



Share and Share Alike!

Both my daughters were born in April, just about exactly two years apart. That wasn't planned at all; it just happened to turn out that way. When they were little, it was kind of convenient having their birthdays near to each other, and we sometimes had 'combined' birthday parties. So this month has been a bit nostalgic for me, looking back to the 'good old days' when the three of us lived together here in Japan.

From the time their mother left our household (when they were 8 and 6), up until Himi reached the age to enter middle school and the two of them went to live in Canada, we were a three-member family. We had a lot of fun together, even though we were all very busy - they with their school activities, and I with my printmaking work. But with no 'mother' in the house, who did all the housework?

Well, simply put, we all did. At the time we began that pattern of living, I knew that if we didn't get things organized well, we would soon be living in a pigsty, so I worked out a good system for sharing the housework between us. I drew up a chart of the various household 'chores', with everything that needed to be done each day of the week. Next to each job on the chart there was an empty box, and every Sunday evening the three of us sat down and put our names in the boxes for the jobs we were going to do during the coming week.

The jobs were listed on the chart in various groups, according to the time of day they were usually done. In the case of the morning jobs, breakfast and laundry were mine alone (because the girls were very busy getting ready for school), but for jobs such as taking out the garbage, feeding the cat, and hanging up the bedding, the girls pencilled in their names for each job a minimum of two times each week. My name then went in the unfilled boxes.

The main jobs for the after school hours were: piano practice, school homework, vacuuming the house, wiping the floors, shopping for dinner, cooking, and dishwashing. Some of these (homework, etc.) were compulsory every day, but the others were again, to be selected twice a week for each of the kids. In the case of cooking, I was the main person each day, and they signed up to be my 'assistant'.

The evening group was made up of such things as preparing the bedding, running the bath, and packing the school satchels, and there was also a 'Miscellaneous' group with items like watering the flowers, buying the weekly flowers for the entranceway, filling out the weekly Co-op food order form, and suchlike.

Now that was the theory; did it actually work in practice? Yes indeed! Every Sunday for year after year, we filled in the form and then stuck to it during the coming week. They never whined about having to do chores, and soon came to consider these things just a transparent part of daily life. There were a few reasons that the girls kept to it so well. One was that I was never severely strict; if something came up during the week that made it difficult for one of us to fulfill some of our committed obligations, one of the other two would happily stand in place and do the job instead. Plenty of job swapping went on all the time, and it wasn't unknown for an occasional 'P' (pass) to get scribbled on the chart somewhere.

When we originally started the system, I made a rule that if they stuck to their obligations, they would receive 500 yen allowance each week, but honestly speaking, that didn't seem to be much of an incentive for

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them. Any number of times, I forgot to give this to them, and they forgot to ask me about it. Their main motivation - as was mine - was the recognition that we were 'in this together' and that nobody was going to take care of us. If we wanted to live a normal pleasant life in clean surroundings, these were the jobs we would all have to do. So we did.

Daughter Himi now has two children of her own. They are still far too young to be participating in any kind of household chores, and I'm waiting with interest to see how Himi handles the housework situation once they get a bit older. It's none of my business at all how she will handle things, but I do know that I would feel a tad disappointed if it turned out that she ended up doing all the housework herself!

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