

What a Lady Taught Me

I was born in Okinawa, and now I go to high school in Kagoshima, and live in the school dormitory. When the summer vacation starts, I fly back to Okinawa. It takes me only an hour from Kagoshima to Okinawa by airplane. I often read comics during the flight, but this time was different. The woman sitting next to me was not Japanese. For the first 20 minutes I sat there not knowing what to say, but eventually, I got up the nerve, and talked to her. She was so friendly that we started chatting and I found out that she had lived in Kagoshima for almost ten years, and was traveling to Okinawa for the first time. I asked her various questions such as how well she could speak Japanese, and how well she could use chopsticks. She was so kind that she answered all my questions, but I noticed she began to look a little uncomfortable. Soon after the conversation finished, our plane arrived at Okinawa, and we parted. However, I was worried about the strained look on her face, and I suspected I might have offended her in some way. I wanted to apologize to her, but unfortunately there was no opportunity to meet her again. After I got back home, I began thinking about what had made her feel upset. It occurred to me that my questions had emphasized the gap between Japanese people and people from other countries, and I had made her feel alienated even though I hadn't intended to. She had lived in Japan for almost ten years, so she was not a foreign tourist, but a person who had decided to live in Japan. She may have felt that she was Japanese in a sense, and it made her feel she was being treated like a foreigner.

I should have spoken to her about what I talk about with my Japanese friends, instead of asking questions which made her feel like an outsider. This experience taught me that we sometimes draw a line between ourselves and foreigners, and make them feel alienated though we don't mean to. Instead we ought to treat them as we treat Japanese people especially if we find out that they have lived in Japan for a long time.

I had another opportunity to talk with an American the other day in Okinawa. He asked me the way to the monorail station, so I offered to guide him there. On our way, I talked with him, and found out that he had lived in Tokyo for more than fifteen years. Of course I remembered the conversation on the airplane, so I asked him what kind of music he liked. It turned out that we loved the same artist, and we got on well even though we were only together for a short time.

I didn' t know how to treat people from other countries until recently, but through this experience, I realized that we should not draw lines. To be treated as a guest sometimes makes others feel uncomfortable, or even alienated. We should not divide ourselves by culture. Instead we ought to consider others as our fellow citizens on the earth. The world is now becoming more and more globalized, and there are greater opportunities to encounter people from abroad. In order to get to know and form friendships with them, we should keep in mind that we must not draw lines, and we are all part of humanity. [581words]