

Two Bridge-builders

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Just after the war, a young, ambitious man left Fukuoka in the lingering heat of an early fall day in order to realize his dream – a dream to start a large farm. Poor as he was, he was rich in hope. Almost two months later, he arrived in the port of Santos. In the vast property he purchased near Sao Paulo, he finally got settled and started cultivating the land. His last name is Iwamura – the same as mine. Yes! This robust, resilient man is my great-grandfather, who started the history of my family. More than six decades ago, he connected my two homes, Japan and Brazil.

My real name is Emilly Emi Iwamura. Make no mistake. There are two I's in my name. As you might have expected, I am what we call a "half." Precisely speaking, my father is a Sansei whose parents are both Niseis, and my mother is a Caucasian. So, you might want to call me a "three-quarter."

Well, I am not here to complain about being called by Japanese people "half," "three-quarter," or "less than 100 percent." As a matter of fact, I do not care even if you call me imperfect. What's in a name? What I do care is something very different.

I live in Minokamo. This city is famous for its foreign population, which accounts for about 10 percent of all the people in it. Needless to say, there are a number of foreign students in each school. My junior high school was no exception. When I was a junior high school student, I saw a lot of non-Japanese students discriminated, hated, or bullied by Japanese ones because they didn't know the rules at school or understand the Japanese language, or only because they look different from Japanese people. As a "half," I really wanted to help them, and I actually did.

Of course, those Japanese students have to be blamed for their wrongdoing, but is it the end of the story? Are Japanese students always wrong? Of course not. As I have lived in Japan for 15 years, I do understand what Japanese people feel when they see foreigners. For example, non-Japanese people tend to talk too loud when in a group, which often makes Japanese people frown. Besides, even though they enjoy its merits, just complaining about the small society called school, they are apt to huddle up together. For Japanese people, that is sometimes frightening.

The both sides are misunderstanding each other. They know little about the background the other ones have. They should reach out their hands and understand each other. That is easier said than done. It's not that simple. What they lack is the chances to appreciate each other, and there must be someone who stands between them, and I believe I am the one to be the help. I know how bad foreigners living in Japan feel when they are pointed at and spoken ill of in an unfamiliar language behind them. At the same time, I also understand how uncomfortable Japanese feel when foreigners wear too much perfume and give off strong scents. It is I that can give chances for the two groups to get to know each other.

Now I am determined by the experience to study more languages and build bridges of friendship between Japan and other countries. I will be a bridge-builder who connects many people in different places in the world, just as my great-grandpa did.

私の曾祖父がブラジルへ渡ってから60年以上がたちました。そこから私たち家族の歴史がはじまりました。私は「ハーフ」として日本で1歳半から生活しています。日本とブラジルの違いについて、多くを意識しています。私はその違いを乗り越えた、二つの祖国の懸け橋になりたいと思っています。