



## Story 1

Flight from Haneda to Fukuoka

### **A veiled birthday**

When I was returning to Fukuoka with my wife and daughter, due to our doctor's decision, my daughter was designated as a stretcher patient and allowed to board the plane lying down, instead of being assigned an ordinary seat, as she was for our outbound flight. (The stretcher is a makeshift bed attached above the seats in the plane. It's for passengers who are unable to sit due to illness or injury.) Since the stretcher is partitioned off behind a beige-colored curtain, regular passengers certainly notice there's something unusual going on, but they most likely can't even begin to imagine that behind the beige-colored curtain, a bed-ridden patient is flying together with them.

My daughter is in the fourth grade and suffers from heart disease. She had undergone surgery in Tokyo during this trip, but the operation had failed to make smooth progress. For this reason, we ended up returning on this day to Fukuoka without seeing a full recovery.

More than anyone else, my daughter herself knew this, along with the fact that her long-held dream to be able to run with all her strength had grown distant again.

We were allowed to board the plane ahead of the other passengers, since the installation of the bed would take up time.

Even though it was her second time, my daughter was not used to this experience yet, and her face was stiff with tension, just as I also felt.

However, many of the flight attendants put our minds at ease, giving us a warm welcome by saying things like, "Hello, thanks for boarding," and "It's going to be all right."

They promptly transferred my daughter to the rear of the cabin and moved her from the gurney to the stretcher bed. There were several belts attached to her chest area, and my wife and I sat next to her, straddling the aisle. Moments later, the flight attendant in charge appeared and tenderly greeted us with a smile, and said, "My name is so and so, and I'm the attendant personally assigned to you for this flight. Please feel free to ask me anything I can help you with. Are you comfortable?" She then went on to relate funny stories of her own

grade-school days, helping my daughter to relax and feel more at ease.

She must have been exhausted from the long trip, because soon after the other passengers boarded and the plane began to move, she was sound asleep.

After liftoff and the drinks, the flight attendant who had appeared a while ago returned to check on us. I began to chat with her, and before I knew it, I was talking away about my daughter's surgery, about how excited she was about flying in an airplane, and about how, in fact, it was her tenth birthday today.

A little while later, she awoke. Then, lo and behold, the flight attendant in charge returned with two other flight attendants and began to sing in a low voice, "Happy birthday to you!"

And that wasn't all. After saying, "Congratulations!" they brought a basketful of handmade candies and a picture postcard filled with messages of encouragement written by all the crew members.

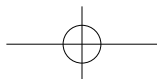
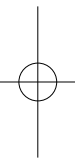
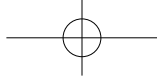
To be sure, my daughter was surprised at this sudden turn of events. Still, she wore a huge smile on her face. It was a smile I hadn't seen for some time now.

As soon as the flight attendants finished singing the birthday song, we heard "Happy birthday to you" again. And it was coming from the other side of the curtain, for that matter. "What was going on?"

My wife and I and the flight attendants exchanged glances, all of us surprised. So we opened the curtain a little, and became even more surprised. A lady passenger seated nearby was singing for my daughter. She probably overheard the talk I had with the attendant earlier.

While her voice wasn't too loud, her singing resounded throughout the cabin. Moments later, a man's voice joined with hers, followed by many others from beyond the curtain.

I began to feel calm and happy. The singing voices were simply wonderful, helping my daughter forget all



the fatigue from the surgery and being hospitalized.

What a blessing it was to have so many people celebrate my daughter's birthday. Filled with gratitude as well as pity for her, I was overcome with emotion and my eyes began to brim with tears. Even my daughter's eyes were overflowing with tears.

I said to her, "Nice, isn't it? To have your birthday celebrated by so many people. You must be very happy." She answered happily, "Yes. I've never had so many people wish me well."

I just kept bowing my head, thanking everyone for their singing, even though the curtain veiled my bedridden daughter from their view. With all the encouragement and warmth from everyone there, I felt reaffirmed that people are basically warm-hearted, and that the world isn't all that bad after all. I still vividly remember the look on my daughter's face when she began hearing the singing voices from behind the curtain, and asked, "For me?"

While we still have a rough road ahead, the three of us as a family will join hands and live strong.

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*I wonder who it was who started singing first. Without this person, people who would have otherwise been perfect strangers to us began singing and celebrating together. This person must have wondered if there was anything she could do just herself; something helpful; something to bring some joy.*

*I think it's amazing someone could act on such thoughts. It's touching and makes you believe in people.*

*To be able to freely think about wishing to do something and then take action; I believe we all have it in us to be able to take such a first, pure-hearted, honest step forward. This was a flight in which my heart was touched by the kindness of others.*

*Let's all plant the seeds of kindness together, in-*

*stead of waiting for someone else to make the flower bloom.*

## Story 2

Flight from Matsuyama to Haneda

### **Grandma's lullaby**