

I love my mother! What a normal thing to say. I'm sure everyone loves their mother. After all mothers and their children share a natural bond. Still my friends sometimes complain to me, "Today my mom forgot to make breakfast!" "My mom is so annoying! She keeps bugging me to do my homework." In everyday conversation my friends express these frustrations, but I envy them. I don't have "an annoying mother", because I don't live with my mother. I have a very kind and beautiful mother. Though she does give me special treatment since we can see each other only a few times a year.

When I was three years old, I came to the foster house in Matsuyama. I didn't know why. Suddenly my surroundings had completely changed. I didn't know where "here" was. Unfamiliar people and things surrounded me. I didn't know what to do. Why had my mother left me alone? Had she abandoned me? Every day my anxiety and solitude increased.

Many days later, out of a cloud of solitude, I remember a girl saying, "Let's go!" I had been alone for a while. It was the first time someone other than my teachers had even spoken to me. I was so happy to play with her. For the first time, I had a new friend. Gradually, I accepted my new situation. My new life started to become bearable. That girl had startled me into finding the strength to open up to the world.

Four years later, when I was seven, I visited my mother's home for two days. When I saw my mother again, I was shy and didn't know what to say to her. When she first said my name, I broke down and cried. Suddenly, I remembered living there with the smells and feelings of my home. I wanted to ask my mother, "Why did you leave me? What happened?" But I couldn't. The time wasn't right. I could feel my mother's pain beneath the surface. Instead, I filled the air with happy stories from the foster house. I made her smile. I felt happy again. I felt deep down that she hadn't just abandoned me and that one day I would eventually return home.

For some reason I understood, though we didn't talk about what had happened. I realized that even though we were apart, we were both struggling together. From my mother's example and my own experiences, I learned that women must develop emotional and mental strength in order to protect themselves and their family. I want to embody that strength and nurture others through my example. Helen Keller, who also triumphed over solitude once said, "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched—they must be felt with the heart."

Thank you.