

My earliest memories of growing up are being surrounded by dense forests, pristine rivers, teeming with fish and shrimp, and mountains. I lived in Mihara village in a remote part of southern Japan; an island in Hata District Kochi Prefecture.

Green is the colour I would use to describe my environment then, red for my new home Alice Springs. I have always had a strong connection to nature, which remains with me today. Days would be spent outside in the company of nature; playing in fields, picking wild fruit, building cubby houses in the bush- it was where I was happiest.

My father's family immigrated to Peru leaving him in Japan with his grandparents. He was the middle child which meant life was hard. He often slept in the fields, crying for his parents; however, he studied hard at school, graduated and became a bus driver. Saving money, he eventually bought land on the mountain. An early pioneer he cultivated the land, moving heavy rocks and trees by hand – he was tenacious. As the years passed, through hard work, he became a respected elder of the village with people looking to him for advice. Words of praise for what he had achieved would come from the city.

My mother was a traditional Japanese woman who supported her husband. Never a word of complaint passed her lips. She cooked, tended the gardens, cleaned and raised her children.

I trained as a teacher and taught at the local high school. Always in the back of my mind, I thought my destiny would differ from those around me. The turning point in my life came when I came across and started to read and live by Universal Laws or Principles. The Universe exists in perfect harmony by virtue of these laws. Later on, I migrated to Australia without any guarantee of what the future would hold; good or bad. This wish to move was triggered by the need to seek awareness of my true self. I thought I needed challenges because of my immaturity and this was a huge challenge.

My move to Australia was made possible through a friend whose family had immigrated to Brisbane, Qld. My English was 'terrible' but I was determined to continue to study this language and took up an apprenticeship in hairdressing which was to last a year, sadly ending because of visa conditions. There were to be many other jobs and study paths to follow in an attempt to stay in Australia.

I remember one incident of finding myself locked in a corporate building at night. Engrossed in completing my cleaning job to a high standard I had forgotten the time, way past 9.00pm. I now look back and laugh at this experience, an unforgettable memory. Work opportunities brought me to Alice Springs. People had advised me not to move to such a remote place but I wanted to experience it. My first impression on landing was how 'red' the country was. In many ways, it is not dissimilar to where I grew up. Although a large dry desert area, a strange environment to me, it was yet familiar. Maybe the small population is reminiscent of Mihari.

Alice Springs has been very good to me. I have worked in disability for many years now, and find it so rewarding. Together with this work, I teach Japanese. Here I was granted permanent residency making Alice Springs my permanent home. I don't feel the need to return to Japan although I do miss it and my family. Friends come over to visit, each one amazed at the unique environment I now call home. I have been blessed with good friends and a supportive community. If I look back to when my journey started I see many faces, each one having assisted me in my journey.

There are still many things I want to carry out but what drives me is to pay back to others the fortune that has been bestowed on me.