

日米協会会長賞

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オランダのチェス国際大会で出会ったパラグアイの女の子がとってくれた行為に心を動かされました。彼女の勇気のいる行動がどれだけ私にとって大きいものだったかと、エッセイで上手く伝えられるように頑張りました。

### A Small Gesture of Kindness

A cloudy, gray-colored sky spread above me. Here I was. After the seemingly interminable flight, I set foot in the Netherlands to compete in a chess tournament called the “FIDE WORLD YOUTH U16 CHESS OLYMPIAD” to represent Japan. I felt extreme anxiety, nervousness, and loneliness as the only girl on the team. The other 3 boys I only barely knew and scarcely ever exchanged any conversation with. It was my first time competing in an international tournament, so I was scared and unprepared.

For the first round, I was paired with a stronger opponent. I put in a strenuous effort to cling on, but in the end, I lost control of the game and suffered defeat. As soon as the pairings for the second round had been revealed, I realized that I was paired with an opponent who was around the same strength as me. “I have to win this round,” I thought to myself. I felt so nervous and alone facing this round, given the fact that I didn't have any friends there, and therefore I felt as if all of the competitors were my “enemies,” coming to destroy me.

The second round had begun. Beads of sweat trickled down my face. Time was ticking, and I had to act fast. “I have to make my move,” I thought, but my brain went blank, and I just couldn't make my move. 10, 9, 8... I moved my hand to reach out for a piece. Just as my tremulous fingers were about to press the clock, I glanced and saw a big, fat zero shown on the clock, signaling that I had lost because of time. I was heartbroken. After resigning and shaking hands with my opponent, various emotions, like regret, anger, frustration, and sadness, hit me, and I bawled my eyes out. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I felt somebody embracing me. It was from a girl whom I didn't recognize.

She wasn't my opponent or my friend; she was just another competitor. “It's alright. You did well.” She comforted me and stayed by my side until I calmed down. At that time, I was flummoxed by the

sudden course of events and didn't understand the situation, so I was only able to squeeze out a "thank you" before she left. Afterward, I understood the gesture of kindness the girl took and regretted the fact that I wasn't able to appreciate her more or even ask what her name was.

Two days later, I came across her again at the venue. I expressed my gratitude for her actions, and we talked for a bit. There, I found out that her name was Renata, and she was representing Paraguay. She was only a year older than me. In the middle of our conversation, I got curious and asked her why she hugged me after the second round.

She looked a little surprised and told me that she wanted to comfort me simply because she saw how dejected I was. I couldn't recall a time when I had comforted a stranger like that. Therefore, her actions were eye-opening to me, but to her, they came naturally. She told me that it surprised and amazed her that her actions made such a positive impact on me. Her actions comforted me and made my day. Not only that, but this gesture taught me that my opponents aren't my "enemies," even if we are fighting hard in-game. We are just a congregation with similar interests. After being comforted by Renata, I calmed down and was able to win a few nice games and play to the best of my abilities. Renata taught me the importance of kind actions and the difference they make. Knowing the impact such actions make, I look around and try to make a few acts of kindness to everyone. It requires quite a bit of courage to take these actions, but I believe that these small gestures will make the world a better place. [663 words]