

Understanding Hidden Kindness

Last November was the last time I met my paternal grandfather. After a four-hour trip on the Shinkansen from Tokyo to Hiroshima, my family and I took an old-fashioned coral pink train to visit him. He had been hospitalized for months due to a disease. Looking out the train window, I thought back to the time we spent together which made me aware of hidden kindness around me.

Although I love my grandfather as he was always kind to me, there was one thing about him that was hard for me to understand; oftentimes, he hid his true feelings and acted opposite to his emotions. In my generation, it is a norm to express our emotions, especially when communicating on social media. Being used to texting online, which tends to be more straightforward communication, I often take words at face value. Therefore, when he told us that he did not need us to meet him often, I thought that he did not want to see us and that he wanted to keep his family away. Even though I later learned that he missed us at his heart, as I grew up in an environment where self-expression was valued, I could not understand why he would say something different from his innermost feelings.

The time we spent together was probably much shorter than other people's grandparent-grandchild relationships. It was not just because he refused us to visit him often. During the past ten years, we moved to the United States twice and returned to Japan. We lived in the US for a total of four years. The distance between the two countries prevented us to meet frequently.

I eventually learned that he was not meant to keep his family away. Rather, he was concerned about my family, especially about my newspaper journalist father, who had to return to work whenever a big story came out. He did not want to bother us by telling him that he wanted us to meet frequently. He had always been thinking about us even when he was enduring illness. Every time we talked on the telephone, he would always ask me about my school life and if we were doing well. One day, when we

were talking on the telephone, as he always did, he asked me if my father was doing fine. While talking, I recognized him coughing and asked if he was feeling alright. He replied that he was fine; however, as the days went by, he became sicker and sicker.

Arriving at the hospital, the staff brought us to a hallway as we could not get in the room to prevent coronavirus infection. We could see him lying on the bed through an acrylic shield standing. He seemed confused and surprised by the unexpected visit as we did not tell him about the visit beforehand. To talk with him, my father had to turn on the speaker of his phone and had to hand it over to the staff in order to avoid droplet transmission. The staff then handed it over to my grandfather, but with his weakened grip, he was unable to hold it. From the phone speaker, we heard a hoarse voice saying, “Why did you come here?” My father answered, “We just wanted to see your face.” The meeting time passed in the blink of an eye. At the end of the visit, I told him that I would come back to see him again. Instead of replying, he smiled and nodded. At that moment, I felt that we could finally understand each other.

My grandfather, who passed away earlier this year, was someone who had always limited his inner feelings and prioritized other people. In my generation, many of us value expressing ourselves, whereas my grandfather valued more on being patient. For him, patience meant consideration for others. His hidden kindness made me think that I might be supported by the kindness of those around me in ways I don't recognize. I believe that I would one day be able to understand people with different values by considering the reasons behind their actions and attitudes. Thank you, Grandpa, for teaching me a valuable life lesson. [697 words]