



Belt Up!

My birthday last week passed without much fanfare, as they usually do these days. I suppose the next one that will draw any attention will be 'When I'm 64' a couple of years from now, then maybe a year later at 65, although I suspect that is no longer considered the point at which one becomes a Senior Citizen; perhaps that happens at 70 these days?

In any case, the event was not completely unnoticed, as my parents sent a card, Sadako bought me some new jeans, and my two daughters sent a package. The contents of their little gift packages to me are pretty much pre-ordained. They head over to a local Natural Food shop and buy me a selection of dried fruits, something I can still not obtain here in Japan (at least not locally, nor at a reasonable price).

But this time, as I was beginning to open the package, I paused for a moment - what was that scent? It wasn't fruit, for sure. Was it perhaps soap? Why would they be sending me something like that? Was this a 'joke' package? Please, no! Girls, I really enjoy the fruit selection; don't feel that I am 'bored' with it at all!

As I got to the inside, the scent became quite strong. No doubt about it; they were sending me soap!

Well, no. As expected, I found a number of sealed packages of various types of dried fruit and nuts, but nestled among them was a small tissue-wrapped bundle. A brand new - and very heavy duty - leather belt.

They knew I needed such a thing, having watched a recent NHK program in which I had (unknowingly) been constantly hitching up my trousers. And as they are in the fashion business, making a new belt for their Dad was not a problem for them. I am happy to have this, and it will go into service immediately.

Seeing it there on my desk though - this heavy wide unadorned hunk of deep brown leather - triggered a memory from a very long time ago. Here I was again, face to face with ... The Strap!

Back in Elementary school, I was not at all badly behaved. I was - for the most part - quiet and shy, and not at all the sort of boy who would need to be disciplined frequently. But I do have a memory of being sent to the principal's office on at least one occasion, although I have not the slightest idea what I did to deserve it.

There was a bench outside his office, and the time one spent sitting there waiting to be called in was of course a major part of the punishment. What will he do? Is he going to beat me? By the time the call came, I suppose the 'naughty boys' were pretty penitent. I am very sure that I must have been.

Once inside, it was time for a lecture from this very forbidding man, and then - for the worst offenders - it was 'Put your hands out!', followed by the administration of the appropriate number of whacks with The Strap.

Did I actually get strapped? You know, for the life of me I can't remember. This is exactly the sort of memory that exponentially grows in the telling over the years, so I really don't trust myself to report it to you accurately. Almost certainly, I was simply lectured and then sent back to the classroom (I was, after all, a very 'good' little boy) but that's not how I (want to?) remember it.

It hurt so much! And I am absolutely certain, that whatever the transgression was, I never did it again!

Thanks for the memory, girls! :-)

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