

The Invisible Wall

This summer, I had my kindergarten class reunion and I was able to meet a lot of old friends. Although I had very good time, there was one thing that I couldn't stop thinking about, a girl I could not communicate with naturally. Her name is Sayaka and she is a girl with Down's Syndrome. When I talked with her, she could not keep up with my talking speed and I gave up in the middle of our conversation. The fact that I could not enjoy talking with her like I do with others discouraged me. On my way home, I thought that she might also have been disappointed with my attitude, and she must have been hurt.

However, I changed my mind and said to myself that it cannot be helped. She has a handicap and I do not.

At the dinner table, I talked about my reunion and about my feeling toward what happened with Sayaka. My mother said "It is sad to hear that. I remember her well. You used to get along well with her. You looked so happy when you were with her." I was surprised to hear what my mother said, and suddenly I remembered the times we spent together. In those days, I loved chatting with her because she listened to me and always kept smiling. We also played hide- and- seek almost every day.

What changed me? I have not only gained a lot of knowledge, but also developed a biased attitude toward differences. Even without any particular bad intention, we unconsciously tend to separate the world we live in from the world we do not. Sometimes this separation is “abled” and “disabled.” The distinction makes us feel that there is a wall between “us” and “them.”

Who builds this wall? I thought that the wall has always been there, but it was not true. The wall is made by people who have prejudice. In this case I had built the wall.

When I met Sayaka again at the reunion, it changed me. When I was a little child, I did not think that Sayaka and I lived in different worlds. We were just friends, we went to the same kindergarten, we played in the same room and we laughed at the same time. There was no wall between us.

When I went to Australia, for a home stay last summer, I could not speak well with my host family. I spoke slowly and I could not understand what they told me, just like Sayaka could not understand me when we met again. However, they managed to communicate with me by speaking slowly with gestures. There was no wall between us even though we have different backgrounds. If I had tried to communicate with Sayaka like them, we could have had fun like we used to.

A prejudiced preconception makes an invisible wall, and the person who builds the wall is “ourselves”. Discovering this fact made me recognize that anything is possible by removing the wall between others; between “abled” and “disabled”, “a native” and “a foreigner” or “white” and “black”. It can also be removed between religions, ways of thinking, and cultures. We must always remember the one who builds the wall is “ourselves”. It is not always there, like when Sayaka and I were small children.

I think I will meet many people who have various backgrounds from now. Although I may be surprised with the differences, I should always remember this experience. By remembering this, my world will be infinitely extended. Taking advantage of my experience, if I can meet Sayaka again, I am sure I can communicate with her just like we used to. Now, I know how to remove the wall. (624 words)