



Special Delivery

Today is April 2nd, a day that has special memories for me; it was the day of the birth of my first daughter, Himi-chan. Himi actually tried to enter the world a couple of days earlier, on the evening of March 31st, but the birth was difficult, and she wasn't able to join us until the morning of the 2nd.

At the time, my friends in Canada (this all took place in Vancouver) joked that little Himi was just trying to avoid being an 'April Fool' baby, but in later years, when we had moved to Japan, I came to realize that perhaps she had something else in mind ...

We came to Japan when Himi was three years old and her younger sister Fumi was one. We moved into a standard 3DK apartment in an average community, and the two girls soon had dozens of friends and play-mates. The girls' mother and I decided not to send our daughters to a kindergarten, but we did enroll them in a daycare facility, where they spent some time each day immersed in play and social activities.

After a couple of years of this idyllic life for them, it became time to start to think about school, and I learned something interesting about the Japanese education system - the school year began in April, and the cut-off date for deciding which year a young child would start school was April 1st. The rule was simple: a child would become a Grade One student in the April following her 6th birthday.

This meant that Himi-chan was going to start school a full year later than if she had actually been born on March 31st, as might easily have happened. When I realized the ramifications of this, I was quite pleased, both for a selfish reason of my own, and for Himi, too.

At that time I was making a living by teaching English in our apartment while I tried to build up my nascent printmaking business. I also had a kind of 'side-business' making and selling wooden toys, which had developed after neighbours saw the toys I had made for my children. I did all these things at home, working in one of the rooms of our little apartment. There was no separation at all between my 'work' and my 'home life' - they were one and the same. And Himi and Fumi were very much a part of it - they joined English classes when they wished, played with the toys (of course), and were just generally underfoot all the time.

I was in no hurry to break up this family routine to send Himi off to school. Of course, I knew she would have to go when the time came, but to have her around the home for an extra year was a kind of bonus for me.

And for Himi herself - what a difference it would make! There were two wonderful benefits; first, all the way up through the stages of her school life she would be the oldest child in the class - always being the most mature, and more ready to take on whatever challenges faced her.

But more importantly, because she was born on April 2nd, she was being 'given' a whole extra year of care-free childhood! I have no idea how many years she will live, but if you think of her life as being broken up into periods - of childhood, then of school life, then adult life, then finally old age - it is clear that one year has been taken from the end, and placed at the beginning: her childhood was a full six years, instead of the five it could have been. What a wonderful bonus for her!

And, I have to say, for me too ... Himi-chan, thank you for the 'extra' year we were able to spend together!

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