



Lies, All Lies!

I learned something very interesting while chatting with my daughter Fumi one day during my recent trip to Canada for our annual family reunion. We were sitting on her sister's patio watching over my two grandchildren while they played in the garden, and our conversation somehow turned to the topic of insects - not unusual given the circumstances.

She surprised me a little when she said that she was different from most of her friends and contemporaries, in that she wasn't bothered by insects in the same way that they were. When faced with some kind of bug in the house, for example, perhaps a spider or caterpillar, they would think only of killing it. She, on the other hand, will not only avoid killing it if possible, but has no qualms about simply picking it up in her bare hands and putting it outside, something that her friends cannot bear to even think about. Touch a bug? Yuck!

I say that I was surprised to hear her say this, but it was a pleasant surprise. More than 15 years ago I wrote a little piece about my children and insects (reproduced in [A Story A Week episode #80](#)), describing how I wanted them to grow up with no particular fear of insects, simply seeing them as creatures who share our living space on this planet. We of course have to use common sense when dealing with poisonous insects, or those that are unhealthy for us, but in truth, most of the insects we meet on a day-to-day basis are completely benign, if not actually beneficial.

So I was very glad to hear that the 'lesson' had indeed stuck, and that she now has no particular fear of insects. It was also a matter of considerable pride to hear her relate episodes of boys around her being repelled by some bug or other, while she herself dealt with it completely calmly.

As I listened to her tell me about this, I debated whether or not to tell her a particular story about insects and my own childhood, and decided I might as well not keep it back. The daddy that she has always known - who enjoys the (plentiful) insects that share his living environment in Japan - was not always like this.

Back during our first years in Canada (it must have been when I was around 8 years old), my mother bought a children's encyclopedia set for our home. It was one of those 'one volume a week' promotions put on by supermarkets to keep their customers coming back, and I think it had about 16 volumes in all. Because it was aimed at children, it was of course full of colourful illustrations, and the outer cover of each one was completely covered in pictures taken from the inside of that particular volume. Realistic pictures. Very realistic pictures.

For the volume that included the letters H through K, the designers had plastered the outside of the volume with images of insects. And although I read the rest of the set from cover to cover, and repeatedly, the contents of that particular volume remained a blank to me. I simply couldn't bring myself to touch it, let alone pick it up and hold it in my lap for browsing.

I have no idea where or when my feelings towards insects changed. Certainly by the time I arrived in Japan (and spent our first few summers down in the country), I had become 'normal', had no fear of them, and tried to encourage that same attitude in my daughters (apparently successfully!). And these days, I look forward eagerly to the development of the 'green curtain' that I prepare on the south side of my home every summer, which teems with interesting insects and provides endless entertainment when watched from the underside.

And I can't help but wonder about the topics that were included in the encyclopedia volume that I 'missed'. If I hadn't been so squeamish, I would have learned about the H to K topics ... perhaps I would have ended up being interested in Japan much sooner!

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