

Beyond Baby Shampoo

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I must have figured out early on that learning has a lot to do with refining the way we see. Surely this was the thought on my mind as I ventured my first attempt at the scientific method. One night, staying over at my grandparents' home, I noticed a peculiar bottle of shampoo. It was labeled "No Tears Baby Shampoo." My grandmother must have purchased it thinking it would be safer for her grandchildren's use.

I felt an experiment coming on! The experimenter: six-year-old me. The materials: "No Tears" shampoo and my eyeball. I courageously held up the clear bottle of honey-colored shampoo and poured a generous glob into my eye. I think I must have cried for an hour. After that, I showered with caution and learned to examine labels. Somehow the world looks cleaner to me now.

In spite of this learning incident, I faced a similar experience shortly after my family moved to Japan. A few years older, and debatably wiser, I walked with my sister into a convenience store where we found a small bottle labeled "Sample" (in English) that appeared to be a breath-refreshing spray. The details were all written in Japanese. My sister excitedly bid me "open wide," to which I automatically opened up and received a full dose of cologne

in my mouth. I diligently learned to read Japanese after this episode.

Half blind and short on taste buds, I now reflect upon my educational experience with profound gratitude not only to have survived thus far but for those moments that have converted knowledge into wisdom. To all the graduates, I ask: "What have we learned here?"

Looking back upon journal entries from my freshman days at BYU, I found what I had written to sum up my year of learning: "An unconfident man will say he has no talent. A foolish man will believe him." This idea has made a strong impression upon me. History classes show us that for centuries we have been myopic enough to believe that someone can profit by making another person lose. In the short run this seems valid enough, but on a more complete scale of time, it's just not possible. When one person is denied the chance to exercise his or her skill or caused to "lose" in some way, the rest of us miss out dearly on that person's contributions—a lose-lose situation.

Sachiko V. Jensen spoke as the representative of her graduating class at BYU commencement on 11 August 2005.

My mother once asked, “I wonder how many Einsteins and Gershwins there have been in the world who have lived out their time without a chance to show forth all they had to offer.” Maybe they were not allowed the opportunity. Perhaps they lacked someone to have faith in their abilities. Maybe they didn’t even know they had something to offer. On the other hand, when someone develops his or her talents and enhances his or her education, the positive effects can be contagious. One person’s victory, in some small or large, direct or indirect way, benefits everyone—a win-win situation.

With this I need to thank you all in advance for the contributions you will make, because I plan on benefiting from them. I know I already have benefited from many.

It seems only natural that we would underestimate and misunderstand each other since we can’t actually ever be someone else. Around the time I was in third grade, I remember visiting my cousins’ home and watching them play video games. As I stood focused on the screen, it fascinated me that a character named Mario would stumble into traps and even die as many times as he wanted and yet keep coming back to life. He could even come back as someone else: Luigi or Yoshi. It occurred to me that I would never be afforded that same luxury. This struck me as the greatest dilemma in my young life, that try as I may, I could never look out from a pair of eyes other than my own: never Luigi’s or Yoshi’s, never Helen Keller’s or Lassie’s or Carl Sagan’s or Brigham Young’s. This is a great way to keep a third grader up all night. I wondered, “Is it possible to stay behind Sachi’s eyes and still understand someone else’s angle of vision?”

While living in Hiroshima, I learned a little more about seeing through another person’s eyes. I remember wandering through Hiroshima’s Peace Memorial Park. My two sisters and I, still in elementary school, had a habit of introducing ourselves and jabbering

away with random passersby. One day we found an elderly lady staring at something invisible in the river that ran alongside the park. We plunked ourselves down beside her on the bench and asked what she was looking at. She explained how she had been a little girl in a large family, living in Hiroshima during World War II.

The atomic bomb struck, and all that survived of her family besides herself were her father and two younger siblings. She recalled that the last time she saw her mother and her older brothers and sisters, they were floating down this river brimming with black water stained by acid rain. Her father decided to keep her in Hiroshima and send the two younger ones away to live with relatives in Nagasaki, where they would be safe. Three days later, the second atomic bomb, this time in Nagasaki, erased any trace of her siblings. Not long after, her father passed away from leukemia, leaving her the sole survivor of a once-large family.

A handkerchief held to her eyes marked the end of her story. This time my own tears came not from something poured into my eye but from a woman’s perspective that suddenly came into focus in my mind. It was like filling in a blind spot I didn’t even know I had. I feel in retrospect that perhaps Mario’s ability to see through others’ eyes is not quite out of our reach. With this experience I began to see how crucial it is that we apply knowledge harnessed by wisdom and spiritual perspective.

How grateful I am to a university that promotes this intermingling of academic reasoning and spiritual vision, a place that has encouraged me to see more clearly and advance my education beyond baby shampoo.

As graduates of BYU we can all say that someone has had great faith in us. A large portion of our educational expenses came from tithe payers and individuals who generously bestowed these funds upon the university with us in mind. Considering these sacrifices that subsidize our tuition, it is fair to say we have

all attended BYU on scholarship. This means someone has deemed each of us a worthwhile investment.

In thinking about the confidence this inspires—to know that someone believes in you that much—it occurred to me that our Heavenly Father has also sent us to attend this earthly “school” on a full-ride scholarship. Jesus Christ paid the full price, enabling us to come and make mistakes, fix them, learn, and perfect ourselves. Obviously the Lord has profound faith in each of us to invest so heavily in our futures. Just as with a college scholarship with GPA and credit-hour requirements, we are expected to obey commandments. Because of Christ’s Atonement, however, we are, in a sense, able to experience Mario’s amazing ability to stumble and get back up again.

In Japan there is an expression, “nanakorobi yaoki,” which means “Fall seven times; get up eight.” Many times here at BYU I’ve felt so underqualified that I had to hold my breath and try hard not to look behind me to accomplish the task at hand. Though it has seemed overwhelming on occasion, I am humbled and deeply thankful to be here with all of you today to commemorate the times we’ve gotten back up again and what we’ve learned from the times we’ve fallen.

I wish to express a wholehearted thank-you to the parents, professors, administrators, alumni, and friends who have invested time and thought, energy and funds, refreshments and love toward our education. We appreciate it deeply, and we’ll do you proud!

Thank you.