

In my grandfather's house there was a rather special, old ping-pong table. What made it so special was how it became a magnet for people of all walks of life until shortly after he passed away.

40 years ago, my mother's younger sister developed an intractable disease at the age of 8 but somehow she miraculously survived. My grandfather gave his daughter a ping-pong table with the hope that she would be well again. Our extended family and she enjoyed ping-pong together. Our family's love encouraged her to get better soon, and my aunt said, "the time I shared with my family was the most precious in my life."

However, life was not always rosy for her as she was bullied at school because she became quite thin and sickly looking from her illness. One day her homeroom teacher decided to bring some classmates to her home every day a few at a time. The children played ping-pong together, even with children with whom they had never spoken to, and they all became excited. Playing together prompted them to communicate more and they gradually came to understand her and her disease better and accepted her. When I heard this story, I thought sports has a magical power that unites people together. Her family deepened their bond and her classmates also created a special bond in their hearts.

Then one day, with all his gratitude, my grandfather decided to open the table to the public. He put up a sign that said "Feel free to use it, Enjoy!!" in Japanese. Children came after cram school, working parents visited with their children on the weekend, a local postman took part in the game whole heartedly. Even a senior lady who lived alone nearby dropped into just watch the games. I was very pleased to see many people enjoying themselves, but at the same time, I realized something very important. It was that every person has a different background and lives with more or less some troubles of their own. Back then, children would want to play outside, working parents needed some help with their childcare, postal workers would feel pressure from their workload, and senior citizens would feel the loneliness of their single lives. The interactions I gained because of the table tennis provided me with chances to understand others who were different from me. I learned the value of respecting and considering people's feelings.

In July I participated in an international summer camp, where I discussed "peace" with visiting students from overseas, and of course we all grew up in different environments. In fact, I realized one's peace does not necessarily mean another's peace, since the problems we have differ according to each region or country, such as hunger, poverty, or discrimination. At the camp we needed to talk about ourselves and listen carefully to others. Direct interaction with them affected me greatly, where what I learned was more realistic than any information I could have gained from the mass media. And we could bring our hearts closer together.

"Peace" starts from interaction. We communicate, accept differences, understand each other, and become friends. As a friend, I want to find what I can do. From the viewpoint of diversity, I want to contribute to the improvement of the world. Sports has the magical power to unite and is a universal activity which connects us together, where we can surely weave our hearts together and create mutual understanding among us. This will make it possible to pave the way for peace on earth step by step.

Finally, I am thinking to revive the table tennis as "a ping-pong project" in the future. I will hang a sign written in English so that diversity can thrive there. Please pay us a visit!!