

Round-the-World Trip — Searching for Who I Really Am



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My Resolution

I am 22 years old, a senior student at the Faculty of Policy Management of Keio University. Since I am a senior, I am finishing college soon and will probably start working for a company. About six months ago, I made a big decision that after graduation I will make a round-the-world trip for one year.

Self-Introduction

I was born in the city of Ise in Mie Prefecture, the eldest son in a big family of eight members running a liquor shop. In my childhood, I enjoyed playing football and spent most of my time after school playing football until I graduated from high school. I did this because my parents once told me that I should do my best at my favorite activity. When I was a kid, I devoted all my energy and efforts to what I truly loved without paying much attention to anything else. It has been my habit since then to pour all my passion into anything of which I am truly fond.

On leaving high school, I decided to make my favorite activity something other than football. In choosing a university to enrol at, I thought the Faculty of Policy Management of Keio University would offer a chance to use all my energy in such an activity, since this is a unique school with a great diversity of students and a great freedom to study. In such an environment, I felt sure I could discover something valuable as an alternative to football.

I gained acceptance after one year of study at a preparatory school for the college entrance exams. My university days have been truly enjoyable and stimulating, and I have encountered a variety of values and ideas outside the classroom as well. I have spent my time at university learning as my curiosity has led me, and I am confident that I have seen and heard a greater variety of things than most college students do.

The Trigger to My Resolution

However, I have not gotten a sense of having truly achieved anything in my three-year university life. It does not have to be any learning, but could be a hobby or pastime or even part-time work while studying. I want to have a sense of achievement during my university days to tell my kids about later in life. Though I did not hesitate to get involved in anything that I found interesting, I could not gain any sense of having achieved something until the last moment.

One day I got a call from my mother. She told me, “Your aunt Kiyomi is in a critical condition in the hospital. As she may pass away any time, please come home to see her.” Kiyomi, my mother’s younger sister, never married and had loved me and my brothers as if we were her own kids since we were babies. She had been suffering from breast cancer since three years ago and going back and forth between home and the hospital due to frequent resurgence of the symptoms. Though I had often heard about her condition, I could not believe what my mother told me. I rushed back to my home in Ise and ran to the hospital, and found my aunt so weak in a room at the hospital’s palliative care promotion center. She had a number of tubes in her body, and could barely speak. In those passing last moments with my aunt, I spontaneously told her that I would like to make a round-the-world trip. I don’t know why I told her of this ambition. But I was aware then of my drawing the line between what I could do and what I could not do. I had nearly put aside the idea of a round-the-world trip as something I could do, even though I had been thinking about it ever since a backpack tour with my friend in Southeast Asia a couple of years earlier. I finally got to discover what I truly wanted to do at the bedside of my beloved dying aunt. Her last words to me through her oxygen mask were: “Do whatever you truly want to do, as you only live once. You should do that round-the-world trip.” This sounded similar to what my parents had told me in my childhood. Her voice was so weak and could barely be heard, yet it sounded larger to me than anybody else’s. That was the moment when my project of a round-the-world trip truly started.



After My Resolution ...

I thought all would go well once I decided to start this project. However, as time passed, I found myself beginning to be caught by a sense of obligation. What shall I do during this trip? I have to make a plan and complete this project with careful and detailed planning, etc. Those concerns and questions started to occupy my mind all the time and caused me to suffer. It was painful to discover that what I had decided to do spontaneously was increasingly feeling like an obligation. One day when I felt almost crushed by this sense of obligation, I asked myself, "Why exactly are you going to start this trip?" I was able to provide a simple answer myself.

I will do this, I told myself, in order to enjoy the freedom to live spontaneously in the true sense, free from any vanity or hypocrisy in pretending to be so nice and attract others' attention. But I was still caught by such vanity and that created a sense of obligation which agonized me. In travelling alone, I would meet unknown people by chance and these incidental meetings would produce unexpected events, and in the midst of those unexpected events I would have to do many things quickly that I had never thought of in my life. Looking back on those events afterwards, I would find a story that would not have occurred in my daily routine life where I always have to behave myself and think about other people's opinion of me. To get a sense of liberation from the obligations of my routine life is the purpose of my trip. To achieve this I will have only one rule to be observed rigorously during my trip, and that is not to have any single objective. The stories I will find on my trip can neither be predicted in any guidebook nor told by anybody else. What happens naturally and unexpectedly during the course of my trip will create for me a real sense of pleasure in life.

I believe this trip will be a significant experience for me, even if it is only for one year of my entire life. It will expand my view of the world and influence my values, and therefore be an invaluable asset for my entire life.

After Returning from the Trip

After my year of traveling aimlessly, I have decided to do one thing after my return. This is to use my experiences for the interest of Japanese middle school and high school kids. I believe the most fundamental part of a person's character can be influenced by middle and high school education. If we change education, Japan will change and eventually the world will change. Therefore, I would like to contribute to education in some way.

In the current Japanese education system, kids are merely passively learning from a curriculum set by the authorities. I am not totally negative about a curriculum that encourages abilities or personal development by enforcing rules and obligations, and needless to say, obligatory education providing basic knowledge for a human being is indispensable. But I still believe there is a serious weakness in the current system, namely the lack of programs motivating young students to do something they find valuable.

There seem to be very few occasions in our education system where kids are naturally motivated to act for a certain purpose on their own. I think education could produce greater benefits by a combination of enforcement of obligations and provision of freedom to encourage voluntary acts by young pupils and aid their personal development and sense of responsibility.

In this light, I am convinced that my experiences on my trip could work as a stimulus for young students' motivation for voluntary activities. After returning from my travels, I would like to organize seminars in schools all over the country and talk about my experiences to students, discussing what we can achieve through our spontaneity. After all, you should not end up regretting in life not having done what you truly wanted to do.

I am now leaving for my round-the-world trip. See you again! **JS**

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