



The Voice in My Pocket

I'm not very good at taking notes. On those occasions when it is necessary to write down some details for reference, I sometimes try to make a few notes, but later when I am trying to read what I have written, I can understand almost nothing of what is on the paper.

It has always been like this for me; back when I was in school my notebooks were a scribbled jumble, and I still have a vivid memory of a teacher one day throwing a notebook of mine across the room in disgust because it was so illegible.

I sometimes have a chance to see other people's notebooks, for example when I am being interviewed, and look at them in admiration - clean pages with line after line of points, or numbers, or neat sentences. How can they do it? I have no idea! I myself sometimes become a kind of 'reporter', when I visit somebody to gather information for a story for my Hyakunin Issho newsletter. I duly take along a notebook and pen, but when I get home and begin to write the story, the notebook tells me nothing. It is either completely empty - because I was so wrapped up in conversation that I wasn't able to write anything down - or it contains nothing but indecipherable chicken scratches.

It is because of this, that I have picked up the habit of keeping a small voice recorder in my pocket. In recent years these have become both very inexpensive, and very small, and I have become addicted to using mine! Just yesterday, while I was riding the train, I had an idea for my 'A Story a Week' series, so pulled out the recorder, spoke my reminder message into it, and then just slipped it back into my pocket. When I got home, I listened to the memo, remembered the topic, and am now writing the story ...

Last week though, I had a little experience with this recorder that I just have to share with you. The recorder was in my shirt pocket as usual, but it seems that when I left home to go out and do some errands on my bicycle, I must have bumped it when I was putting my jacket on, and somehow switched on the 'record' function, without realizing it. I went to the Post Office, and the supermarket, and then returned home. Some time later I heard a 'beep' from my shirt pocket, and discovered what I had done. I was about to erase the unwanted recording, but on a whim, switched it to 'play' mode, and set the recorder on the table to listen to what was on it.

What a surprise I got! It had been recording for over an hour, and I could trace my journey by listening to the sounds: the front door closing, getting onto my bicycle, the traffic when I crossed a nearby main street ... the whole journey was there 'on tape'.

So why was I surprised? Well, it's a bit embarrassing to admit this to you, but here and there on the recording, I heard a kind of running commentary on what was going on!

"At the post office, don't forget to mail that postcard for OO-san ... " ... "Hey, that's Akagawa-san's truck ... he's kind of late for work today ..." ... "OK, that's done, now what's next? ... Oh yeah, supermarket ..."

I had no idea that I was doing this ... talking with myself as I went about my daily business! Of course I knew that I was thinking these things, but didn't realize that they were actually audible too.

I think we have the idea that people who walk around town talking to themselves are kind of 'crazy'. I tell you, it's not like that! I'm completely normal ... honest!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>