

# My Work

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Abstract:

I am 43 years old. I live in Tsuruoka City in Yamagata prefecture located in the Tohoku area of Japan. It has been 6 years since I started to deliver mail through the Kuroneko Yamato mail service at Okaraya. Until then, I worked in farming, delivered newsletters, and at times attended a welfare institution. After resigning from the company in the concrete business for which I had worked for 12 years, I realized I can deliver mails and this led to my present job.

I was bullied in my middle school and I stopped socializing with friends and withdrew into my own world. I feel this has had a strong influence on my present life.

While working in various jobs, many things happened. I would like to use this opportunity to tell people about what I worked hard for, my worries, my hardships, what I lack, my joy and all that I have experienced.

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My name is Takashi Sato, and I am 44 years old. My hometown, Haguro-cho, Tsuruoka-City, Yamagata Prefecture, in the Tohoku (North Eastern) region of Japan, is known for Mt. Haguro, one of the three religious mountains of Dewa, which a great many Shugenja (members of religious orders who perform ascetic practices in the mountains) and tourists visit. The town is located in a very snowy region, and my family starts preparing firewood for the coming winter in late May, when snow begins melting. The work to prepare firewood for the next winter lasts till round late October.

At present, I work to deliver mail for the door-to-door courier service company called "Kuroneko-Yamato" together with my six colleagues. Besides mail, I also deliver local community papers, newsletters from the volunteer center, and books at the request of local bookshops, with the help of care workers. All these tasks keep me very busy. For example, I have to deliver to as many as 350 houses per day at peak workload, and have to deliver about 300 copies of community newspapers in three hours. Each one of us is assigned to a specific area of community. While I enjoy the act of delivery, I feel nervous about possible misdelivery when workload is heavy. I feel, however, even disappointed when I have only to deliver limited volume. Shortly after the East Japan Great Earthquake in 2011, in particular, I had nothing to deliver as long as two weeks. While I was very worried about quake victims, I was also very anxious about possible loss of my job. Things have now

gone back to normal. I feel very assured when I find the right volume of delivery on any given day.

The happiest period in my whole life so far has been the days from kindergarten to the sixth grade of my elementary school. Having lots of friends in my neighborhood, playing with them after school, and being very close to the children of my parents' friends, I went with them to hot spring resorts and stayed overnight at my friends' houses. With my parents working outside, leaving me alone at home, I had the privilege of monopolizing TV and watched often cartoons and special effects films. While I enjoyed watching TV as much as I liked, I am afraid that I did not form fundamental habits of daily living. As I began attending a junior high school, I came to face increasing number of troubles. One of them was that I no longer had the same people from my elementary school as my friends because those graduating from my primary school moved onto three different junior highs. These environmental changes were a serious challenge to me. I was unable to do what other children did without difficulty. In retrospect I do not know for sure whether I was unable to do it or I was not willing to do it. Partly because I was bullied at the junior high, and because there was a very shocking development between my close friends and me in the second year at the school, I became afraid to keep company with others. While I did not physically shut up at home, I tried to avoid contact with others, to retire into my shell, and I always lived in my own imaginary or dream world. Although I did not like schoolwork, I chose to move onto an evening course at an industrial high school as almost everybody else went onto high schools. While I maintained my life style there, one thing I did distinct from my previous life was to join the mountaineering club and stayed there for four years because of the teacher that I met in the club and that I wanted to learn from him for four years. From the previous life style of spending a lot of time watching TV before going to school in the evening, I switched to the one of working in the daytime and schooling from 5pm onward.

My first job was the shipment of chicken eggs at a chicken farm. I clearly remember I became weary of their repeated complaints of the same mistakes I made, though I do not remember what tasks I had to do or how I spent time at the workplace. I wanted to talk back when complained, but often times I was unable to do so. I finally got fired. The second job that I had was newspaper delivery. I did not acknowledge and correct my mistakes even after repeated failures to deliver them to contracted readers or to deliver timely. This developed into some trouble, followed by my dismissal from the job within one year. I do not believe that this can happen to me today. It seems that my mindset then was wrong, and that I was not mentally ready to work. The third job that I undertook when I was in the second year of the high school was at a workshop for people with disabilities. I made this choice in the belief that I was not good enough to work for a regular business and that it was wrong to be unemployed and idle away time. That was a workshop for autistic people, and I felt there that they were similar to me. While some nasty people gave me a hard time there, I kept working there even after my graduation from the senior high, staying on the job longer than any of my previous ones. Then the turning point arrived. Welfare service staff and my parents found for me a new and my fourth

job, which was at “concrete company”.

I was involved in the operation to feed concrete into molds to make U-shaped drainage to be installed on the roadside. While it seems non-skilled work, it involves carrying heavy stuff and requires physical strength. I stayed on the job for twelve years despite its heavy workload. I was paid for the day, yet I earned more than my previous work, which enabled me to enjoy life, like going on trips and buying what I wanted. I admit, though, that I did not develop relationship with colleagues, and that I simply spent every working day commuting, working and returning home. Three people with disabilities were employed. After some time, some large-scale shops were built, causing the company’s revenues to sink, and leaving us workers little work to do. Besides, some new management took over the president, who hired me. During the last four years of my employment, my boss often harassed me by yelling at me, making me nervous, to the extent that I finally did not manage to greet people like “Good morning”. While I believed that I put in my best efforts, I came to commit more errors, which made me feel that I was not considered to be good enough. I worked hard trying not to be fired. Yet the volume of my work dwindled, down to two assignments weekly or monthly. Finally, they told me one day without prior notice that I no longer had to come to work. On one hand I felt very sad and disappointed toward the end of my employment. On the other hand, however, I am still grateful that they kept me employed, with the knowledge that other employers would have let me go sooner.

I thought that working for the company was the only way for me to be kept linked to society. After the dismissal, I wanted to have opportunities to expose myself to outside world, in the belief that having no place to go would demoralize me. I feel as if some changes occurred to me around that time. It was when I was 33 years old that I began going, as a volunteer, to the care service provider, whom my father had also supported as a volunteer. I kept volunteering about four years, having a good time at a variety of events at the provider. I also began taking part in activities of a local youth group. I found drinking with the youth group’s members much more enjoyable than drinking alone in my own room. I recognized that taking part in various activities gave me a lot of pleasure. It was in 2006 that I encountered my fifth and current job.

One day I heard about and went to see the mail delivery service that the organization called “Hand-Made Cookies OKARAYA” provided, I found the delivery work interesting and doable for me, and decided to join it. When I started delivery, I was assigned to one community alone in Tsuruoka-City. To perform my task, I put markings on the map, put packages in the sequence of delivery, and then go off with packages on my bicycle if the weather is fine. I walk for delivery if it rains or snows. It took me about two months to get used to the work to the extent that I no longer needed a map. Some of the packages contain goods that have been auctioned off on-line, and if delivered to wrong addresses, result in big trouble. I use every caution to make sure that I deliver packages and mail to right addresses to keep customers’ confidence in the service, which is subcontracted to OKARAYA by Kuroneko-Yamato. The number of communities assigned to my

organization has gradually increased and stands now at five. Making customers happy with delivery gives me a lot of pleasure. One of them, who I inconvenienced with wrong delivery, now receives packages with a broad smile, which pleases me in particular. While I am making delivery, some people, whom I cannot identify yet feel as if I have seen, greet me saying “Good morning”, or “Hello”. I respond to them with my greetings assuming that they are community residents living in areas assigned to me. In a gathering to let community people know about our activities, we successfully communicated to them how hard each one of us works. My six colleagues have certain communities assigned to them and work diligently. I am now capable enough to deliver to any community, and to pick up the slack even when somebody has taken time off. While I assume we will face some difficulties as we go forward, I am determined to overcome them with our teamwork.

As I described, my fifth job seems to me a good fit for me. Besides my daily work, I serve as a self-advocacy committee chairman at OKARAYA. While I was very nervous when I took chairmanship, I am now getting used to making decisions based upon my colleagues views, like decisions on events’ plans and when to take days off. Though I still have to improve the way I facilitate at events, I would like to listen to others’ inputs and have a lot of fun,

As I look back upon my childhood, I realize that I should have done this or that. I still sometimes cannot control my emotions or get along properly with others. Yet I have become able to recognize that I should have done better. I believe that I have grown up enough to do my job properly, not avoid contact with others, and to speak to such a large audience as I do today.

Thank you very much for your attention.