

BEARS, FORESTS AND PEOPLE:

English Edition

THE STORY OF THE JAPAN BEAR & FOREST SOCIETY

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Based on the speech at the General Assembly of Rotary International 2680th district in 2002 and summarized by Noriko Futagami (Chief Editor of Rotary World Magazine Press):

When water from natural forests are gone
All industry and towns are gone
Our lives are deeply supported by forests
Let's make Japan a nature conservation country
If not, we can't live through the 21st century
Let's pass down to the next generation
Ample forests where bears live.

The JBFS was awarded a special prize from the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in March, 2008.

Love is expressed by practice rather than words.

Mother Teresa

Japanese version of

Bears, Forests and People

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Introduction

Japanese black bears (called Tsukinowa-guma in Japanese because of a mark like a crescent moon on its chest) are disappearing.

In the year 1992, a female student brought me a newspaper article announcing Japanese black bears are in danger of extinction. We knew from the article that Japanese forests in remote mountain areas (“Okuyama” in Japanese) were largely being devastated.

Since the bears were losing their feeding places, they were coming down to villages in a starving state. Bears and other large wild animals were being killed as harmful beasts. Middle school students stood up to save bears from extinction.

We realized it is not only bears but all animals, including humans, that are going to decline with the disappearance of forests.

“We want to live to the end of our natural lives.”

Students started to act for environmental protection and worked very hard to sustain it.

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Chapter 1: Prologue

“Oh, I don't want to read it!” I shoved the article away to the corner of my desk.

The Japan Bear and Forest Society (the JBFS) is a national conservation organization. We have chosen the bear as a symbol of our association and are acting eagerly to maintain rich forests. In Japan's natural forests there live a variety of animals from tiny bacteria through to big

animals such as bears, monkeys and wild boars.

I was born in Amagasaki City and was brought up in Kobe, and I never dreamed of working on this kind of activity when I was younger.

I was a science teacher in various public schools. In 1992, I was teaching at Muko-Higashi Junior High School in Amagasaki City, Hyogo Prefecture. In January of that year, my first grade students were studying about “The world of animals”. As the unit came close to an end, I assigned students to study the topic by themselves. One girl turned in her report with a newspaper article. At first sight, I ignored it and put it aside because I didn’t feel like reading it.

In the newspaper article there was a picture of two hunters carrying on their shoulders a thin bear they had shot and killed, that showed how heart-aching a story this article would be. I decided to read only her report. From her report, I understood how seriously she had taken this problem.

I felt like writing a response to her with my red pen, but at that point I realized I must read the article first. I reached for the article and cautiously began reading.

Headline: *We Hate this Mountain. No Food, No Trees. We can't Sleep. We Go Down to the Village in Winter for Food, and are Shot and Killed. Japanese black bears are crying out against Environmental Destruction.*

I began reading and was deeply shocked to realize that even I, a science teacher, knew nothing about how Japanese forests and animals were in crisis.

According to the article, the national policy of expansive afforestation with plantation trees such as Japanese cedar and Hinoki cypress, enacted after World War Two, has changed a huge part of the deep forest in remote mountain areas of Japan into plantation forest.

If we look down from an airplane, we can see green mountain ranges. I knew that **all the civilizations which had cut down all of their trees had perished**. But as far as I could see, there was still much forest remaining, so I was relieved that the Japanese civilization would continue for the time being. I couldn’t believe that much of the green was not natural forests but was in fact plantation forests.

Before the forests were changed to plantations, Japan’s deep forests were filled with wild animals. Not only bears but all varieties of animals were living together in the natural forests of broadleaf trees such as beech, oak and evergreen trees. In this forest, depending upon the season, there was plenty of food for animals: flowers, leaves, nuts and berries, as well as forest undergrowth and many kinds of insects.

However, in recent years, the natural forests have been cut down and conifers like Japanese cedar and Hinoki cypress, which are useful to humans, were planted. Some animals lost their places to sleep because trees with large holes were cut down. Others lost food because the leaves of cedar and cypress are too bitter to eat, and they don’t produce nuts or berries which animals like bears, eat. For all these reasons animals couldn’t endure hunger and as a result they came down to villages.

Now, Japanese remote mountain areas are empty. **This extraordinary phenomenon is the beginning of extinction**. However, people in villages took the opposite view and mistakenly thought that there are too many animals in the forests. People said their agricultural products were damaged and they started killing animals with guns and traps - not only for hunting, but as harmful beasts.

When this type of problem occurs, extinction begins with the largest animals. The Japanese black bear became the first one. On Kyushu Island, where expansive afforestation started, bears are already gone. In Shikoku Island, only a small number (less than 20) remains. With some still remaining, many people feel relieved that they are not extinct yet. But for these types of animals, when it becomes less than 300 remaining, extinction begins with inbreeding and when there are less than 100, extinction becomes inevitable. On Shikoku Island the extinction of black bears is most likely to come.

There are many examples of where a species has gone extinct in one place and where

efforts have been made to revive them in that area by bringing the same type of animal from elsewhere, but they have been unsuccessful. In fact, about 1000 trials have been done all over the world, but in vain. **When an animal has become extinct in one place, they rarely come back.**

In Hyogo Prefecture, it was estimated that in 1992, 60 Japanese black bears remained. In the newspaper article, it was said that they were in danger of extinction. The percentage of plantation forest in all of Hyogo Prefecture, where we live, was on average 42%. But the percentage of plantation forest in the areas where wild animals lived, ranged from 60-80%. It is said that extinctions begin when the percentage of plantation forest is over 40%. I was amazed to know that bears were still surviving there.

Almost all the animals and plants, except cedar and cypress, are gone from Japanese remote mountain areas. I thought students should know what a critical condition Japanese forests are in, so I printed the article and the student's report in our school newsletter "Science News" and next day took it to class.

Five minutes before the class was over, I passed out the paper. The classroom became silent and all the students were reading it ardently. I think they knew for the first time in their lives how critical the situation was for Japanese wild animals.

When all the students finished reading, one male student shouted out "This is horrible." At the same time the bell rang to announce the class was over.

I thought this issue was over; however, after the class, when I was walking down the hallway, several boys came with serious looks on their faces, "Bears are going extinct. That's too sad. Let's help them." I was surprised to hear such a thing and responded: "You know how busy I am? People of nature conservation groups will take care of such a problem, so you can just rely on them."

At that point, I believed from the bottom of my heart that there was such a group in Japan, which worked on such problems.

From the next day I started reading newspapers carefully. I believed at least some newspapers would write a special feature article in full-spread size reporting that "Japanese remote mountain areas are in a critical condition," and many comments would be sent by readers. But the original article ended with no response and there were no new related articles. There were no groups in Japan working on these problems.

My students kept asking me "Did anyone say 'let's save bears'?" Every time I was asked, it became difficult for me to answer and gradually I felt more stressed.

Chapter 2: We want to live to the end of our natural lives.

We doubt if adults really love us and care about our future."

At that time, I would say to my students, "Listen, everyone. **If you believe that something is true, voice that belief even if you are all alone.** This country will never get better unless those with courage and a strong sense of justice increase and take action. I am teaching seriously, hoping that all of you will grow to be such people."

But now the remote forests are in a disastrous condition.

In my modern ecology classes, I would teach my students: "No matter how far science progresses, humans are nothing without nature. Nature is essential to humans. The varieties of animals and plants are so closely interrelated that nature exists in a perfect balance. Nature conservation means keeping such biodiversity."

I knew the seriousness of the bear issue more than anyone else. The students were watching how I would act next. If I avoided this problem, what I had said to the students would be regarded as a lie. No one had raised a voice to protest the situation. What should I do?

I had a negative image of the nature conservation activity back then, and I never wanted to join such groups. I began to struggle with myself. Thoughts went through my mind: "I feel sorry for the bears that are being killed and are becoming extinct. But after all they are carnivores, and according to the media, sometimes they attack humans. So their extinction

cannot be helped.”

One day I went to the school library and looked at a book called “Japanese Black Bear Diary”. The book was written by Mr. Masayoshi Miyazawa of Nagano Prefecture, in an attempt to let people know the real nature of bears.

He said, **“Normally bears inhabit remote forests quietly, and are very cowardly — contrary to their appearance. The average Japanese black bear consumes 99 percent vegetation and only 1 percent animal protein, the majority of which is insects and freshwater crabs. They very rarely attack people. Fatal accident occurs only when the scared bear is trying to escape from humans.”**

A few dozen years ago in remote mountain areas in Nagano, where humans would seldom enter, Mr. Miyazawa would spend a whole day, walking past some twenty Japanese black bears. He had met countless bears, and none of them attempted to bother him. **He was impressed that a Japanese black bear, bigger and with greater physical strength than human beings, was such a peaceful animal.**

Mr. Miyazawa became more and more fascinated by the bears, and in later years, lived closely with 10 black bears in his garden - which had an area of about 1,650 square meters. Having lived together, he learned the real nature of the bears. He became more respectful towards their gentleness, cleverness, patience, and the deep sense of gratitude they would show to him.

Bears are hunted on a massive scale, and **traded for about one million yen per head** - particularly because of their gall bladders, which are used in traditional Chinese medicines and traded at a price higher than gold. Bears are victims, but in most cases bears are made out as perpetrators. If bears could read newspapers, they would shed tears of sorrow, I thought. I learned that the ignorance, misunderstanding and mercilessness of humans are threatening bears to extinction. This is an absolutely horrible fact.

On a humanitarian level, as well as for our nation’s environmental protection, someone had to raise a voice against the situation. Thus I finally made up my mind. As a science teacher who was teaching about nature, I had no choice but to raise a voice to protect bears.

The first thing I did was to show the newspaper article of the killed bear to two science teachers at our school. They recognized that the Japanese remote mountain areas were being devastated. So the three of us gathered in the science room after hours, and formed “The Group for Protecting Wild Japanese Black Bears”.

On the following day, I was finally walking tall into the classroom. When the class was about to end, I told students, “I have something to say about protecting bears that you have been concerned about. As there has been no one acting to save them, I formed “The Group for Protecting Wild Japanese Black Bears” with my teaching colleagues. I am ready to raise a voice against the crisis.”

All the students were staring at me. The subsequent developments were not what I had ever expected to happen.

On the same day, I was doing routine tasks in the teachers’ room, when several students came in looking very serious. One boy said, “Ms. Moriyama, let us join your group for protecting wild Japanese black bears. We feel great heartache after reading the newspaper article on the poor bear.” He looked pained, holding his chest with his hand. Their action surprised me, as I had never imagined the present day children getting so worried about this kind of issue. I was much moved. However, I declined their participation in my group, because I knew that their joining the group would be interpreted as me agitating the students.

On the next day, the students came to me in groups, each comprising 4 to 5 members. One after another they would announce: “Ms. Moriyama, we have formed ‘The Group for Returning Wildlife to the Mountains’.” “We have formed ‘The Group for the Resurgence of Japanese Black Bears’.” “We have formed ‘The Group for Bears’.” By that time, those who were not my students had already joined the groups. I also learned later that the “Science News”

covering the bear protection issue had been circulated to the whole school. In all, 16 bear-protection groups were formed in our school, Muko-Higashi Junior High School.

The students knew from the beginning that the bear-protection issue included forests. In their houses they located books about bears and forests, brought them to school, got together in the science room, and enthusiastically read them to learn about the problem. The more they read and studied, the more they became aware of the sense of crisis: “Japanese forests and animals are in serious trouble”.

The students acted very quickly. They gathered telephone cards, and, began making calls to the town office of Tajima District in the northern part of Hyogo Prefecture, where bears still survived. When the town office staff received the calls asking, “Stop hunting bears to prevent their extinction”, they all responded in anger: “Protecting bears? Which do you think is more important, bears or people?”

At that time, we did not understand why the local people became so angry. We also made calls to the authorized local hunting group, but they responded that their hunting was lawful.

To get over these difficulties, we decided to collect signatures for a petition. The science teachers prepared a petition titled

“Urgent Request to Stop the Capturing of Endangered Japanese Black Bears in Hyogo Prefecture”

on which signatures were to be collected. However, we adults could not be proactive enough, being somewhat shy and reluctant to approach people, in spite of knowing that we were taking the right action. We ended up just sending request letters to science teachers in the local schools. A little while later, most of the local science teachers, 70 in number, responded with their signatures in approval of our petition.

However, the students’ groups had collected a far greater number of signatures. I asked students, “How can you collect so many signatures each day?” What they were doing made me speechless. They said, “Ms. Moriyama, we are visiting each household in the town.” “We stand in front of the station.” “We stand in front of the supermarket every day.”

I was about to shed tears to know that the so-called present-day children were working so hard for something which would bring no physical reward to them. The students strived to collect the supporting signatures because they felt that the lives of innocent wildlife, including those of bears, should not be extinguished by human beings.

Totally confused by the extent of their devotion, I asked the students one day, “Why are all of you working so eagerly?”

One boy replied, “Ms. Moriyama, this is an issue not only for bears, but also for us. How many more years do you think we are going to live before we reach the end of our natural lives? About seventy more years. **But seeing today’s destruction of nature, it is obvious that we cannot live out our natural life span.** We do want to live to the end of our natural lives.” It was indeed a serious outcry of a young student.

Another boy told me with a sad expression:

“I doubt if adults really love us children. They would use up all the natural resources within their generation and would not leave anything for us.”

Being an adult myself, the words hit me hard, so hard that I couldn’t reply.

Chapter 3: We shall change society!

It is a very good opportunity to communicate our vision to the Emperor and Empress of Japan when they come here!

The students said to me that we can collect an infinite number of signatures if we have enough time. In spite of their motivations, I suggested to them that it would be better to send these signatures to the Office of Hyogo Prefecture.

The 16 leaders of students and I went to the Office with the signatures they had

collected from their hometown. We asked the man at the Forestry Agency to stop planting cedar and cypress for re-forestation. Contrary to our opinion, he got angry and told us that they would never change their mind and would continue to plant cedar and cypress trees. The students spent 90 minutes trying to prove their point, and said to him, "Please do not send the bears to extinction", but he ignored them.

A professor who was considered an authority of nature protection, whom we asked to go with us, shocked us by saying, "It is not possible for the bears to go extinct and we should not worry about it." This was in contrast to what he had told us before departure. After hearing this, a reporter who had been collecting information for an article said, "This is not worthy writing about," and went home.

At that time in Hyogo Prefecture, 30 bears were killed in one year by hunting and as so-called nuisances. It was estimated that 60 bears had survived. We could calculate easily that if the bears continue to be killed at a rate of 30 per year, they would soon become extinct.

I vividly remember the scene, as we all stood on the platform at Sannomiya Station in Kobe, in shocked silence. I apologized to the students from the position of a teacher and as an adult human being. It was hard to believe that there were such marvelous young people, with good spirits and courage, in the world. I thought the students had done a great job to make a big movement in Japanese nature conservation activities. However, the government did not respond to the students' movement.

I said to them, "we should not have come here to visit the government." But they said to me, "It was a good opportunity to visit the Office. We found out the reality of the situation. The negotiation of adults was not fair. We have gained the energy for fighting. We will persuade them after researching and studying in the future."

They made this pledge at the train platform, and subsequently pursued the pledge.

Afterwards, surprisingly, Muko-Higashi Junior High School was upgraded to a school which was recommended by the Ministry of Education. I believe that at this time every student became conscious of the importance of studying to change our current society, and studying changed from meaning nothing to meaning lots of things. The students started to study harder.

Now, the Japanese education system does not function well. People have been blaming schools, teachers, and parents for it. I realized that nobody should be blamed, but in fact, our wealthy society had caused this problem. A wealthy society causes children to be less ambitious. However, once children have ambitions, they start to study harder by themselves. The students had not given up studying and were working hard, because it was not only for them, but for the poor and weak creatures. I noticed that the students could continue to make efforts to achieve their goal even when the goal was a hard one, if the goal was for the benefit of other creatures. Bullying problems disappeared from my school after the children's attitude changed.

Consequently, the students started to send letters to various agencies. However, nobody answered their letters.

At that time, the regional Forestry Agency in Osaka had jurisdiction over forests in Hyogo Prefecture. I visited them to ask about the situation of wild animals in the forests. A sincere officer said to me, "Wild animals in the forests will become extinct in the future, and aside from that, we are facing a problem of water shortage now."

I asked him why he said that. He said "Over-planted cedar trees in the remote mountain areas and developments in the forests have lowered the water levels in the rivers. Therefore, we built many dams in the mountains, but there is no space to build dams anymore. If we do not have enough rain in a year, we must start limiting our water supply. Please prepare for this situation."

We were surprised about this and asked him to release this news to the public, but he refused to. I said to myself, **"If the forests' ecosystem is destroyed then human beings will also disappear."**

In the summer vacation, the representatives of the students, the leader of the parent-teacher association, and three science teachers went to the Environmental Agency in Kasumigaseki in Tokyo by Shinkansen - the bullet train. We aimed to present our opinions to the authorities that Japan had no system to protect forests and animals. Two officers listened to the energetic speeches by the representatives for about 30 minutes. At last they said, "We have understood your opinions well."

How nice they were! They made us feel happy, but right after that they said this to us, "We have no capability to do anything about it at all, and you have to try by yourselves if you want to protect the forests and animals."

We could not believe it.

The officer continued to say, "Our country has a certain limited capacity for population. Our country begins has begun a route to extinction, by consuming natural resources."

We timidly asked them, "What is a suitable number for Japan's population to survive?"

The judgment of the officer was, "30 million people living moderately, like during the Edo Era when they were living sustainably (then energy consumption was one hundredth of today). We are destined to become extinct if this country's population increases any more." The total population in Japan at the time was 123 million people.

In that year we had only one hope. The organization of hunters in Hyogo Prefecture said to the press, "We will stop hunting Japanese black bears by self-imposed control because of the likelihood of their extinction." This was right after we handed signatures to the Office and it might have had an effect on the group.

We expected the hunters not to hunt bears anymore, and the total number of bears killed by hunters was down to only two from the previous year, but still 25 bears were killed as nuisances.

It was like a horrible trick; the name was changed but the overall numbers remained the same. Bears were dying.

A student said and decided, "Let's make a direct appeal to Mr. Kaihara, Governor of Hyogo Prefecture."

I wrote a letter to Governor Kaihara. He promised an appointment of about 15 minutes. All the staff thought that the appeal would determine the destiny of forests and animals in Japan, so we chose 4 students with special skills, with spirit for protecting things, and the ability to give good speeches. All four were females. They practiced every day and every night after club meetings in the science classroom.

When they met the governor on the chosen day, they presented a paper and asked about the future of wild Japanese black bears in Hyogo Prefecture.

Here are the choices:

No. 1. The bears must be protected as wild animals.

No. 2. The bears have to be left to survive by themselves.

No. 3. No comments.

No. 4. We shall exterminate as many bears as possible.

No. 5. All of the bears will be exterminated.

They said to him, "Governor, which would you choose?"

The governor said without hesitation, "Number 1 is the only choice I should make. The bears should be left as wild."

After a period of silence, we didn't utter a word because we did not anticipate this answer and weren't ready for the answer number 1. After a while they cried with joy and clapped their hands.

The presentation continued for 15 minutes as practiced. The governor listened and said, "This problem is very difficult because there is a positive side and a negative side. But I shall try to find a solution."

From that moment on, everything began to change gradually. We met many people in authority, and unexpectedly, the person who understood about ecosystems the most was Governor Kaihara. He gave the budget to each government department related to wild animals. But the government officers altered it to investigation and research purpose only. We were disappointed because we expected that they would spend money for actually protecting bears.

Investigation and research may sound good, but it actually means to do the following things:

- Set out the traps at the places where bears exist and capture them one after another,
- Put those fully panicked bears under general anesthesia,
- Pull out a tooth to determine the age,
- Put a heavy GPS collar that is permanently attached around the neck and attach a tag to the ear, and release.

These actions end up with planting more fear from human beings. We thought this could induce them to attack humans, and by toying with them, time for extinction would come sooner. It was this doing that made the students, who were used to thinking on the bears' side, more anxious about the bear situation.

The only method for protecting wild animals from extinction is to give them freedom without touching them. In other words, keep a place for coexistence as our ancestor did.

In the meantime, we learned that Hyogo Prefecture was to be the host for an event for planting trees for the second time. At the event people plant cedar trees. This event has been held every year in each prefecture and in the same form for 50 years since World War Two. At this time the Emperor and the Empress will also plant cedar trees.

We thought that it was not good to plant cedar trees. Rather, it would be better to plant the broad-leaves trees that provide food for bears.

We wrote a letter to the governor about this matter. The details are as follows:

“There is too much plantation forest of cedar trees in Japan. – Lots of environmental problems are emerging in Japan, not only in Hyogo Prefecture. – We can be the first prefecture to plant broad-leaves trees. This will be a good precedent and set a good example to all other prefectures. So please plant broad-leaved trees at the event instead.”

A newspaper ran a story in which:

“Mr. Kaihara decided to plant 26 kinds of broad-leaved trees instead of planting cedar trees. The Emperor and the Empress will also plant broad-leaved trees.”

This was a very quick change of action. The students were so glad that they wanted to join this event. I wrote to the governor again. We received 5 invitations and attended the event held in Muraoka town - located in the north of Hyogo Prefecture, where bears live.

One student said to me, “It is a very good chance to broadcast our opinion to the whole country through the media, because the Emperor and the Empress will come here.”

Bears in Hyogo Prefecture inhabit areas near the prefectural border : to the west Tottori & Okayama Prefecture and to the east Kyoto. They wander around unaware of borders and get killed in other prefectures. It is not possible for Hyogo Prefecture alone to keep bears from getting killed. The best solution is to make a movement to preserve bears throughout the entire nation.

The students, after attendance at the event, wrote a letter and visited the hotel where the Emperor and the Empress stayed, and delivered it via the attendant. Thank God they read the students' letter upon delivery.

A story about this incident appeared in the newspaper in Tokyo the next day. Then on the same day, an extraordinary meeting was held at the Environment Agency that hadn't taken any action at all. And the next day, the head of the Agency announced to the press at an extraordinary press interview, that it would be prohibited to hunt Japanese black bears in Hyogo Prefecture due to being in danger of extinction.

They succeeded in keeping bears from being hunted in Hyogo Prefecture. However,

more was required.

To protect these wild animals in this country, we must restore remote mountain areas to make them a place where animals can live without the necessity to come out to villages in search for food. We should make the remote areas a sanctuary and restore **the habitat as our ancestors did.**

However, by that time the students had grown up to be a senior high school students. So we decided to wind up the team.

Chapter 4: Plants + Animals + Micro-organism = Forests

Animals do not live on forests. They help to build them, instead.

After that, I traveled all over Japan, as a science teacher, and I researched as much as I could on the problems associated with bears. From the Tohoku district to Shimane Prefecture, I visited several prefectures and did surveys in remote areas. Everywhere I went, elders were saying to me, "In the old days, there were no bears around, in fact no animals were near the village. But these days, when it becomes dark, animals come down from the mountains."

While studying about forests, a question occurred to me: why was Japan so successful in becoming a rich country? My answer was that, until recently, our ancestors had preserved the native broadleaf forests in remote areas.

Such forests provide an abundant flow of water throughout the year. After dripping through fallen leaves, raindrops eventually reappear as spring water. After that, they are no longer raindrops but nutritious water that is ideal for agriculture.

This crystal-clear water serves as water resources for both animals in the wild and for our cities. This clean water also supports many industries in Japan. And after flowing into the sea, it nurtures sea weed making good fishery grounds as well as for fish to gather and breed.

I started to realize that if the Japanese remote areas were left alone in today's state, with their plantation forests and over-development, the country's forests would one by one start to collapse in the future. If that happened, just like the civilizations in the past, by losing spring waters that sustain all the industries, Japanese civilization would perish.

There may be forces such as economic, military and cultural powers in the world, but above all things, I firmly believe that :

"Japan must become an "environmental power," otherwise this nation will not survive in the twenty-first century."

I entered a virgin forest in Okayama Prefecture inhabited by bears, which we named "Bears' forest" ('kumamori' in Japanese). This kind of native forest is now very rare and is only present in limited areas.

I first imagined the forest to be dense with plants. But once I entered, I found beautiful woods with plenty of clearings. It was as if a gardener had tended them only yesterday.

The sun's rays came through the broadleaves of beech and water oak, illuminating the forest's floor. It was one bright space and I felt as if I were inside a huge green dome. There were various kinds of trees and shrubs that were unfamiliar to me, and it was a picturesque sight. The ground held lots of water. Every surface was moist and wet with clear water dripping everywhere. I saw the rocks were also covered with moss.

This is what a real forest is like!

I was awestricken by my first encounter with this "Bears' forest."

As I walked through the forest, it suddenly came to me that :

Animals do not just live in forests, but rather they coexist with each other, and they help to build these rich forests.

A large animal's path like the one made by bears, brings air and light into the forest. Bears eat nuts from higher branches breaking them off, and this action results in bringing light into the forest.

In some areas, however, bears are hated as a nuisance by forestry workers because

they peel off one side of cedar's bark, so the workers still set a trap and kill them. According to Mr. Suhara Kenji, **who has been doing research on the Asyuu virgin forest in Kyoto, this little-known bear activity creates tree hollows that became indispensable to provide nesting spots for Japanese honey bees and spots for other animals.**

Recently bears have started peeling off the bark all the way around cedar trees at regular intervals, so that the trees eventually fall down. **Bears, so-called professionals of forest building, may be** trying to restore the forest's ecosystem by reducing the number of over-planted cedars.

As well, the bears dig up the soil and help the growth of other trees' roots, and their droppings also fertilize the plants. Birds spread seeds they have eaten thus ensuring the next generation of plants. When insects collect pollen and nectar, they help to pollinate plants. A forest does not consist of plants alone. I believe that only when both plants and animals participate, a forest can stay as a forest! We should not ignore the importance of fungi, either.

If we let our wild animals become extinct, then forests will eventually disappear from Japan. If we let bears become extinct in Hyogo Prefecture, then we will lose forever the richest forests that hold precious water.

I also visited one of the vast, abandoned plantation forests in a remote area. From a distance, it appeared to be a beautiful forest with rows of lush, triangular-shaped cedar trees. But once I stepped inside, it was completely dark. There were no plants growing on the forest floor, as very little sunlight reached the ground all through the year. Much of the topsoil was gone, washed away by rainfall, and the ground was bare. As far as I walked, I could sense no life forms at all. Not even an insect. It was a silent, desperately dead forest. Here and there, I saw some landslides.

A plantation forest like this cannot be maintained without continuous human care, such as cutting, pruning and thinning. Because the Forestry Agency of Japan only cared about their economic efficiency, vast areas of forests were turned into "cedar fields" in an attempt to control their growth. But unable to manage the vast labor costs of cutting, pruning and thinning, it ended in failure.

Moreover, forestry in Japan mainly went out of business after cheap timber began to be imported from 1964. As a result, vast areas of plantation forests are now abandoned and left overgrown. Unless we do something about it, the country's forests will be ruined. Before it becomes too late, we must get the government to change its policy and move towards native forest conservation, and restoration of remote mountain areas, as soon as possible.

But, there was no one taking action - neither government, prefecture nor local government. So Governments being unwilling to take action, I asked around other organization, but in vain.

In the spring of 1996, together with some people such as researchers, we held the first assembly at a bear's habitat in Hyogo Prefecture. But unfortunately it was taken over by people who wanted to make profit out of bear-related problems. We were deeply hurt by that, and I finally realized that there is no one who would earnestly devote his or her life for forest conservation of remote areas and wildlife protection.

Even though we were correct in our recognition of this critically serious problem that is endangering our water sources and forests in remote areas, I wondered why the government and everyone else kept ignoring this.

While being in such a state of frustration, I came across a book. It was "American Environmental Movement" (Iwanami Shinsho 142) by Shigeyuki Okajima, then deputy manager of commentary Dept. of Yomiuri Shimbun Newspaper. This book totally overwhelmed me.

In the United States and Europe today, there are some large natural conservation groups with several hundred thousands of or even over one million members. They already have succeeded in stopping developments and conserving the natural environment. Thanks to the book, I found

the way to move on.

Chapter 5:

Nobody will do it, so why don't we

Neither governments nor scholars are the ones who protect nature. It is done only by children who could share and feel the pain of such endangered animals. It was a natural conclusion that such people got together, formed an organization, planned better persuasion tactics, instead of confrontation, and in this way proceed to protect nature in Japan.

Thus the society named "The Japan Bear & Forest Society" was established in spring 1997. My students were already college students by then. The news made them really happy - "You finally did what you told us you'd do!" - and those who had made a direct appeal to the then governor of Hyogo Pref. came back to help. They lead the Society and started vigorously working and with a renewed will.

Some grown-ups, even members of hunting clubs, came to join us thanks to my students activities.

I didn't intend to make the Society the one meant for bears alone, but there were two reasons why we added the word "Bear" on top. One is because we learned the fact that the most prolific forest is where bears live, so why not preserve such forests for bears. And the other is because we could use bears as a symbol when we succeeded in conserving natural environment where bears, the biggest animal in the forest, lived. And that meant also to make the forest the place where the rest of the animals, such as birds, fish and insects, lived.

First of all, we made a visit to the town in Hyogo Prefecture where the majority of people insisted on killing bears, and spent a long time listening to what the leaders there were unhappy about. They showed us what the local mountains were like. It was a kind of disaster. Japanese cedars (a native of the warmer island of Kyushu) being planted in plantation forests of a snowy country, and had all fallen down due to the excessive weight of snow.

We stayed overnight, and in the night looked around the area near private houses with a flashlight. It looked like a zoo - unlike daytime when no a single animal could be seen. Various kinds of animals' eyes were glittering in the darkness. They knew there was no chance to be shot in the night time, so they gathered there to eat field crops.

Local people were suffering double hardships. Their foresting business was dying due to destructively cheap import, and farmers were broke due to their produce being eaten up by those animals.

We grieved to hear, "Our nation told us to plant cedars. They must answer for the consequences. They are the one to be blamed for this. We just don't know why we must swallow the loss by ourselves?"

We made a proposal. "How about planting trees that can bear crops to feed animals up-country again?"

Then the leaders of the town saw the light and were delighted.. "We have never thought about it. I remembered that, when there were lots of trees full of crops, no animals came down to bother us. We could securely farm again as we used to, if they would stay where they were supposed to."

But immediately after that they said in despair, "Well, that is impossible. We are in so-called depopulated area and we all are getting too old. We just don't have any power nor money left."

So we made an offer to say, "Then let us urbanites help you."

As per our offer, we have begun to restore forests for animals to live on with the countersign: **"Let's give a forest home for animals to come back to and give a secure feeling to locals,"**

By investing the manpower of students and citizen volunteers to the areas, we have been planting young plants of broadleaf trees considered to be local natural vegetation - like chestnuts,

water oaks, oaks, konara oaks, Manchurian walnuts, Japanese horse-chestnuts and beeches. We planted these fodder-producing trees in the area where bears inhabit with a hope for future governmental commitment.

Mr. Higashiyama Shozo, ex-Chairperson of liaison committee of birds and beasts in Wakayama Pref. taught us a lot of things. He was a valuable adviser to the Society, as he had been doing the same activities in his prefecture.

Although we had been doing these kind of planting activities by trial and error, we know that it is never ever possible to artificially restore the rich forests best suited for numerous numbers of animals and plants. It is better for us just to lend our hand and let the ecosystem and animals do the rest of the work.

On the other hand, we do hope for promotion of domestic forestry interest as it is natural that domestic woods should be used for Japanese houses and furniture. And for this we think, as our ancestors used to hand it down from generation to generation, that **we should make the forestry sustainable by scaling down tree planting to 20 to 30 percent and by preserving as natural forests one third of mountain portions in remote mountain areas, ridges, routes beside mountain streams, steep gradients and mountaintops.**

It is one bit of good news to know that the importance of preserving “Satoyama” (village forests) has been recognized lately, but if “Satoyama” is important, isn’t “Okuyama” (remote mountain areas) to be regarded as far more important?

It is these forests of remote mountain areas that are immense and support Japan with water resources that are indispensable for its civilization. Our ancestors protected such remote mountain areas from hazard until recently.

In conclusion, we believe that preservation of nature can be made only by the hands of urbanites, who can stand for this cause and provide capital and support to people in rural areas, who have been conserving the nature that is essential to guard urbanites’ lifeline. And, it can only be done with the help and understanding of those in rural areas. Beside that, environmental organizations that specialize in conservation of nature are expected to initiate this project with the help of tax money.

We have made every effort to explain to people in local governments, ex-Environment Agency (the present Ministry of Environment), Forestry Agency and members of Diet in Tokyo how disastrous the situation has been to both locals and animals.

We made the following proposals for countermeasures:

- 1 Excessive plantation forests of Japanese cedars and cypresses have caused serious damage to nature. Any further implementation for afforestation has to be ceased immediately and restore two thirds of these plantation forests to virgin.
- 2 Many plantation forests that were illegally planted and still remain have to be removed on government expense to prevent expected disaster. Do periodic thinning to those mountains owned by the government.
- 3 Top priority has to be given to wild animals that are also residents of Japan. They are entitled to have their lives saved by being carefully controlled, instead of being subjected to catch and kill, even when some damages to crops and property occur.
- 4 We should restore and return the habitat that we took away, providing a place for wild animals to live again. We should make habitat segregation a fundamental solution to the problems faced by birds and animals (For example, return remote mountain areas and virgin forests to bears. Forest edges to deer.) Make their home, a core habitat, a sanctuary and keep off any humans.
- 5 Designate bears as Japanese national animal in order to keep bears from extinction.

We feel the urge to build up one social system to nurture the youth, so they will continue their efforts to conserve a natural environment, where all living things including humans can survive and to support such activities on a monetary basis. As of today, the Japan

Bear & Forest Society is not yet big enough to influence the government to do what it should to protect forests in Japan, but we are proud to say that we have been influential in every field as a proposal-based environment organization. Full time workers will soon be needed to be fully in charge of nature conservation.

Though there have been various theories of the cause like global warming, acid rain (snow) insects, awful “mortality of oak trees” that trees of acorns are massively dying on a massive scale. More animals get inhabitable in the forests and end up with coming down to show up where humans live and getting killed. There exist environmental organizations with millions of members of general citizens in USA and Europe. We need such a powerful organization as well in Japan.

There exist environmental organizations with millions of members in USA and Europe. We need such a powerful organization as well in Japan.

It would be our utmost pleasure if you not only understand and agree with us, but also decide to stand up and start doing something for conservation of remote mountain areas and for more powerful organization.

I feel personally happy to have carried on this project. I stood up against what I thought wrong and acted upon it without being evasive nor compromising. This makes me feel proud.

My former mentor once told me, **“We begin to lead our lives only when beginning to live for others sake besides ourselves.”**

I lived as his words said. And I came to know that it means more to me this way than to live with being evasive and compromising. That’s my life. And I really want to thank my students who led me to leading this life.

I couldn’t agree more with Mother Teresa’s words; **“Love is expressed by practice rather than words.”**

This booklet is edited from the speech made at 2002 International Rotary District 2680 Convention.

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