**Chapter 6　No Runaway, No Life**

 There is another question that I am always asked,

“Why is your heart so strong?"

Like the other question, I have once reflected back on my life to seek its answer. I think it was Mrs. Nakajima, one of the ladies that lived near my parents' house, that influenced me most on this matter.

 I was born into a rather wealthy family. My father managed a construction company and a hotel. My mother was a housewife, making us delicious meals every day.

My father used to play rugby, a rare choice of sports at that time, and even led his high school team as captain. The sub-captain was Yoshiharu Yamaguchi, who is now well known as the rugby coach for Fushimi Industry High School which was the model for the Japanese movie "School Wars."

 My father was accepted to a university by recommendation for his talents in rugby, but before he was admitted, my grandfather suddenly passed away. My father gave up advancing onto university and started working locally. Eventually, he started his own business, and I was born. After my younger sister was born, he started a rugby school that he had been wanting to do. When I was in elementary school, I was forced to go to rugby school with him. I wanted to stay home and watch cartoons. Hence, rugby is a sport I most dislike.

 Back then, I would be sent to a temple near our house called Enshoji. I was sent there early in the morning every day to practice sitting in Zen meditation. According to my mother, I was a very restless child and disrupted class by asking the teacher with difficult questions that were impossible to answer. That was obvious from the comments made on my report cards that I later came across as an adult. The teacher had hastily written (with much resentment) what a problem child I was.

 My problematic behavior could not be resolved by the school teacher in charge and the issue was escalated to the elementary school principal. Again, my behavior could not be improved and was eventually escalated to the board of education. I met with them and was then urged to have a psychoanalysis done at the Reinan Hospital (currently called Reinan Kokorono Hospital), a large psychiatry hospital.

 One morning, as I was finishing my breakfast, my younger sister left for nursery school on the school bus. My mother had told me that I did not have to go to school that day. I jumped with joy and started to lazily spend the day in front of the TV.

After a while, my mother took me in her small car, driving through roads and mountain roads that I had never passed through before, to a building in a secluded area. There were iron frames fixed on the windows.

As soon as we arrived, they made me draw, do puzzles, and take a scan through a machine similar to a CT with wires on my head.

My mother later told me, all we found out that day was that I was a lot brighter than my peers. (Perhaps if it were today, I may have been diagnosed with Asperger's or ADHD, but at that time, that was the most they could get out of a psychological analysis.)

 Despite that I was taken to the psychiatry(?) hospital, sent to temple for Zen meditation training, I religiously refused to do my homework. I just hated doing the same thing as everyone else, and always sat out for physical education (PE) classes by saying I forgotten my PE clothes. I did do anything during music classes, again saying that I forgot to bring my pianica.

 As I advanced to higher grades, a tough teacher would send me out the classroom to do homework in the school hallway while everybody else was normally taking classes. All I heard was the teacher's voice leaking from the classroom, and yet my scores for science and arithmetic were always top of the class, and my Japanese grades were only slightly affected. Of course, my grades for PE (which I always sat out of) and Music (which I always cut classes) were of the worst.

I really really was a problem child.

 Yet, I become a much more 'normal' student as I advanced to high school. Maybe it was because tons of my brain cells died from too much heading practice for soccer (lol), which I started in junior high as an alternative for the much-despised rugby.

 In 1986, when Halley's Comet most closely approached Earth, I invented a reflecting telescope that the world has never seen. I was only in 9th grade. Much later, when I was fighting cancer, I had so much leisure time that I had this invention patented. I also applied for its international patent. This invention is introduced on the Internet as the "Taniguchi Telescope" alongside with Newtonian Telescope invented by Isaac Newton who had found universal gravitation (I think). If there is anyone at NASA or JAXA interested in using this next generation telescope, please do not hesitate to contact me.

 Until about the time of this invention, I was really bright. I sometimes regret I started soccer and killed so many of my brain cells.

 One day in high school, my friend taught me that if I became the student council president, I would more easily be admitted to a university by recommendation. In fact, it was said that the previous student council president got accepted to a well-known university by recommendation.

　I hated studying and terribly wanted to get the easy way out. I listened carefully to my friend and decided to run for student council president.

 For the past few years at my high school, there was usually only one student running for the student council president. The candidate was able to inaugurate to office by undergoing the process of "electoral votes" instead of the typical election. This meant, if I ran for president, I would automatically be elected and automatically be recommended to a good university.

 Miraculously, and much to my misfortune, there was ANOTHER candidate that decided to run for president after I declared it! 　I thought I heard the collapsing sound of my wonderful future. This girl was quite popular, so I thought I may lose in the election. However, we both had to speak in front of the entire student body and 70% of the students who heard my speech voted for me. I was too nervous to remember anything that the girl spoke in her speech, but I guess my speech reached the students' hearts. I couldn't confess to my friends that the real reason I wanted to become a student council president was because I wanted to take an easier path for university admission.

This is how I inaugurated as the president of Wakasa High School Council in Fukui prefecture. But the real problem starts here.

 The next day, my mother called me to come to the entrance gates of our home. Our neighbor, Mrs. Nakajima, was at the gates holding a big bouquet of flowers. I had never received a bouquet of flowers in my life before. I politely thanked her for her gift.

I repeat: But the real problem starts here.

 As I received the bouquet of flowers, Mrs. Nakajima said to me, "Congratulations on becoming Student President. Wow, Hiroshi-kun. You must be proud of your father."

 At first, I thought I had heard it wrong, but I realized Mrs. Nakajima was not praising ME, but praising MY FATHER. I tried thinking that maybe she meant to say "Wow, Hiroshi-kun. Your father must be proud of you." But no matter how many times I re-play her words in my mind, Mrs. Nakajima most definitely said to me "Wow, Hiroshi-kun. You must be proud of your father."

These words made me confirm that society does not evaluate me as much as I thought. Despite that I had thought up of what to address in my speech and that content resonated with everyone, society seemed to think that I won the student council election as if father had bought the votes of the students.

 This thought made me sad and at the same time, it got me thinking,”　What could I have done so that I wouldn't be perceived that way?"

Even if I advance to university, succeed my father's company, become company president, and make the company bigger, it'll probably still be my father that is praised. Just thinking that made me sick, and though my father was good to me, he became subject to my hatred.

　It was then that I drew the conclusion that I had to run away.

 In actual, it is not until much later that I run away from home on September 30th, 1999, when I am 27 years old. It was because I would plan it, but it would never work out. I planned it when I started university, when I dropped out of university and went to Hong Kong, as well as when I quit my job and went to Thailand. Each and every time, I had planned to run away and fall off from my parents' grid.

 For reference, my job in Thailand was the on-site supervision of the construction of a Japanese parabolic antenna factory. Someone introduced me to this job at the construction company when I had grown tired of working in Hong Kong. However, I just couldn't get along with the president of this company and quit in merely a month.

 On the day I quit the company, I went to a red-light district in Bangkok to drink alone. It helped that I no longer had to face the president I disliked. I did not know much about Bangkok since I had only been there for a month. There wasn't a place in Bangkok where I could drink alone in peace. It was the worst environment to do it, especially on Thanon Patpong in the red-light district. Prostitutes and dancers were hanging out on the street and the tourists leisurely took walks through it.

Nevertheless, I tried drinking beer alone at a noisy bar where the speakers were booming. Prostitutes and sellers would come up to me and start talking. I sighed, finally realizing I couldn't drink in peace there. As I was about to leave, two tall guys, a German and a Swiss, struck up a conversation with me. The girls and sellers that would come up to tourists to talk had minimal English understanding. Usually, the conversation did not last very long. However, these two men with Germanic ancestry were fluently speaking English and they were the perfect audience for my recent complaints.

　I ended up drinking with them in several bars in this town of Bangkok that night.

 The German's name was Marcus, who was working as a model for three years in Bangkok. The Swiss was Daniel, who had just recently come to Bangkok. I told them I had just quit my job and was wondering what to do from now on.

Marcus said that he belonged to a modellimg agency and that agency was not only looking for European models, but they were also looking for Asians. He added that he would put word in for us.

 Daniel and I registered together with the PIN model agency. Since the hotel I was staying at was expensive, I decided to stay at the same hotel they were at. That is how I got to know Asia's largest "backpackers' street", Khao San Road.

　Khao San Road is a place where various races are coming and going, cheap and comfortable hotels stand side by side, not only tourists, but a lot of people staying long in Bangkok were living.

 The hotel room was small, but it was cheap and the restaurants around the hotel were quite reasonable. With the savings I had, I estimated that I could stay here for half a year. I then later become sort of like the 'King of Khao San Road.

 In one of the arcades in the central section of this street was a pool bar called "Suzie's Bar" that we often hung out at. It was our go-to place, our backyard, our home. Vodka sodas cost 100 baht (500 yen) and was expensive for us. So, we would buy vodka bottles from a nearby liquor store, bring it in the bar only to order soda, and just hang out there from noon to midnight.

 One day the model agency called Marcus on his cell phone (he was the only one who had it at that time). The agency told him that Daniel's and my advertisement photographs were sold so we should come in to the office to pick up our wages. I hopped on a Tuktuk (tricycle taxi) to the office, and found Daniel, who had arrived earlier, arguing.

"What's wrong, Daniel?", I asked. Enraged, Daniel said to me, "Hiroshi, great timing. Look at this! What do you think?" and flipped over a page in a magazine.

There was Daniel, not wearing anything....

 "What the hell? 　Did you get nude, Daniel?"

"Hells no!!"

 "But what the hell? 　The picture ...."

I took a closer look. It was a body of someone that wasn't wearing anything, and Daniel's headshot next to it. It made it look like it was him that took off his clothes.

"You're like this, Hiroshi!"

And there I was, just like Daniel, in the magazine without wearing anything.

 Here the agency was, telling us to pick up our wages, and all that we got paid were a few thousand yens for the two photos used. We were both angry, demanded the girl at the office to give us back all the advertisement photographs we took and delete our registrations. Huffing and puffing, we returned to Suzie's Bar.

 We told Marcus of the incident and he laughed his ass off. "That's a great start", he said. Daniel almost punched him.

 The three of us were best buddies. We were scums having no positive impact on the world. I was living the scummiest life on a scumful street full of scums. A month passed, then two, until they suddenly left.

 Daniel was caught in Malaysia, where he had gone to renew his visa, for possession of marijuana and sentenced to death. Shortly after (which Marcus's girlfriend told me), Marcus was caught at Narita Airport for violation of Immigration Control and Customs (and maybe even for possession of marijuana?). The girlfriend was briefly investigated, by phone, and was told that Marcus's name wasn't Marcus. His real name was Jonathon. She didn't tell me in detail, but Marcus (or Jonathan to be exact) went to jail in Japan.

 Though I knew that they smoked pot (I don't even smoke cigarettes), it never crossed my mind that they would be arrested. It was pretty shocking.

 Amid all of this, the Asian currency crisis started in Thailand on July 2nd, 1997. Overnight, the value of my Thai baht lessened to half and the cost of living inflated 1.5 times.

 I was supposed to be able to live six months at Khao San Road. I was now only able to stay for three months, though I did nothing wrong. Yet, I couldn't get out of my scumly life, and continued drinking vodka at Suzie's Bar, alone like a hermit who lost his soul.

 Of course, my savings were just getting smaller and smaller. My English girlfriend that I was dating back then was going to pay for my hotel and living expenses. I truly didn't want to be her burden and finally decide to call my parents in Japan to tell them that I was becoming short on money and ask for financial support. I did not care for my parents and I did not want to make my achievements a result of my parents, so I thought until I was going home, but now I'm making my parents pay attention to my parents by international phone ....

　I was so pathetic that I didn't even have the money to call them. I used international collect call, which my mother picked up. She told me that my father said he will send me money to buy plane ticket back to Japan under the condition that I would join my father's company upon return.

　I didn't even have money to feed myself. I had no choice but to say "Yes, please."

 Many of my scum friends cried for me to say farewell. I drank with these scums at Suzie's Bar till the very last minute and then headed for the airport by taxi. I cried so much that I passed out in the taxi. Simon, Dai, Vincent, Stan, ... they truly were scums, but the greatest of friends with so much exciting drama.

As promised, I join my father's construction company as a CAD operator upon my return.

 I worked very hard at my father's company. It wasn't so tedious as I had done part-time jobs there when school was out in the summers. My mother had warned me that being a full-time employee was much different from working as a part-timer. To make sure that I wouldn't have people talking behind me saying "just because he's the son of the president", I joined the company as the lowest possible position with the least salary.

 I worked longer and harder than anyone else, working overtime and even on the weekends. I had a busy life, working from morning on either Saturday or Sunday every week. My mother used to always say, "Don't be a disgrace to your father!"

 Note however that my heart was never at work. It was at a small town called Obama City with a population of over 30,000. It was not an exciting city like Bangkok or Hong Kong, but I liked going fishing there on the holidays that I had, which were about three days a month.

 My childhood friend from elementary school often invited me to go fishing, and those moments were the only time I could feel I was alive. I would sometimes go fishing early in the morning before going to work or afterwards from around 10 pm. Of course, I would make sure I did not slack off on work itself. At that time, I used to go fishing about 200 days a year.

Indeed, fishing was the only hobby keeping me alive.

 One day, my father called me in to his president’s office. I was working as hard as I possibly could, so I thought I would finally be getting a promotion or a pay raise. However, my father asked me to seal the new loan documents from the bank. Listening carefully, I realized he was asking me to succeed his company. He wanted me to stamp next to the joint guarantor indication to seal the bank document as a new board member for one of his group companies.

I said to him,

"I'm not a beggar! I don't want someone else's stuff for free."

"I don't want to become a board member for a company that I have not even seen the financial reports of! Nor do I want to become a joint guarantor!"

My father tried convincing me with all kinds of benefits, but his negotiations failed.

"Then get out of the house!"

 "Fine then. I'm leaving!"

This is how my dream, ever since high school, had come true. I finally earned my status of becoming truly "on my own." I had long been preparing for my "run away" from home. I wanted to do a cool runaway and had simulated various versions.

 I chose to run away from home on my motorcycle. Exactly a year before my runaway, I bought a motorcycle. All of my local friends had been buying 4WDs and sport cars.

It was a large 1200 cc motorcycle called the BMW R1200 Cruiser. I only rode on it to go fishing, so it was always shiny. A few days after my father told me to get out of the house, I packed up my valuables in a backpack and decided to ride away on my beloved motorcycle. I was going to run away from home on a motorcycle that I had properly bought, not stole.

 The day I left my house, my mother with a worried look on her face called out to me in the garage. But all I said to her was "Thanks for everything. But I'm not coming back." and rode off on my motorcycle.

That was on September 30th, 1999.

 At that time, the highway did pass through Obama City, where I lived, so I took the interchange to Tsuruga to get on the Hokuriku Expressway. I drove north on my BMW R1200 Cruiser.

Foliage was starting on the Hokuriku Expressway and it was a really beautiful drive with the autumn scenery. My body was cold to the core because it was a bit chilly. Yet I was sweating with excitement.

 After three hours of riding north on the Hokuriku Expressway, I checked my gas tank at the parking area. There was not much left. I got off at West Kanazawa interchange and spent the night at a sauna. The next day, I decided to rent an apartment in this city.

 Life in the city of Kanazawa where I didn't know anyone was a bit nerve-racking at first but most of all, it felt free. I thought I would be fine even if I got hungry as long as I had my freedom. This wasn't quite so. I had to look for a job. I decided not to go job hunting, but to start my own business.

 What I really wanted to be was a president of a corporation, but after renting my apartment in Kanazawa, I only had 470,000 yen at hand. The minimum capital for establishing a corporation was 10 million yen, so I gave up. I went to the library to research on limited-liability companies and joint-stock companies. After much studying, I decided to set up a union that had no capital limit.

My very first entrepreneurship was the founding of the "Hokuriku Foreign Business Cooperative Union."

 The main business of this union was to support companies that wanted to expand abroad. Although there was no capital limit, in reality, a capital of at least 2 million yen was required to establish a union. I went around companies I knew nothing about and requested them for their kind cooperation once the foundation of my union was approved. The establishment of a union that spans across three Hokuriku districts was rare, and it was not approved by the Nagoya Regional Bureau of International Trade and Industry (currently, the Chubu Bureau of Economy, Trade, and Industry) until March 22nd (or was it the 16th?) in the following year of 2000. Everyone around me said "It had not been permitted for many years in Ishikawa Prefecture to establish a new union that spans across other prefectures. It'll be impossible!"

Where there's a will there's a way.

By this time, all of my savings were gone, and if the approval for establishment was a week later, I would have had to live off on the bag of panko sitting on my cupboard.

With help from expansion of the foreigner trainee acceptance business, running in full swing at that time, the union had grown into a mid-sized business with a sale of 380 million yen by the time I retired from chairman in 2004.

You see, anyone can do anything if they put their heart into it.

 In February 2004, I retired from the representative director and director of this union after I finished passing on the chairman's tasks to my successor and greeting with my business partners. That day, heavy snow fell on Kanazawa, the first time in several years.

On a side note, I had to unfortunately let go of my beloved BMW R1200 Cruiser in June 2004 for 550,000 yen, because I needed the money to establish South Pacific Free Bird.