

## What's in a *Thank You*?

Rena Matsumoto

Okinawa Shogaku Senior High School

What are you most proud of? Think really hard about it. What about it was so special? How did you feel after you did it? Now stop. Did any of you think of anyone other than yourself? If you answered no, you were not the only one. Until recently, I would have answered the same way.

When I was in junior high school, I was very proud of my English ability, and I had more confidence than many of my classmates, so my teacher encouraged me to participate in the Junior High English speech contest. My teacher sat down with me and helped me write my speech. We practiced almost every day for 6 months and I was able to win awards all the way up to the national level. I thought, “Wow, I am really good at English! I was good enough to win this contest!”

When I became a high school student, I was confident that I could easily repeat my success in the High School English speech contests. However, I was surprised when my high school teacher asked me to write the first draft of my speech all by myself. I remember sitting at my computer staring at a blank screen. I couldn't think of anything to write. I felt despair and disappointment, but after many painful hours, I put together a rough draft and showed it to my teacher. She read it and said, “Your speech doesn't say anything special, anyone could have written this.”

Her words were very painful to me, but I knew they were true. I thought back to my success in junior high school. Did I really do that all by myself? I thought about my junior high school teacher who gave up his lunch breaks to help me write my script and stayed after school day after day to listen to me practice my speech. I had been so arrogant to think that I'd won those trophies on my abilities alone, when in fact my teacher had given so much of his own time to make that possible.

This experience made me think about how much we rely on the sacrifices of others, not only in our achievements, but in our daily lives. In many cases, we do not acknowledge or even notice this. For example, when my mother would pick me up from school, I usually got in the car without even a thank you. But if I had walked home or taken the bus, she could have spent that time doing something she enjoyed. What about you? How many of you students eat lunch made by your parents? They could have slept in an extra hour or enjoyed a cup of coffee, but instead they gave that time to you so that you could study or relax.

Our lives and achievements are built not only on our own efforts, but on the sacrifices of others. The next time you say *thank you* to someone, I want you to pause for a moment to think what exactly you are thanking them for. What did they have to give up in order to make your life easier or to help you become successful? When we realize this, we can truly understand what it means to be grateful to others.