What Good Conversation Needs
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"Hello, everyone. How are you?"

I think maybe you would reply "I'm fine, thank you." in your mind.

How do you continue to talk after the usual greetings, if you want to know me?

What is the most important thing in getting to know other people?

I thought about it when I went to Australia during the summer vacation.

I had stayed in Sydney for three weeks to study English and experience the life in another country.

The first day I arrived in Sydney, I was surprised that there were many kinds of people. Appearances varied from person to person; clothes, color of hair, skin, eyes, build, and so on.   I was interested in Sydney and the people living there and I hoped to know more.

That night, when I was relaxed in my room, suddenly someone knocked at the door.

She was a young Asian woman. It was all I could tell from her appearance.

She said "Hello, I'm Ran. Nice to meet you."

I answered "Hi, I'm Tomo. Nice to meet you, too."

We exchanged conventional greetings.

But I didn't know even what kind of person she was or why she came there.

Perhaps she might be a dangerous person.

Anyway I asked some questions in order to know more about her.

"Where are you from?"   She answered "I'm from Korea."

"How old are you?" "I'm twenty years old."

"Why did you come to my room?" "Just to meet you."

"Ah….ah….Ok, Thank you. Good night, Ran." "Good night, Tomo."

Uneasy silence followed.

The bad atmosphere didn't allow me to talk anymore.

It seemed to me to be more like an interrogation rather than conversation. I felt I had failed.

I realized it was difficult for me to communicate with a person I met for the first time.

What should I say or ask in order to know a person??

The first day was over.

Next morning, I had to go to university by bus.

In the bus, I spoke to an elderly woman sitting next to me.

"Excuse me. I want to go to University of New South Wales. But I don't know the nearest stop. Could you tell me where to get off?"

"Sure. No problem. Are you a student?" "Yes I am. I go to the university to study English."

"Ok. You will be a good English speaker. Are you Japanese?" "Yes, I'm Japanese."

She said, with a smile, "Wonderful. Watashi wa sukoshi nihongoga hanasemasu(I can speak Japanese a little)".　I was amazed!

"Why are you able to speak Japanese?" "Because I have been in Osaka to teach English to Japanese students for six months."

"Oh, really? I live near Osaka. Do you like Osaka?" "Of course.　I really enjoyed it."

After we enjoyed talking about Foods, Fashions, Buildings and so on, for some time, we reached her stop.

I was glad to have a natural and friendly chat with her.

I wondered why I was able to have a good time talking with her.

I know!! "Good questions!!"

Good conversation needs good questions.

For example, it can be impolite to ask every person you first meet "how old are you?"　You should ask questions respecting the person's feelings, considering his or her situation and guessing what he or she seems to be interested in.

If you ask a good question, you will get a good answer. To respond, you should ask more questions to broaden and deepen the topic.

I realized this process made a good conversation.

That night, I had another chance to talk to Ran at the dinner table.

Being careful not to repeat a failure, I spoke to her, as pleasantly as I could.

She replied with a smile and the conversation went smoothly during the dinner.

Moreover she invited me to her room and we talked about our family, friends and school life, until midnight.

I was happy to make friends with her. And I gained confidence.

I still keep in touch with her as the first of many good friends I got in Sydney.

It is very rare for me to get to know a stranger in my school life in Japan.

Staying in Sydney was a good opportunity for me to find out some important things for friendship.