

## Contributing My Rediscovered Self to the Providence, Part I

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My hometown is Hokkaido. My parents were devoted members of Tenrikyo, an Eastern “new religion” founded in 1838. I was born in 1964, the fourth of five children. As a child, I was withdrawn and not good at expressing my opinions. I was a bit odd. People often said they could not figure out what was on my mind.

I had a mysterious experience in elementary school. As homework, our teacher told us to write a poem. The moment I thought, I want to write about “this,” I felt words drop out of the sky. All I did was jot them down on paper, but the teacher said, “What a wonderful poem!” She even contributed it to a poem collection by students from all over Japan. I was excited because I had rarely experienced receiving praise. This was my first encounter with writing.

After that, I was good at writing. Several times, I won first prize in composition contests. Writing came effortlessly. I felt as if I could express my true self and become free through writing. Because I was not self-confident, I often suffered from gaps -- I tried to do what adults or others around me told

me to do, but I would fail. I wondered what was wrong with me. By contrast, in my schooldays I became aware that my true happiness lies in writing.

When I was in ninth grade, I began to have antagonistic feelings against my father. He told me to go to Tenri High School, which was not a regular high school but a four-year course in the evening, while working to qualify as a vocational nurse in the first two years and work in a hospital in the latter two years.

Since they waived tuition fees for students in this course, I would only need pocket money. I did not want to become a nurse, but since my father was demanding it and I knew my family’s financial difficulties, I ended up going to Tenri High School and living in a dormitory.

### Life and death

We used the desks regular high school students used during the day. We went to school as they went home, so we often passed each other on the street. I would think, Why can’t I go to school during the day as they do? I did not enjoy high school at all. I had to study day and night and our life at the dormitory was very strict. Neither could I feel any sense of satisfaction in my work as a nurse.

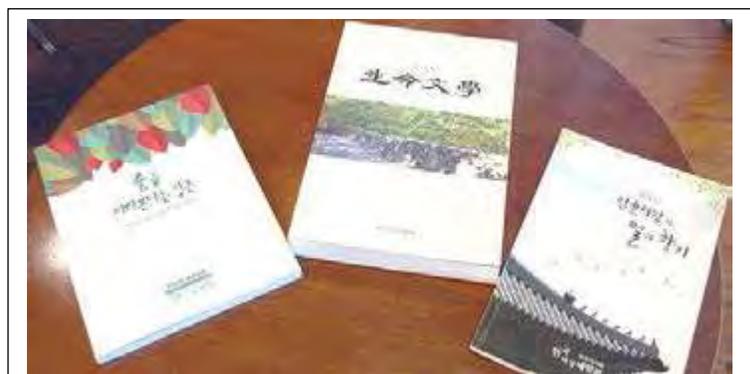
As my bitter feelings toward my father grew, I lost my ability to write. I knew I could change through writing, but I could not write anything -- poems, essays, not even book reports. I forced myself to write, but the results were not even half as good as previously. I wrote and wrote, but hated everything I wrote; eventually, I quit writing.

When I look back at those days, I could have advised myself to quit being a nurse if I hated it that much. However, back then, I thought I did not like being a nurse because I did understand the work well enough. So, after I graduated from high school, I chose to go on to a two-year course to become a registered nurse. Nevertheless, I did not find it meaningful and barely concentrated on my nursing studies. I read unrelated things, such as books on philosophy, as if saying, What am I supposed to do as a nurse when I don’t even know why people live and die in the first place?

In 1985, I was struggling to find a fundamental answer to this question when I met my spiritual parent. A few days later, I visited a video center and heard the Divine Principle for the first time. I was shocked to learn about the Fall but inspired to learn the reason for human suffering. I went to the video center regularly. However, the school found out about this one day. Although I was in my second grade of the nursing school, they said, “The school operates on donations offered by Tenrikyo followers. We cannot let you graduate if you are going to the Unification Church.” I think the teachers thought they could stop

me by saying so. When I think back on it now, I should have just obeyed them temporarily and started going to the church again after I graduated (laugh), but I knew no better than to quit school a month before graduation. I thought, “If I haven’t come across the Divine Principle at that moment, I would not have been my present self. I should not leave the church just because I couldn’t graduate from school,” and started to live a devotional life in a church dormitory.

At first, I was high-spirited, but as time went by, I started to feel contradiction in various matters such as human relationships within the church or the way they operated the financial providence. There were times when I wanted to leave, but I ended up staying because every time I studied the Divine Principle, I was convinced that its teaching was the truth. Helplessly dragging on my life in the church, I stayed in bed at the dormitory most of the time.



*Satoko Oshima's writing has appeared in published collections of short stories and poems.*

### **Serving my mother-in-law**

Nevertheless, thanks to the devotion offered by the people around me, I somehow managed to emerge from the blessing in a Korean–Japanese couple and came to Korea in 1996. I had married into the Wonju Lee family, meaning that among the many different Chinese characters pronounced “lee,” my husband’s family has the one that traces back to a Lee that lived in Wonju, sometime deep in antiquity. Of eight children, my husband, Lee

Byeong-seung, is the oldest. All his siblings live in Seoul. He alone lived with his mother in Wonju. A number of things I cannot express in words happened since I came to Korea, but I cannot avoid saying that my mother-in-law’s personality was problematic.

One example: we had a vegetable garden. I wanted to grow cabbage in it, so one day I asked her, “Could I raise something in the garden, too?” She misunderstood and believed that I had said, “Could I change the name of the garden to my name?” She told this to everyone around her. I was wondering why people were casting cold looks at me. When my husband’s aunt asked if I had really said that, I was shocked. Similar occurrence happened daily.

One of the most shocking circumstances occurred right after I gave birth to my second son. My husband had had an accident and could not work for over a year. Despite this, my mother-in-law applied for the welfare payments to go into her account and kept it a secret. When we discovered it, my husband took away her bankbook. When the payment ceased coming a few months later, we discovered she had arranged for it to go to another of her accounts.

Having to live with her for thirteen years, I finally fell mentally ill. As it turned out afterwards, she, too, had difficult family issues and had had a hard time with her own mother-in-law. It seems that many of the things she did to me her mother-in-law had done to her. Since I was not aware of that back then, I had thought it was my fault. Not understanding Korean well, in itself, caused me to feel accountable for everything. Constantly, unconsciously, I blamed myself.

Every night, I would wake up around two o’clock from hearing myself scream. I could neither sleep nor eat. I lost fifteen kilograms [thirty-three pounds]. In 2007, feeling I reached my limit and went to see a second-generation member who was an art therapy doctor. The seriousness of my condition took her aback. She recommended I undergo psychiatric treatment as well. The psychiatrist prescribed medicine for serious depression, anger syndrome and emotional disorders.

I began using sleeping pills. Meanwhile, my mother-in-law often experienced blood sugar crashes due to diabetes, usually around four o’clock in the morning. Since I had to call the ambulance whenever this happened, I could not sleep after all. The art therapy doctor found out about this and said, “This is not right. You will die if you stay there. You have to leave home.” She suggested I attend a forty-day workshop at Chung Pyung.

While I was at the workshop, my mother-in-law stayed with my brother-in-law’s family, until, unable to cope, they put her in a nursing home. By then, she had lost sight in one eye (a complication of the diabetes) and lived on dialysis due to decline in renal function.

As soon as I came back home, although I wanted to rest until I recovered completely, the other in-laws started to say, “We cannot stand our mother being in a nursing home.” They took this stance despite none of them having confidence to look after her. They pushed her on to me because I was “the oldest son’s wife.” Thus, I had to live with her again.