



Life's Detours

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From Singapore



Scenery of Malawi

When I was in high school, I had dreams like these: "Work for an international organization to save underprivileged children. In my private life, by around the age of 35, marry a partner who shares my aspirations and build a wonderful family." As of July 2024, I'm 40 years old. Neither of those dreams has come true (laughs).

My first setback happened when I entered university. Despite studying so hard that I suffered from daily headaches, I couldn't adjust to the university life I had longed for. The glitzy urban lifestyle, the shallow human relationships, and classmates who spoke English effortlessly—I felt out of place among the returnees from overseas. I also encountered situations where my long-held insecurities were pointed out. Tired of such everyday life, I developed a trauma and couldn't attend school anymore. One day, feeling deeply distressed, I was taken to the hospital with hyperventilation and finally decided to take a leave of absence.

To reclaim my former self, I decided to start anew by doing a resort job in Nagano Prefecture. Working at a hotel surrounded by rich natural environments where I could see Mount Fuji in the distance, I gradually began to regain my self-worth. Participating in the "Ship for World Youth" program organized by the Cabinet Office and hosting foreign trainees in Kochi also helped me regain my confidence through various international exchange volunteer activities.



Takamine Kogen Hotel, Nagano Prefecture

I took a two-year leave from university, but I couldn't bring myself to return. Instead, I decided to study law via a correspondence course at another university. Facing a mountain of textbooks, I successfully graduated from the Faculty of Law at the age of 26.

My second setback came when I was 28, upon returning from Africa. After spending two years in Malawi as a JICA volunteer, I lost my goal of working for an international organization. It wasn't because life in the remote areas of Malawi without reliable infrastructure wasn't enjoyable. The life I had longed for in Africa was full of surprises and discoveries. Riding a motorcycle while watching the deep red sun set on the horizon was an incredible feeling. However, as I began to acclimate to life in Malawi, another voice within me grew louder. "Something is off. Is working for an international organization truly what I want to do?"

Even if the UN projects continued for hundreds of years, would they lead to the economic and political maturity of developing countries, turning them into self-sufficient nations like developed countries? Would making a living by taking a portion of donations from charities and countries truly reflect the life philosophy I pursued? Being in an age where it was becoming increasingly difficult to aim for a job at an international organization, I lost my direction. After returning home, I lived off the small allowances I received during my time in the volunteer corps. It took me a year, filled with various uncertainties, to decide to find a job in Singapore.

In this way, I had a total of about three years of what is commonly called a "freeter" period, where I neither worked nor went to school. Not being able to affirm myself, not knowing what I wanted to do in the future, and the aimless days were tough. Sometimes, I would feel hatred, wondering, "Where did that grand dream from high school go?"

Now, over ten years later, I feel that those three years have connected to my current happiness. Because by stepping off the rails of societal norms, I was able to think freely and eventually create my own yardstick to measure happiness. Now, I can freely contemplate the life I want to live and what happiness means to me.

Setbacks are not failures in life but merely "detours." And one day, those detours will enrich your life and transform into a wide and deep sense of happiness. I want to deliver this message to the youth today.

Finally, to the young people, I recommend reading classics, history books, and biographies of great figures. Messages from Buddha, Confucius, and Jesus, passed down for over 2500 years, are treasure troves of life philosophy. Although I am non-religious, I believe in a higher existence beyond human intelligence. Classics have served as a stabilizer for my mind during tough times. I hope you will learn about these great people not as religious figures but as examples of human life. Our mere few decades of life are insignificant from the perspective of the universe. I hope you find hints for living a happy life from the pioneers who pursued the truth with their lives.

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