

Before the things that are important disappear

"Mom? Why are you locking the door when Dad hasn't come home yet?" These are the words I said to my mother 16 years ago when I was 3 years old. Do you remember the flash flood accident in the Gabu River that hit Okinawa on August 19, 2008? I lost my real father in that accident. This flash flood accident was a tragic accident in which five workers who were conducting an earthquake resistance survey in the drainage channel that runs through the Hikawa River in Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture, commonly known as the "Gabu River," were swept away by a sudden heavy rain called a flash flood. Of the five people who were swept away, four died. My father was one of those four. At the time, I was 3 years old and my brother was only 2 years old. Therefore, according to what I heard from my mother, I did not understand that "people die" at the time and always believed that my father would come home. Now I have no memory of ever saying such a thing, but it is still deeply engraved in my mother's heart. And it is no wonder. My young child had been waiting forever for the precious life that had been lost, that would never come back. My mother was heartbroken and saddened by the words I had casually and suddenly said at the time, and cried and cried and cried. However, at the same time, she resolved to raise us, who were still young, on her own. "I can't cry. What's the point of me crying all the time? Get a grip! I'll love these children as much as children who have a father, without wanting anything." From then on, our family received more help than ever from the many people around us. For example, the father of one of my friends who attended the same nursery school saw me jealous of my friend being carried on his shoulders, and he carried me on his shoulders just like his own child, and he flew kites with me in the park. Because my mother was a nursery teacher at the time, sometimes my brother and I would be left at our cousin's house early on weekday mornings, or I would wait for my mother to come home late at night at my grandparents' house. Even then, my uncle, aunt, and cousins welcomed my siblings and I with a smile every morning, without showing any signs of annoyance. My cousins, who were junior high and high school students at the time, would hold my hands and take me and my brother to nursery school every morning when it was time for us to go. My grandfather and grandmother would make us sleep between them so that my brother and I could sleep peacefully, and stay with us the whole time. These memories, which no one around me had experienced and which only I had experienced, were just a part of my life at the time, and became part of my daily routine. Because of this, I feel that I was much less grateful and thankful to the people around me than I am now. And above all, I am grateful that I am alive here and now, and I am immeasurably grateful to my mother for raising me without any inconveniences. My mother never wanted us to feel any inconveniences, and she

never wanted us to feel miserable because we didn't have a father. Even though everything was new and we were fumbling around, she tried her best to think of ways to entertain us. The people around me didn't pity or sympathize with my mother, but encouraged and supported her. I think that's why I've been able to grow up to be so strong. I was able to realize and know the importance of the people around me at a young age, so I think that now I can help, support, and encourage those around me who are in trouble. The things I experienced as a child were not "special". As long as we live, we will one day face the "death" of someone important to us. I always tell myself that I was just faced with the "death" of my loved ones earlier than others. Perhaps there are things I can understand and convey because I have had these experiences since I was a child. Perhaps there are things I can understand and empathize with because I am the one who has experienced them. "Don't take other people's lives lightly." "Don't treat your own life carelessly." "Take care of yourself and those around you." These are words that are overflowing everywhere. Words that everyone has heard. Words that everyone already understands. But even so, that life that was lost will never come back. It cannot be retrieved. Perhaps the best thing we can do now is to live our lives to the fullest and never forget to be grateful to the people who support us.