

特別賞

渡邊 衣さん 千葉県立千葉高等学校 3年

千葉県

コミュニケーションとは必ずしも言語を用いたものだけではないと私自身は考えています。そのことを身をもって私に教えてくれたのは障がいを持った幼い従姉妹でした。

What my little cousin with a disability taught me

My cousin's arms are her mouth. Her hands and arms move, willed in all directions — this is her way of communicating. Rarely do I spend time without complicated feelings when people look at her with strange eyes.

Two years ago in May, I enjoyed a sunny day at the park with my cousins and my sisters. We played on the playground for three or four hours. Then my mother called me and said, "It's lunch time, so come home." I thought I had to begin working hard. I told everyone "Let's go home," but only one person didn't nod. It was my cute cousin. She has Down's syndrome. She is an elementary school student who is very good at dancing and is not very good at talking.

I had known that she was fond of the park. At that time, first she pronounced "Ya!" or "N!" She could only say those few words. However, we had talked a lot by that point, so I understood what she meant by saying those unclear words and using her arms and hands.

She didn't want to go home. First, she said only "Ya!" Then she continued with some unclear words and gestures. Her statement was long, and there were a lot of phrases and gestures that I had never seen before. Then, a boy who was playing in the same park looked at us curiously. His eyes looked as if we had been doing something strange. Moreover, another child saw the unusual communication that is our style. I thought we had to hurry home. However, my strongest feeling was that of being embarrassed, being in the line of sight of those children. In order to get home early, I badly pretended to understand her claim. But she didn't move. She knew I didn't understand or listen to her, really. The more I pretended to understand, the harder her gestures and her unclear words became. A few minutes later, I realized that I had to understand the content of her argument. First, I looked into her eyes. And I observed her gestures. Also, I remembered what she liked and the memories I had with her. She was circling her arms around her — and alternating between them. Her face looked down. She repeated this movement over and over. Then, it came to me. It

was 'a pool'. I remembered she liked swimming. Then I asked her "Do you want to go swimming?" A big smile appeared on her face. I felt the moment our hearts connected.

Once, at a station, I was asked about the train by someone who seemed to be a foreign tourist. The language they spoke was neither Japanese nor English. We conversed with maximum gestures and few proper nouns. At first, I didn't understand what they were saying, and I was scared by their expressions. However, the one moment when we understood each other, smiles appeared on their faces. — It was the same with my cousin's case.

Some people say they cannot understand someone else because the other person speaks in English. It's true that the language barrier is huge. However, just because you have a conversation in Japanese, it doesn't necessarily mean you can understand everything other people are thinking. I believe that the key to successful communication is not the language you use, but how much consideration you have for the other person. Different backgrounds may lead different forms of communication. However, putting yourself in the other person's shoes and being considerate enable you to communicate with them. Therefore, I think that talking with someone who speaks another language and talking with a person with a disability are the same. When our hearts connect, a smile appears. Also, the harder it is to communicate and the longer it takes to reach heart-to-heart, the bigger this smile will become.

In recent years, Japan and the world have become rich in diversity, with an increasing number of people with disabilities and immigrants. Therefore, we need to communicate with various people with different backgrounds.

I also want to use this experience to communicate with a wide variety of people and be of help to someone. [693 words]