted to start and run my own Internet service provider company.

To do that, I needed money. And to do that, I had to make a detailed business plan and attract people who were willing to invest in the company. While I was working for KEPCO on a daily basis, I prepared to start the company on my days off. I found a person from abroad who invested 27 million yen in my plan. I also made an offer to hire a person with technical knowledge and conducted technical negotiations with the main Internet provider. And in a situation that was somewhat ready, I also submitted a letter of resignation to the company.

The problem was that I had a family, had just bought a new house and had a mortgage, so I was worried about being able to recover if the business failed. If the business failed, I would be in trouble with the people I employed. Confidence is half and half. I couldn't see the possibility of success clearly, even for myself. I thought about it day after day, losing sleep over it, but in the end I decided to give up the business. I also stopped receiving payments from investors at the last minute.

I had already handed in my resignation to the company. Uncharacteristically, I went back to my boss and asked him to take it back. And I managed to stay in the company as before. I really inconvenienced everyone around me in this matter. I regretted my lack of foresight, but I also learned the importance of having the courage to back out of a decision once made. At that time, the Internet was in a bubble and many people became successful. However, there were also many who withdrew after starting their businesses. I don't know which category I was in, but I'm sure I was dreaming the biggest dream of my life as I prepared for this startup.

### 31 Working in a company in the internet business

Although I was traumatized by the abandonment of my own business, my desire to work on the Internet remained unchanged after that. I kept telling the company that I wanted to work in an Internet-related job.

My dream came true when I was next assigned to a department called Internet Solutions in the Business Development Division. There I was told to use KEPCO's management resources to plan a business that could be done in any way I wanted. I set myself the task of creating a portal website in the Kansai region like Yahoo, etc., and received approval from the company. I had been running websites personally, so I had some know-how. I went around to various content providers on my own and developed a plan and gradually created an outline. The company asked me to share capital with other companies instead of starting a business with KEPCO alone. For my part, I knew that there were people within KEPCO who were rich in ideas and had a high level of technology, so I thought that I could manage if I utilized them, and I did not think that bringing in other companies in the future would be a good idea.

In the end, we decided to cooperate with Hakuhodo and a company called Keihanshin L Magazine. In 2001, we were able to establish Kansai.com Co. I lobbied to have the domain name "kansai.com" transferred from the New York office of Kansai Electric Power Company (KEPCO), which had been owned by the New York office.

Although I was at the center of the planning, I was removed from the management of this company and representatives from each of the three companies made up the board of directors. The content of the website was not planned or created by me, but was outsourced. The company operated with the attitude of simply providing a venue, which was one hundred and eighty degrees different from the image I had of the new company. If we did it that way, I thought, sooner or later we would hit a dead end.

I made plans and explained them to my superiors at every turn, but the company would only move according to the wishes of the parent company. The plans discussed at the management level were just empty theories on paper, and there was no sign of improvement because they did not try to make a plan to realize the plan themselves. We had 450 million yen in capital, but we couldn't make the most of it, and the strength of the company was only getting weaker. I felt that this kind of management was like running a muddy boat.

At that time, Kansai Electric Power Company was recruiting a large number of employees for early retirement. The company was about to drastically reduce the number of employees in a wave of management rationalization. I decided to retire as soon as I found my next job. One of Kansai.com's business partners, a company based in Kyoto City, said they would consider hiring me, so I decided to resign from KEPCO.

In terms of retirement benefits, early retirees received almost twice as much as regular retirees. I had a mortgage of about 20 million yen, which I paid off in full in advance.

## 32            Although I worked for an internet company

In late 2002, I started working for a company in Kyoto. It was a different kind of small company where the president's wishes were very much in control. I spent my days learning the business, doing sales and planning, and I thought that one day I would like to contribute to the company with a big project.

However, I noticed that the atmosphere in the company was a bit strange. From time to time, people from the bank would come to see the CEO. And the frequency of these visits was increasing. The first month's salary was paid on time, but the second month's salary was not paid on time. The company is short of cash. In the end, I was paid a week late, but this situation is really not good. Then, in the third month, one employee was laid off yesterday and another today. Finally, even I was forced to resign. This really upset me. Why did they decide to hire me if this was going to happen? I could not understand it at all.

I had tripped over a big stone in my life. It was the time when the internet bubble burst. It was not so easy to find another job.

Suddenly unemployed, I had no choice but to go to the unemployment office. If you are over 40, it is hard to find an office job. I have not lived in the technical field, so there is no place where I can work in anything right now.

My relationship with my wife had been strained since I retired from KEPCO, and to make matters worse, I was fired from my job at the next company and faced a situation where I couldn't find another job, so our relationship deteriorated even further. .

I decided that it would be better for me to leave the house and I started living alone in a flat in Otsu City. Then, for almost six months, I went to the job centre once a month, and the rest of the time I searched for jobs online and stayed at home, except for going shopping at a convenience store.

I was anxious to find a job and start working as soon as possible, but the reality was that nothing had changed. I occasionally went for interviews with companies, but I never got hired due to the age barrier, and I thought about starting my own business, but I couldn't come up with an idea that I could start with confidence, so I was at a loss every day.

I used to work proudly at KEPCO, but when I lost my job, I felt so miserable and regretted the choices I had made. My current situation is the worst in the world. It is a private life that I never want the people I met in the past to know about.

At that time, the only comfort I had was to sit alone in my room and watch DVDs of Korean dramas. I escaped from reality and kept my peace of mind by immersing myself in the story.

While searching the Internet, I found a Korean language class in Osaka. I had been to Korea before, but I had never learned the language, so I decided to give it a try. I took the train to Osaka once a week. That went on for three months. I had nothing else to do, so I could concentrate on studying to some extent.

### 33 Helping my brother with his business

My brother ran a used bicycle collection and repair business on the outskirts of Atsugi, Kanagawa Prefecture. When I called my brother, he said he was short of staff, so I decided to help him.

I left my apartment in Otsu and moved to Atsugi City. And I immediately helped my brother with his work. The job involves collecting abandoned and unused bicycles, repairing them, marketing them, and selling them. However, the profit is small and the work is little more than volunteer work. Although the work was beneficial to the world, it was difficult to add value to it.

One day, I found information on the Internet about a three-week Korean language course for Japanese students at Korea University in South Korea. I decided to take a leave of absence from my brother's job to attend.

On the day of enrollment, there was an interview. The interview was to determine my level of Korean. I was placed in the intermediate class. I was worried about being placed in the intermediate class with my ability, as I had not yet mastered the vocabulary and grammar. All classes are taught in Korean.

It was a tough three weeks for me, but I thought, "It doesn't matter if I don't understand it now, I'll just observe what it's like to teach Korean and go home. I thought I would open a Korean language school when I returned to Japan. At that time, there was a Korean boom, and various aspects of Korean culture - movies, dramas, songs, food, etc. - were spreading in Japan. The number of people traveling to Korea was also increasing every year. I thought that at least as long as these conditions continued, interest in the Korean language would increase.

As soon as I returned home from a three-week Korean language course, I quit my brother's work and started preparing to start my own Korean language school.

## 34 Opening a Korean language school in Sagamihara

One of the most important aspects of starting a business is where to locate. It is important for a business to have a certain amount of population and to be able to remain competitive without competing with rival places. That's why we chose Sagamihara City instead of the city center. There are no schools that specialize in Korean along the Odakyu line, so I was confident that if I went there now, it would be safe.

However, I do not speak Korean. That is, I know more than beginners, but I don't know enough to answer students' questions. So finding someone to teach me Korean was also an important task. I went to a website frequented by Korean students in Japan and posted an application, which received an immediate response. After interviewing one person, new people would come to interview through word of mouth, creating a virtuous cycle, and we kept gathering potential teachers.

We spent about two months preparing for the opening of the school, including the curriculum, tuition payment system, and website. Finally, on December 14, 2004, Haneul Korean Language Institute was born in Sagamihara City, Kanagawa Prefecture.

On opening day, we started with seven students. You need fifty students to make a decent profit. At first, we kept losing money. And after six months, we were close to running out of money. I worked at Haneul during the day, while at night I got a part-time job sorting packages to make ends meet at Yamato. Looking back, I must have had very little time to sleep, but I don't know how I survived.

By the time I had been in business for a year, I finally had a growing number of students and money was rolling in nicely.

## 35 Writing a Korean language learning book

While I was conducting a Korean language course, I also developed a plan to produce a book from a Japanese perspective that would meet the needs of people learning Korean. When I started this work, there were only a few Korean language books available. I thought this was an opportunity because there was a clear lack of supply even though the Korean language was booming.

I listened to the Korean teachers when they were teaching and benefited a lot from them. That's how I got a good grounding in the Korean language. I also became aware of the difficulties and stumbling blocks that Japanese people face in learning Korean. Until then, Korean learning books had been written by Koreans or Japanese who had already mastered the language, but as a beginner myself, I had many questions and things to notice. I used Excel to organize a collection of such notes from my position.

I decided to compile such a collection into a manuscript and take it to a publisher. In publishing my book, I chose my publisher carefully. I compared books that had been published in the past, focusing on the publisher, and chose one that suited my taste. In my case, I liked some of the books published by Kokusai Languages, so I narrowed it down to them. I then took the proposal and part of the manuscript with me. I had never written a book before, and although I loved reading books, I never imagined that in my life I would be on the side of the writer rather than the reader until I started this job. However, I was confident that a proposal based on my own experiences, written from the unique position I was now in, would resonate with the public.

I first met with the editor-in-chief, Minori Oda, and showed him my proposal. After looking at it, I was told to wait a little longer. While I was nervously waiting and drinking the coffee I was offered, the president, Mr. Shigeru Tamura, appeared and said.

"I have never seen a book like this. It's interesting. Let's give it a try."

I had a warrior's tremor. I thought this is what a good meeting is all about. I was glad that I had chosen this company.

I went through several rounds of design decisions and manuscript proofreading before publishing the book. Six months later, my book was sold flat-packed in a major bookstore. The response was positive, and the book continued to sell consistently year after year. People who said they had read my book also started knocking on the door of my academy and enrolling. This success story gave me a lot of confidence. I only paid to study Korean for three months in Osaka and three weeks at Korea University. The rest of the time, I learned by listening to the teachers at the institute I founded. Because of this, I was able to write the book without having studied in the Korean language department at the university or having lived in Korea.

