

Taking Someone's Hand

Haruka Kyan

Kaiho Senior High School

Last year was the stormiest year in my life ever. Unforgettable things happened to me one after another and even though I understand all of the things are in the past, I still cannot help thinking about what could have been. However, because of that year, I gained clarity on what matters most in my life.

When troubles came and knocked me down, I wasn't able to see how many people were offering a helping hand because all I could think about was my pain and sorrow. It wasn't until I had pushed those hands away that I realized I had needed them more than ever. Let me tell you about my story on how I came to realize that I am blessed.

First, last year, I went to the U.S. and stayed there for 7 months. During my stay in America as an exchange student, my grandfather passed away. I was in shock as I thought I would see him again after I finished the program and actually I was looking forward to talking with him again about my experiences in the U.S.

I suffered for several weeks trying to get over his death. During that time, I had just wanted to be alone with my thoughts, but that didn't stop my host sister. She tried to console me with an affectionate hug, but I slammed shut the door of my room and rejected her. As a result I made her cry. I was blind. I couldn't see anything other than my suffering. I couldn't continue in that way. I had to think about those people who were around me and were supporting me the best they could.

When I had almost regained my strength, I had other fatal blows. My other grandfather and great grandmother had passed away within a week of each other. At that time I believed the saying that after rain comes, the sun shines. After something bad has happened, surely something good will balance it. I

believed somewhere in my heart that this was the rain and the sun needed to shine.

However, the rain turned to a storm. I had received a call and was told that my father had collapsed from a brainstem hemorrhage. I couldn't understand why this was happening to me. I wished for this to be just a nightmare and I would wake up. After being told about my father's condition, I decided to come back to Japan and support my family.

At that time, a lot of people in the states took care of me. My host family hugged and kissed me while saying "I love you Haruka" continually consoling me. My friends at school wrote a card for me and my father to recover, and many people said they would pray for my father and they still continue to support me even now.

I always think back to that time and how fortunate I was to have so many people who supported me through such a difficult time even though I was so new to their community.

Sometimes we act like our loved ones will be there forever and that we'll never be left behind. Now I know that our daily lives can be destroyed much easier than we think. So I, or should I say we, have to appreciate the people who are around us in times of difficulty by not taking them for granted in our times of happiness and contentment. We are only as good as those who surround us and care for us. I am loved. I am blessed. And I am glad I am able to recognize these facts now while I am young.

Fellow contestants, look at the teachers that are with you today. You, like me, are here because of your support system. Take the time to appreciate their hard work, just as they appreciate yours.