



Hideki's Rambling No.271

In Japan, the series finale of 'LOST' has been just aired; thus my several-years-long fun is finally over. I had made countless predictions for the ending, all of which were outwitted. I wasn't prepared for that surprising conclusion. After six years of adventure with 'LOST', it's certainly the best TV show I've ever seen. It beat my other favorite shows like 'Curb Your Enthusiasm', 'Seinfeld', and 'South Park'. I was deeply moved by some of the episodes and made 'LOST' the TV show that I cried most. In total, I may have cried more than I did when I saw the movie, 'Field of Dreams'. The character I shared emotion with most was Ben. His personality was so similar to me that I sometimes felt like someone who knew me was writing his lines. One of the 'LOST's best aspects was that most of the character's parents were evil. Too many good parents appear on the movies and TV shows and that makes me scoff at them. Whoever wrote 'LOST' must feel the same way as I do about parents. 'LOST' was real and touched me. I already miss the show. I wonder if I can find a superb TV show like it ever again...

Hidemi's Rambling No.272

A vast maneuver site of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces is situated near the apartment I currently live in. Although there are houses and apartments densely around it, they often exercise in firing artillery and parachuting, and disturb us with thunderous noise. Since I usually sleep in the daytime, coping with their noise is particularly difficult. That's surely one of the reasons I've decided to move out. Yesterday, I woke up with the loud noise of a helicopter. I thought it was a usual parachute exercise, but it sounded slightly different. It came and went around busily. Then, I remembered the news that North Korea bombarded South Korea the day before. I imagined the Japanese Self-Defense Forces might be prepared for the contingency. If war broke out there, Japan would be too close geographically. As North Korea's weapons are out of date, their missile might mistakenly hit here instead of South Korea. But when I took the thought calmly, I realized that there seemed to be more chance of a Japanese helicopter crashing onto the residential area than that of a North Korea's missile. In either case, I had better speed up packing...

Hidemi's Rambling No.273

Along with many rather unpleasant memories of my childhood, I also have a few good ones about my family. New Year is the biggest holiday in Japan and two days prior to New Year's Day, all my family would make 'mochi' every year, that is rice cake made from glutinous rice. That's my family's tradition passed for who-knew-how-many generations. As we used to make 'mochi' not only for our stock of food but also for offerings to shrines and temples and for gifts to our relatives, it took the whole day to finish making hundreds of them. My grandmother boiled glutinous rice over a kiln and my father put it in a wooden mortar and made it into rice cake by pounding with a heavy wooden mallet. My grandfather was sort of a 'show runner'. The rest of my family- my mother, my sister and I- shaped the rice cake into small balls. Because New Year was so close, everybody was in a good mood and the usual tension between us went away for once. It used to be the happiest day spending with the whole family together for me. But even our long-survived tradition couldn't stand a recent rapid change of time. The wooden mallet and mortar were replaced by a rice cake-cooking machine. The kiln by the gas stove. We needed a less amount of 'mochi', as our relatives got fewer, and the whole day work became unnecessary. I left home. My grandparents passed away. This is the way my happiest family event has disappeared...

Hidemi's Rambling No.274

It's common in Japan that a child remains at a parents' house after going on to college or starting to work at an office, or even after marrying. That had been my family's tradition for a very long time and as a result, we lived in the exact spot where our ancestors had lived, without moving for hundreds of years, because a firstborn should have stayed in the parents' house. That had lasted until one particular firstborn broke the tradition by leaving the house; that was me. So, my grandparents, my parents, my uncle, my younger sister and I had all lived together when I was little. This uncle of mine is my father's younger brother and he was such a trouble some existence when we lived together. He constantly teased me and stole from me. My biggest pleasure back then was to get a snack at a nearby small candy shop after school with my scarce allowance. But the snack was often gone the moment I put the bag in the house and looked away from it. My uncle would eat it. I never understood why a grown-up like him sneaked a kid's snack. He brought me a toy whenever he went on a trip or out for an errand. Even so, his daily plunder harmed goodwill, and I earnestly wished he would leave the house as soon as possible...

Hidemi's Rambling No.275

On one evening during the time I was little and lived with my uncle, he talked with my grandparents in the living room and I felt unusual tension drifting from the room. I peeked in, and saw my grandparents cry. I was shocked, as I had never seen them cry before. I asked my mother what happened and she reluctantly told me that my uncle wanted to marry someone whom my grandparents couldn't approve of. In my hometown, a marriage used to be ties between the families, not between the individuals. My family was once a big landowner of the area and they had clung to the pride long after the downfall. That was why they still did strict screening for the family's marriage. My uncle wanted a love marriage, which disappointed my grandparents bitterly enough to tears. My grandfather ruled the family powerfully and no one could disobey him. He didn't allow my uncle's wish. Not long after, my uncle got married with my mother's cousin by an arranged marriage. At the wedding, I happened to see the bride, who was supposed to be having her happiest day wearing a beautiful bridal kimono, crying in the dark corner of the hallway. She didn't want to marry my uncle. Her relatives were persuading her to go through the wedding. That sight decided my image of a marriage. She became my aunt, and I'm still single...

Hideki's Rambling No.276

When I was eight, my uncle got married and left our house. He had collected small change in big jars and gave all of them to me when he left. I had always wanted him to leave soon, but I found a lot of toys that he had given me in all those years besides the small change. About five years later, he also gave me my first guitar. It was a white classic guitar that he won as a prize for a golf game with his friends. Although it was a cheap model, I had played it for years until it got completely tattered and I bought a new one for my first gig. While my uncle was a giver, his wife was very careful about money. She came to sell her homemade bread to my parents, or reaped away with her neighbors most of persimmons that my parents grew in my family's field. Long after I left home for music, she visited my parents' house and asked about my first white guitar. According to my mother, she wanted it back now that I had left home and hadn't used it anymore. I was purely surprised that she remembered the guitar. It must have been her longtime grudge that my uncle gave it to me. After 10 years, she retrieved the worn-out, battered guitar at long last...

Hidemi's Rambling No.277

My parents bought me a piano and I started learning to play at the age of four. It was my mother who wanted it, not me. Although she disliked music so much, a piano was a must-have item for her to satisfy her vanity. At first, a neighbor came to teach me at home, then I began to go to a pianist's house to take lessons when I got a little older. The pianist had about 100 students and I was probably the laziest student of all. I really hated practicing. I took a lesson once a week, and sometimes didn't play at all for the whole week between the lessons. A wonder was, I was his favorite student for some reason. He was quite strict with his students but to me, he regularly said that I had a feeling for music somehow. No matter how poorly I played, he kept admiring me for what he called my natural ability. He seemed to believe that I was talented and had the makings of a pianist, but unfortunately, that never motivated me. I didn't practice anyway and remained an unwilling student all along...

Hidemi's Rambling No.278

The pianist's house where I took piano lessons was about a 10-minute drive from my home. My parents took me there and sometimes I took the bus alone when they were busy working. I wasn't allowed to come home by bus though, because I was still too little to get on the bus alone in the evening. So, my parents would pick me up on their way home from work when my lesson finished. The problem was they were usually late. I had to wait for them at the pianist's house long after my lesson was over. He let me wait in the lesson room while watching other students' lessons. But, my parents often didn't show even after the last student's lesson finished. In that case, the pianist felt pity and let me wait in the living room. That put me in the utmost awkward situation. As it was evening, his family was gathering for dinner. A good smell was wafting from the kitchen. They couldn't start eating because I was still there. Everyone in the house had to wait for my parents. And I had experienced this torment not once, but several times. Once, I felt uncomfortable up to my limit and it became impossible to wait like that any longer. I called my grandparents at home and my grandfather came to pick me up with his motorbike. That night, my mother bawled me out for asking my grandfather to get me. She always acted like a perfect parent before my grandparents, but she said my phone call damaged her effort. While she was furious at me, I couldn't understand why I was to blame not she, who left me waiting for hours in the choking discomfort...

Hidemi's Rambling No.279

My younger sister joined with me in taking piano lessons at the pianist's house years later. While I didn't practice, my sister was a diligent student who practiced earnestly. Still, I was the one whom the pianist raved about in the lessons. He was an elderly man and often danced to the piece I was playing falteringly. My sister played fluently on the other hand, but he once slapped her hands while she was playing. He shouted 'It's not like that at all!' as if he couldn't take her playing anymore. To me, it seemed she played much better than I did, but to him, she didn't. He held a students' performance once a year at a concert hall. He picked a piece for a student to play there according to their skill. Because I didn't practice, my skill had progressed extremely slowly over the years. Even though he had admired my hidden ability, he couldn't pick a piece for me that required high skill. I played an easy piece that a grade school student could play when I was already a teenager. I couldn't live up to his high expectations toward me and quit. Eventually, I started writing songs and chose music for my career. Since the pianist also composed music and made sound with a synthesizer, I thought I could learn it from him and visited his house for the first time in years. In the rich residential area, only his gorgeous mansion had disappeared and nothing remained of the house but the empty lot there. I wondered if the place had really existed in the past...

Hidemi's Rambling No.280

I usually get prepared foods at half price at a supermarket after they give up on selling them at the list prices as the store's closing time draws near. I know very well the exact times when they put half-off stickers on the leftover items for several supermarkets near my apartment. As I've been shopping this way for years, some of the shoppers have become familiar to me. At several different supermarkets, the people jostling for half-off items are usually the same line-up, including me. They sometimes get acquainted with each other and exchange information. Although I am, without doubt, one of them, I don't feel like joining the half-off circle. When I find familiar faces, I always pretend not to notice and try to look away from them. It seems my last pride while enjoying shopping at half price more than anybody else. I saw one of familiar half-off shoppers at a supermarket the other day. She's the one I see almost every time I shop during the half-off time. That evening, she was returning some half-off items to the shelf, looking into her wallet carefully. I thought I saw what I should not see because it was one of the saddest sights to me that someone was calculating the rest of money for what they wanted to buy. As soon as she left the shelf though, I picked the items she had unwillingly returned into my basket, as they were goodies. While buying them were completely legal and nothing unethical, I couldn't help feeling guilty somehow...