



## Don't Sweat it!

The other day, I went over to Sadako's place; the ostensible reason was to spend a few hours working on the translation of one of the chapters in the '**My Solitudes**' book, but she usually suggests that I come a bit early and she prepares a nice lunch for the two of us. As you may guess, this is much appreciated on my part; even though the supermarkets and convenience stores are preparing much better food these days than they used to, nothing compares with home cooking!

Because she goes to such effort, I of course try and make sure I arrive on time. I usually take the bus to a nearby station, then take the train to her town. Japanese transportation works to very strict schedules, so it is never a problem; I have learned the proper time to leave the house in order to catch the correct bus. The other day though, just as I was in the *genkan* getting my shoes on, the doorbell rang. It was the local parcel delivery man, and as the package he was delivering was a COD, and thus needed more than a simple signature, I ended up being behind schedule. A few minutes later, as I walked along the street toward the bus stop, I realized that I was going to miss it, and thus be late for lunch. My reaction? "Well, it can't be helped; I'll have to explain to Sadako what happened, and I'm sure she'll understand," and I continued cheerfully along the way.

Now had this been happening many years ago, say when I was a young teenager, I know my reaction would have been different. "Damn it! That driver has really screwed me around! Now the whole afternoon is going to get messed up! Damn it!" (Or perhaps - because I was a silly teenager - I might have said something worse than 'damn' ...)

But somewhere along the line, I had a bit of a change of character. I don't remember at all what set it off, but I started playing a kind of game with myself whenever such incidents came along. Instead of losing my temper about the problem, I would just shrug it off, and would think to myself "OK, I'll be a 'good boy' here. I won't get angry. Instead, I'll be 'nice', and if I do that, I'll probably get some kind of 'reward'."

Now this certainly sounds kind of silly. Nobody's 'watching', and unlike what some children may believe - be a good boy and Santa Claus will come! - life just doesn't work that way. But do you know, once you start playing such a game with yourself, you soon find plenty of occasions where it works! And so it was the other day.

I was about half-way to the bus stop when a car pulled up beside me - my neighbour Yamaguchi-san and his wife. They were heading out shopping, and their destination was a department store located right in front of the local train station. It was obvious to him that I was headed for the bus stop, so he rolled down his window and told me to jump in. I did, and we arrived at the station well in advance of the bus that I had missed. I even had time to go down to the food floor and pick up a little something to take with me ...

Coincidence? Well, objectively speaking, I suppose it was. But do you know, this seems to happen again and again. As long as I remember not to get upset about things that happen, they seem to get 'fixed' in short order.

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No granola on the shelf because I forgot to order it soon enough? Just shrug my shoulders, look around for something else ... What's this? Another package hidden away at the back of the cupboard!

I make a careless mistake cutting a piece of mat board for one of my prints; it doesn't fit. Ah well, it can't be helped ... no point in getting upset. Just a minute, if I turn it *this* way instead of that, I can still make it work!

I tell you, this happens every day.

I think this kind of attitude has been well studied and described. I might regret not learning about it much earlier in life, but at least I've got it down pat now.

"Don't sweat the small stuff!"

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