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**The Lesson on “Multicultural Coexistence”
from My Late Grandmother**

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This year, my paternal grandmother passed away, leaving me with a deep sense of loss since I loved her very much. During her funeral, I learned from her friend's eulogy that my grandmother was proficient in English and had run Japanese language classes. This revelation surprised me because I've never heard of it. After the funeral, I asked my father for more details. He explained that she had registered as a homestay host for foreigners and used self-taught English to communicate with them. Sometimes, there were even international phone calls to our house.

Currently, I am concentrating on my English studies at school and preparing myself for the English proficiency tests. This is because my dream is to live and work abroad one day. Naturally, I became very interested in my grandmother's efforts to “coexist” with people from other countries.

To learn more, I talked to my family. My father told me a story about when he was in his second year of junior high school. At that time, a high school boy from Australia briefly lived with him for a homestay, and they became friends during that period by playing video games together. I was curious about how a 17-year-old Australian and a 14-year-old Japanese boy communicated with each other. My father said he used the English he had learned at school, which was imperfect but sufficient for everyday conversation. I wondered if overcoming the language barrier was enough to truly “connect” with someone from a different culture and nationality.

My grandmother's Japanese classes were joined by local residents as instructors, some of whom couldn't even speak English. Many people from various countries visited or stayed in our house, surprising the neighbours. I learned that my grandmother started teaching Japanese partly because more foreign women were marrying into Nihonmatsu City back then. She wanted to “help them manage daily life”. I believe that, thanks to her efforts, quite a few foreigners living here in Nihonmatsu were able to adapt to Japanese society without much difficulty.

Bridging the gap with people of different nationalities, languages and cultures often requires a common language or shared tools. However, I think the real challenge lies in accepting people who come from entirely different backgrounds and have their own identities. This, I believe, is essential before mutual understanding can take place. I wondered how my father managed to accept and be accepted by the Australian boy, and whether my grandmother had no hesitation in interacting with people of diverse nationalities.

My father admitted it was hard at first. However, by spending time together - eating meals and playing games - he gradually accepted the boy. They came to recognise each other as individuals, regardless of race, nationality or cultural background, and formed an equal relationship through living together.

Today, the world faces issues such as racial discrimination and persecution. One of such issues that caught my attention is the plight of the Rohingya refugees, often called “the world's most persecuted minority”. In Myanmar, where 90% of the population practices Buddhism, the Rohingya, a Muslim minority, faces discrimination because of differences in religion, appearance and language. They are labelled as illegal immigrants and denied citizenship. The situation worsened when Buddhist extremist groups intensified violence to expel Muslims, and human rights abuses escalated after Rohingya militants attacked police forces. Many Rohingya fled as refugees to escape the military suppression.

I believe the root cause of such issues lies in a lack of willingness to understand others. People categorise those who appear “different” as aliens. There seems to be a failure to see everyone as an equal human being. Differences in skin colour, language, religion or gender - these rigid views give rise to the irrationality of racism.

I believe that trying to understand others and helping them understand who you are, even through body language, as my grandmother did when she could not speak English, should be what communication is all about. Doing so can help engage with diverse perspectives, gain new experiences and discover fresh ways of thinking. It is vital to try to understand others, including their unique backgrounds that shape their thoughts and feelings.

In Bangladesh, which hosts many Rohingya refugees, I heard that some locals, despite their own poverty, were sharing food and clothing with the refugees. Meanwhile, in Myanmar, some citizens oppressed under the military coup have realised their current struggles mirror what they once inflicted on the Rohingya. While past tragedies cannot be erased, I find hope in people reflecting on their actions, considering the perspective of others, and working to correct their mistakes.

I believe that one-sided judgements lead to discrimination and prejudice against people from

different cultures. While there should be differences between people, every individual has a life that is just as valuable as anyone else's. These lives should never be harmed. Accepting, acknowledging and respecting differences is what we need to achieve coexistence.