



Kampai!

Long-time followers of A Story A Week know that every now and then, when a particular family anniversary falls on a Sunday (my weekly publishing date), I pick up that theme for the topic of the story. This kind of random approach has been working well; we don't end up with *too many* stories about my family, and as time goes by, everybody 'gets their turn' ... eventually.

The one downside to this system though, is that specific important anniversaries - if they happen not to fall on a Sunday - get missed out. And so it is this week. A few days ago, on Thursday, it was my parents' wedding anniversary, and it was a big one - number 60.

When I write about the birthdays, I can usually put myself 'in place' of the person, and feel like I pretty much understand their situation. But this event is different. To spend 60 years together with the same person (and if you count the time before marriage that they knew each other closely, it comes to nearly 70 years!) is something that is so far beyond my own experience that I simply cannot 'understand' it at all. And of course, given that I am 'single' in my late fifties, I will never be in their situation myself. This is simply something that I have to observe from 'afar'.

And my thoughts about their achievement fall into two quite opposite poles. My own (limited) experience with partners has been that the feeling of warmth and comfort that comes from being with this person does indeed grow as time goes by, so for the two of them, this 'togetherness' factor must now be very strong indeed, to the point where they can perhaps not even conceive of being apart.

But the other side to the story is the question of how it is possible to even have a conversation with your partner, when you - of course - already know exactly what they are thinking, and what they will say. I wonder, *is it possible for them to surprise each other?*

Perhaps though, that is not really so important, and indeed, I may be at fault for thinking that it is desirable. If you try and make a comparison with any other form of 'organization', the optimal situation is obviously for the component parts to work together smoothly *without* surprises or frictions. Perhaps it is a reflection of my own immaturity that makes me see this lack of 'novelty' as a problem.

Or perhaps - given the amazingly long list of experiences that they have been through - perhaps they have had quite enough of 'surprises', and are simply content with their peaceful daily routines together!

A few weeks back, in advance of our family anniversary get-together, I was chatting with my brother in Germany about these things, and we were thinking about what it would be like if people could 'choose' their parents. The 'answer' to this speculation was interesting. Back in wartime Britain, in a giant factory producing military uniforms, we find these two teenagers: working class kids, both from broken homes, very poorly educated (they are already at work in their early teens), living in a small provincial mill town with absolutely no prospects of ever leaving it. Their future - or lack of it - was absolutely clear.

Who on earth would ever 'choose' that couple as their parents? Nobody!

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

But it didn't turn out as 'predicted'. Those two kids saw a different possible future for themselves, and 'broke out' to grasp it. And it's quite clear that there was nothing automatic about that; it wasn't simply due to the social changes that took place in the post-war era. In recent years they have had a bit of contact with some of the people they left behind in that environment, and those people were indeed 'left behind' in every sense, having lived the constrained life that could have been the fate of this couple.

None of us can see the future. Sometimes we may have the sense that we are simply buffeted by fate, and pushed this way and that by forces beyond our control. This couple gives the lie to that. When they left that dirty mill town, they could never - I am sure - envision that they would one day sit at the Captain's Table on a luxury cruise liner, surrounded by their children raising a toast to their long and successful partnership.

These three children, and the grand children, and now the great-grand children too, will never have a clear picture of what our lives would have been like had these two not vigorously grasped at the brass ring as it flashed by, and more than once!

To their adventurous spirit we owe everything; the healthy environment we grew up in, the open-minded and questioning approach to life that we took for granted, and the rock-solid support at every stage of our own development.

Who on earth would ever have chosen those two?

Well - of course - we don't get to choose. We are simply dealt a hand. And some of us get very very lucky!

Congratulations to the two of them on 60(+) years! Kampai!

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