**From Baby Steps to Giant Strides**

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Hello everyone. I’m Ryohei Arai and a Kosen student, of course. But actually I may be not an ordinary Kosen student, because two names of Kosen are written in my resume, which means I had changed Kosen in April, 2012. Can you guess why? It was the Great East Japan Earthquake. I used to live in Fukushima and go to Fukushima Kosen. My house stood at 35km away from nuclear power plants and a wide area was polluted by radiation. We always had the fear of the unknown invisible rays and realized how scary what we can’t see is. Thankfully, my parents struggled to prevent me from being exposed to radiation. They took me to and from the Kosen by car every day, didn’t dry the laundry outdoors and made me carry a radiation measuring device. But the thing they had to pay attention to most was food. At that time, it was too difficult to decide what information was trustworthy, so my mother bought food which came from distant area or other countries. But now, the agricultural products from Fukushima are checked for radioactive contamination, so they are all safe, please don’t worry.

Okay, maybe you guys think I will talk about what a terrible and miserable time I spent in Fukushima. That is not what I want to say. What I want to say is the disaster brought me a lot of changes, for better or worse.

First, my hometown got damaged by huge tsunami and radioactive rays and I almost felt hopeless. However, one volunteer organization gave us, affected students, a big hope. They gave us an opportunity to go to NZ as homestay students for free. That was the first time for me to go abroad. The life there gave me a big shock like a big disaster.

Second, I transferred to Osaka Kosen. This was the biggest turning point in my life. It’s far from that disaster.

It’s been 5 years since I started my new life in Osaka. Now I’m doing the final program at Kosen curriculum. I’ve been interested in issues on energy and environment. It may be because I’m from Fukushima and experienced 3.11. So I’m studying fuel cell, which is kind of clean energy. Fortunately, I got a consistent outcome on my research, and I attended a conference held in the United States and could propose a new effective system of the fuel cell. Moreover, I obtained an awesome opportunity. It was to do an internship at a European company for one year. I chose Germany as an internship country because their awareness of renewable clean energy was extremely high compared to other countries in the world. I worked at a company which manufactures and sells wind turbines.

Through the internship, I could realize so many differences between Germany and Japan about awareness of clean energy. Let me tell you about what shocked me.

Basically, they don’t waste anything. They build various things they need and repair things by themselves, never waste water and they are so enthusiastic about recycling. And the biggest shock for me was that they have a great interest in the theme of energy and politics, which young Japanese people tend not to talk about. One day, I was talking with a friend at a coffee shop in Germany. When he went to the bath room, a young lady behind me suddenly asked me about the nuclear power plants in Japan. Of course I didn’t know her at all, so I was so surprised by the sudden happening, but their ways of thinking were totally different from ours. An energy problem seems to be their primary concern. German has decided to shut down all their nuclear power plants in a few years. Instead of nuclear generators, they will use renewable clean energy like wind, water and so on to generate power. And most of the people agree to the price of the energy going up due to the change. The whole nation is eager to go to the next step and it makes Germany go ahead of us in terms of energy.

As you know, nuclear power is a principal source of energy which can supply the majority of electricity needed in Japan. But it has a risk as well. To tell the truth, it is very hard for me to say, “I’m against nuclear power!” I used to live in Fukushima, I have many friends there and some of them work in nuclear-related facilities as engineers. I have mixed feelings about the Pros and Cons of nuclear energy. Nowadays, earthquakes occur frequently everywhere in Japan, so nobody can predict what may happen to Japan tomorrow. And many people appeal the necessity of decommissioning of reactors. That’s why, for our future, we should shift into renewable clean energy no matter what. So, I think it’s time for us to reconsider what we have to do next. But we don’t need to do big things from the start. Let’s start with small things, for instance, to have an interest in politics, energy, and Japan’s future. And for me, this speech is the first step to go forward to the next step. In the end, let me introduce my favorite phrase. “Baby steps to Giant strides.

Thank you for your attention.