

特別賞

阿波 凜花さん 鎌倉女学院中学校高等学校 2 年

神奈川県

このエッセイでは駅で視覚、聴覚障害を持つ女性と出会い、道案内をした経験を通して学んだ「声だけではない本当のコミュニケーション」と私自身の感情の変化に焦点を当てて綴っています。繊細な感情を英語に落とし込むことに苦戦しました。

What we say without words

Tap tap, tap...

One day, waiting for the train, a stranger suddenly tapped my shoulder repeatedly as if urgently needing my attention. I was surprised at this and to be honest, a little afraid. I turned around nervously to find it was a woman with a white cane. I realised she was either blind or partially-sighted and she was looking for someone to take her to her destination.

I got on the train arm in arm with her. Through interacting with her, I realized that she was also deaf so when we talked she used large white text on a black background on her smart phone. I could adapt to her circumstances fairly flexibly because I had gained some knowledge about visual impairment from a TV drama I had seen just a few days before. This made me aware that even something seemingly superficial, like a TV drama, can teach us lots about members of society we don't have much contact with. It can help people to understand each other more easily in real life. Through our conversation, I discovered that we were getting off the train at the same station, Shibuya, and so I could guide her to the Hanzomon Line. After arriving at Shibuya, I took her to the washroom, too. When I saw her walking off alone, in one of the busiest stations in the world, I was so amazed that she knew the way to her destination and the location of the escalator without using brail tiles.

I was left with conflicting feelings about this valuable encounter. On the one hand, I was really happy to be relied on by someone in need and glad to help her using some of the insights I'd gained from the TV drama. However, I also felt ashamed and frustrated at myself. This is because I was afraid of her at first and finally, perhaps, I worried too much about whether she could get to her destination alone or not, though she is a capable young woman just like me. I shouldn't have presumed "You aren't able to do this kind of thing by yourself!" when she was walking off alone. I should have trusted

her abilities. Moreover, I saw her calling on someone else for help after me, and that made me think that some people really fight for their independence through communication - and in that way, she might be more independent than someone who hesitates to ask others for help.

I was struck by the power and wisdom of communication. If we are in a position to trust each other as fellow companions living on this earth, then real communication can happen, no matter what your background or your level of ability. However, for that to happen, there needs to be awareness, too. For example, we need to understand that disabled people can be independent and it is only when they need help and ask for it, that we should give them a hand. So, giving assistance to disabled people is, in this way, no different to helping people without disabilities. It's just that people with disabilities make their reliance on others more visible. Because of stereotypical thinking, it's easy for us to overstep the mark and overdo our help. Yet, actually, we should communicate with all equally. In this way, we avoid patronising the disabled or undermining their dignity.

I will never forget the handshake which was our last exchange. It was full of gratitude and warmth. Although certainly it's not the case that we made eye contact, her smile was unmistakably genuine. She made me understand what real communication is. It is not simply talking about your favorite artist or sending a text message to your friends - although this is certainly fun. Instead, real communication is more about trusting, respecting and learning from each other. Through this, it enables us to connect with different worlds that we cannot experience every day.