

Yamanaka Takuya
Let the Others Live

Translated by Kelly
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Forewords by Takuya Yamanaka

“That guy is crying again.”

“Why is he always crying?”

“Crybaby!”

Noisy. Noisy. Noisy!

“Can you study hard like your older brother?”

“Since the older brother is so amazing, the little brother should be smart too.”

Stop comparing me with my older brother.

“Stop it! Takuya, you need to calm down.”

Let go of me. I can't control myself anymore. Help me!

“Better keep our distance with Takuya.”

Why does nobody try to understand me?

“Takuya is going to play pachinko again today right?”

Why am I a shitty person like this?

“Your mother is sick.”

Sorry. It's my fault. I'm sorry.

“Why are they not making any money? So stupid.”

Casually criticising us without knowing how much effort we had put in.

I'm always hearing voices of other people in my head, I've always been fighting with those voices.

Why do I care so much about what other people think?

Why am I basing my feelings on other people's words?

I still don't have an answer. But I do have some clarity about one thing now.

It's because of other people's hurtful words, I've been fighting like there's no tomorrow.

It's because of some people's kind words, I'm able to come this far.

After all, it is people's words that made me the strong person I am today.

Thank you all very much.

Living in other people's words, let those words live for you.

As it is. Live the way you intended out of it.

Write a book about it! It's the voices of my fans that give me this idea.

I think I could potentially help someone through showcasing some unglamorous side of my past, well, could at least be a cautionary tale.

But my fans are saying: “we hope Takuya could share us with his stories, that might be able to motivate us.”

If my words could motivate someone's soul or relax someone's life, even just for a little bit, would give me ultimate happiness. Mr. Itō from Kadokawa said to me: "Mr. Yamanaka's ways of speaking always touch people's hearts. So why don't you publish a book about your life?" I feel like writing a book is an ultimate mission that's destined to happen.

I'm turning 30 this year. Writing this book can be a good way to reflect on my life and use this past as a fuel to continue to motivate myself in my 30s.

Bullied as a crybaby during my youth, teenage anger in school years that broke my parents' hearts, couldn't trust anyone during my high school career. My mother got sick, I was addicted to gambling during university years. First time getting a critical condition by a doctor. Since I decided to bet my whole life on having a music career, I've been living by the spirit of "I'll make a name for myself to impress all of you" until now. Everything will unfold in this book.

Looking back, I've lived a terrible but tremendous life so far. Though it's never easy, ever since I've decided to live as a band man, the weakness inside me has become an armour. Leading a band comes with responsibilities and pressures, but now I have people that I care deeply about, that I would fight against anything to protect them.

A cowardly person can still grow into a strong person and make their dreams come true! I hope this book can pass down this message.

I hope I will continue growing as a person.

Not only hoping the members in the band can continue following me at ease, I'm also wishing that I could be the person that's leading the band.

Even now, I still feel defeated when I meet a real talented genius.

But it doesn't matter, an ordinary person* still has the strength to get far in life.

Value every emotion, use it as a platform to fly high.

Let other people's opinions strengthen your will.

My life only belongs to me. Your life only belongs to you. The unique life that only belongs to oneself, to live it to the fullest or waste it is completely up to your decision.

Hope everyone will get motivated through reading about my life.

Hope it gives you the courage to make a step onto the pathway you want with a can-do attitude.

I sincerely hope this book can benefit me and all of the readers.

*I translated as an ordinary person, but what Takuya wrote should be translated as a useless person. Think he's being a bit tough on himself (or just being Japanese...)

Chapter 1: The Other Side of Messy Emotions

A Haircut

Because of my father's work, I was living in Thailand from the age of four to six. We had a house maid who would be with me when I was going to my nursery's swimming pool, or going to buy ice lollies. My parents were busy with work, so I spent the majority of my time with the house maid.

It is probably hard for you to imagine this, seeing the person I am today, but I was constantly crying as a kid in my memories. Maybe some people would say "a kid's job is crying". If that's the case, then I was just an overworked baby. What caused me to cry this much? Looking back now, I guess it's a feeling called insecurity. Playing with friends still couldn't calm me down, I always felt insecure deep down. This insecurity was purely coming from the fact that I didn't know how to be around people. So the only time I felt secure was when I was at home or surrounded by the house maid.

We moved back to Japan following my father's work transfer, but the house maid did not move with us. I did not realise this until three days in. "Where is the house maid?" I asked my family. "That person is from Thailand, won't be able to move to Japan." That was the only answer I received. I was shocked, but the belief of "we will meet again" made me not feel lonely.

I was still crying a lot even after I started elementary school in Japan. I would start crying the moment my mother was out of my sight, it could last for the whole day. The headmaster of my school wrote a quite hypocritical comment on my feedback: "Judging the way he could patiently cry for this long, I guess this kid does have some kind of strong will."

From a kid's perspective, the way I was crying might seem interesting, that got me bullied for a bit during first year at elementary school. Mischiefs like giving something to everyone but me, small things like that but powerful. "Why am I left out?" Made me cry again, made my classes laugh and joke at me, that made me cry even more, a vicious circle. Or during school activities, where I thought someone would invite me into their group, I ended up crying on my own because no one ever did. Felt like I was being bullied even more when the teacher asked "can someone let Yamanaka join their group?", tears just won't stop falling down. I hated myself for not being able to do anything simply because nobody invited me into their group, "I just want a normal calm day", something I've been wishing for since I was a little kid.

My father was always busy with work and was never at home. One day during my second year at elementary school, he came home after a work trip and happened to hear about what was happening to me at school.

"Are you having a bad time at school?"

"Well I wouldn't put it that way...."

"But you are crying a lot right? It must be the girl-like haircut you have that makes you cry like a little girl."

My father took me to the hairdresser out of nowhere and cut off my hair. I had really soft and nice hair as a kid, and felt happy when people complimented my hair: "you have pretty hair like a girl!" So my hair was such an important part of me that gave me a lot of confidence.

"How could you cut my hair like this!!" I was crying while screaming at my father, felt down looking at my shaved hair. Perhaps my father wasn't wrong, the feeling of "I need to become stronger" came naturally after the haircut, that stopped me from crying constantly. That was the first time I realised one's appearance can lead to a personality change within. Even as an adult now, I would purposely

look for a suitable outfit to express a certain emotion - let it be posing for a flirtatious photoshoot, or singing in a sexy voice, or acting a bitter way. The value my father taught me with this one haircut is unmeasurable.

After getting the haircut, a boy transferred to my class. That set the motion for my wish of becoming a stronger person. He was the only kid who didn't know I was being bullied in class. Thereby my instinct told me that I could start all over again through making friends with this kid. He was a naughty kid, even a joking situation could be turned into a huge physical fight. Life went on like this for a year, I had stopped crying and became a "real man" who won't get upset even when I was beaten.

There was a time when the top bully picked on me while walking by each other on the school hallway, but I won the fight easily. Since then, kids stopped picking on me and started to get close to me. Obviously I was happy that I was not being bullied anymore, but I saw the delicacy in human nature. People who won fair and square won't pick on other people, people who are watching the fun by the bullies are simply trying to protect themselves. Just some common senses that can be easily understood even by kids, made me an indifferent observer to the world ever since.

Chasing My Brother's Steps

I have a brother who's 5 years older than me. He has a heart disease that forbids him from doing majority of outdoor activities, let alone running, it has been the case since he was a kid. Despite it being the only way to protect him, I can't stop thinking about what he was thinking as a child while watching his friends playing outside.

Couldn't play outside, all my brother used to do was sit in front of the desk to solve quizzes or read books. Ultimately, he was aiming to become an elite, someone I could never get close to when it comes to studying. I guess my parents must be proud to have a son like him. I was often told by them to study hard like my big brother. Unconsciously, I started to believe that I have to be as good as him. Thinking about it, when you have siblings, it is normal to be compared to them or get told that you have to be just like them. Even in school, I was told that "your brother is so excellent", and when I went to tutoring classes, the tutors would have high expectations: "you must be good at study just like your brother." Honestly, hearing those words did make me feel uncomfortable.

Imagine having a brother who's always going to be better than you, standing so far above you, a huge gap that can't be filled through working harder. People around me project my brother's image onto me. It took me a long time to come around, understanding it is normal to be compared to your sibling. "They wouldn't be asking me to perform well at school if I didn't have a brother." I generally thought this way back then.

But I wouldn't be a musician without my brother. When I was in third year of elementary school and my brother was in second year of middle school, he started a band with some friends that I was able to watch them perform. My brother was a big fan of L'Arc-en-Ciel, he was literally obsessed with their live tapes.

One day —

"Takuya, can you hear the bass in this song?"

"...? I can't."

"Can't you hear the heavy low sound in the background?"

I really did enjoy listening to music and I was imitating the way Hyde sings, but my brother won't shut up about bass. It's hard to differentiate bass's sound if you don't have a solid knowledge of the

instrument since the beginning. It took me about a year to really start hearing bass in a song through having many casual discussions of “what do you think of the bass line in this song” with him.

Maybe he saw my progress, so he bought me a bass using my red pocket money without my permission when I was in grade four at elementary school. I asked him how he could spend someone’s money without permission. He did not apologise at all, and made up a stupid excuse: “Takuya did say bass is cool.” Okay, fine, I did say that, but I didn’t say it for him to spend my money like that. Thinking about it now, I reckon he only did that so he could have someone to jam with.

I was mad at him for spending my money without letting me know, but it was true that the passion of having a music career sparked through playing that bass. My brother still says to this day that I’m a band man now because of him, all the credits should go to him.

So it goes, the life of playing instruments together with my brother started. He would push me to go over the poorly played parts over and over again at the beginning, but that was extremely unpleasant. I would stop playing bass after ten minutes of practice, seeing the way I was, my brother suggested: “let’s just focus on the song itself if you are not able to get through the tough parts.” And it was an effective suggestion.

Through practising the parts that I couldn’t play, my skills improved rapidly, but the premise is keeping the passion alive. It doesn’t matter if you are playing poorly or unable to play certain parts, just keep pushing to finish playing the song - the happiness of being able to play a song in full comes naturally. That gives you confidence, the illusion of feeling like playing in a world class band makes you want to go through the song over and over again, which helps to improve the poorly played parts. I presume that I would have hated playing bass if all I did was focusing and going over the poorly played parts over and over again.

My brother was interested in learning more, he would play all different types of music he came across to me almost every day. We would go to a rental store to rent CDs from our favourite musicians, and burn them onto MD.

Knowledge came from a big brother who’s five years older than you. It can be refreshing but hard to understand fully. Hip-hop music I was later obsessed with in middle school was originally introduced to me by my brother. It would always make me happy when I recommend bands or songs that were introduced to me by my brother to my classmates, with them praising my music tastes, and growing my interests in music even deeper.

My brother’s band lasted till he graduated university, where they eventually disbanded after everyone started working full-time. He’s now working at Tokyo Electron Limited. It’s hard for me to imagine that someone who wasn’t even allowed to play outside as a kid is flying all over the world for work. Work has dominated our conversations as adults now when drinking together. He would give me suggestions when I’m complaining about the atmosphere of the band being down: “I understand that you want to lead the band, but sometimes you have to let go and trust them fully.” All I wanted as a kid was to catch up to him, even though we went on completely different paths, I feel like I can always see him right in front of me. I’ve been following his steps since I was a kid, has it gotten a bit closer now?

Goes Against the Flow

Since I was a crybaby who was trying to catch up to my big brother, it often came across that I was a kid who had no individual opinions and behaved childishly. But I have always been someone who has

a difficult personality and wanted to do things that other people couldn't achieve. A good example would be me participating in a drawing competition in elementary school. The theme was "elephant". Everyone started using grey colour to draw elephants, whereas I was using red and blue. Doing something the common way was simply boring to me.

It would be a shame to not draw using my favourite colours, I drew a background that definitely wasn't the right habitat for an elephant. Somehow that drawing was shortlisted, but everyone had nothing good to say after seeing it.

"Blue and red elephants don't exist!"

"Why does he have to select these colours?"

My classmates thought my drawing was something else, but I didn't care about their impressions. I always believe that through breaking the norms, you might be able to create something that's unique to you. It's hard to have the mindset of creating things when you force yourself to fit into a structure or a spectrum. I still am the person who wants to break society norms.

While attending art class in middle school, I would hide my drawings or draw in secret. Not because I felt awkward by people's judgement, but because I didn't want people to imitate them. It was not a situation that can be forgiven simply when someone says, "I love your idea! I want to draw the same thing!" People's creativity should not be touched easily by mindless people who have lost the ability to think individually.

Feeling inspired by someone's work is a completely different thing from imitating someone's work, but it usually gets mistaken for the same. I was inspired by many different people while growing up. My parents, my older brother, and my favourite musicians. It's normal that other people's works might widen your creative vision, but that's only the case for people who won't stop having independent thinking. Simply imitating others' work will stop you from thinking. Most importantly, individual styles are born through mixing and reinventing the influences you take from existing works - it's your decisions. Of course, you'd be feeling some level of insecurities when you were creating something different; you might even get lost along the way, but it's still better than not changing at all, right? As someone who always goes against the flow, I think it's good to be someone like this.

Grandfather

(Translator's note: it's hard to judge whether the chapter was written in present or past tense with my current Japanese knowledge and I'm not sure if Takuya's grandfather is still alive, so I decided to translate the whole chapter in present tense unless I found out otherwise...)

My grandfather has a strict side to him, like he would tell me not to lay on the sofa while watching TV: "Don't lay down, sit up!" But he has a tender side, and he would never deny me doing the things I want. A fair person is a real man. I'm proud to have a grandfather like him; deep down, I always wanted his approval.

Grandfather's hobby is watching baseball games on television. It would make him smile brightly if the team he supports wins; otherwise, he would look upset as if he lost the game. So I always wondered as a kid: would my grandfather be this happy supporting me too if I played baseball? Eventually, during grade 4 of elementary school, I gave up the swimming lesson I was attending and decided to join a junior baseball team.

"Grandad, I want to play baseball!"

"You want to play baseball! Good to hear! Work hard and I will support you during your games!"

Grandfather acted differently when he was watching me play compared to how he reacted to watching baseball games on television; he would always be smiling, whether my team won or lost. It's hard to put it into words - the feeling of having someone this important to you always coming to watch you play with a happy face, praising, "Takuya is working so hard!" - made me incredibly happy. This feeling became the fuel that motivated me to continue playing baseball. Through day-to-day practices and games, I started to love baseball more and more and would go to watch games with other friends who were also baseball fans.

The middle school that was close to my home was a school that we could hear police sirens at almost every day. My parents said to me, "There's no way we'd let you attend that school; you'll need to go to another one." This meant that I had to study extra hard and go to tutoring classes that would make it hard to practise baseball, and I couldn't imagine myself giving up on baseball and focussing on studying. To me, it was more meaningful to win a baseball game than attending a good middle school. My grandfather understood the way I felt and convinced my parents: "Takuya says he wants to play baseball; just let him." So I was able to play on the same baseball team all the way to sixth grade.

Focused on baseball training and didn't study hard enough, obviously I didn't do well for my middle school entrance exam and got into a middle school that had a bad reputation in town.

"Whenever I'm feeling burned out and in pain, I remember that my grandfather is guiding me, which strengthens my power again. Grandfather, I am still working hard!"

Those Bad Kids, Seemed to be My Friends

I was frightened when I first started middle school. People around me were all seemingly freaks, which made me feel super insecure. A place that felt like there's no escape, but luckily, two of my older elementary school pals became respectful bad kids in middle school. Hanging around people like that since I started my middle school career inevitably led me to associate with a group of bad kids.

But for me, I made friends that I was able to hang out with throughout the majority of my middle school years. One day I was on my way to school with these friends when I got attacked, accompanied by a loud noise of "BOOM!". While I was trying to figure out who I had offended, a guy on a bicycle came towards me rapidly and started to beat me up. My head was bleeding from this out-of-nowhere attack, and the situation quickly went out of control. Those friends did not try to stop us; instead, they were just watching to see who would win the fight. I decided to walk away from it just when both of us were physically exhausted. About 5 minutes later, the guy who was supposed to be lying on the ground suddenly screamed, holding a compass needle and attacking my way. He looked like Shocker, who wouldn't stop picking fights with Kamen Rider. Carelessly, I didn't register his behaviour with my brain thinking, "Eh? This can be a way to stab people?" It was different from how we were fighting each other earlier, he generally had a facial expression that he wanted to kill me. The way he came at me started to look like slow motion, with someone shielding me with their back - one of my friends, who didn't do anything when we were fighting earlier, had stepped in. Despite the dangerous situation that could potentially get him killed, he still wanted to protect me. I was moved by his courage, and I sincerely respected him for that.

I wanted to become a stronger person. During my third year of middle school, I was curious to find out who was the stronger person. With this idea in mind, I kicked my friend in the head after school. The thought of winning overflowed my head, and the situation turned around very quickly. The next thing I knew, he had defeated me completely. He was so powerful, I was totally overpowered by him. Then

he said to me, "It's not about who's stronger; there's no need to compete between friends. Stop overthinking it."

He enlightened me and made me believe that he was a friend to keep for life. We've gone through many difficult situations together in life after that. I would go to help him whenever he was in trouble, and he would support me if I got picked on by kids from other schools. Friends were centred around him, trusting him fully. A type of friendship that could never be faked. I'm still proud that I was finally able to build a sincere relationship like that. By the way, this friend is now the owner of an izakaya called Salmon Shogun* in Osaka that I would visit whenever I'm around. The instinct that I could be a lifelong friend with this person turned out to be right.

It goes without saying that I didn't focus on studying while all I did was make friends. My two-grade-above senior in school was a cool guy in all aspects, be it academics or fashion sense - pretty much someone who can be described as perfect. I admired him. "It would be so cool if I could be good at studying just like him!" Thereby, I decided to aim for Nara High School, which was the top school in town. I was attending extra tutoring classes at the time; it shouldn't be hard for me to get in with my grades. But my teacher was telling me to aim for schools that rank around sixth on the league table.

"Sir, I decided to aim for Nara High School."

"Hmm, that would be difficult with your current grades. Have you realised that you've been living a muddled life until yesterday?"

"I know, I know. But I will start school an hour earlier from tomorrow on."

The next day, my teacher showed up an hour earlier too, and would sit next to me to answer any questions I had. Consequently, I settled on my target of getting accepted into Nara High School.

*Salmon Shogun (酒将群) was opened in 2017 and still is a place that's visited by many Oral fans in Japan. Takuya posted a photo about it on [instagram](#) and you can find more information about the izakaya itself here: <https://tabelog.com/osaka/A2701/A270102/27097844/>

Violent Youth

My mother was the only person around during my middle school years. At that time, my older brother had already moved out to live on his own, and my father was frequently away on business trips. My mother was worried sick about me. She complained a lot about the friends I was hanging out with, my poor grades, or my attitude towards life. She would say things like, "You have to study hard like your older brother" whenever my grades weren't ideal, or "You need to be more careful with the friends you make" when I brought my friends home. I felt stuck listening to things like this day in and day out, that rage eventually broke out during my middle school years.

Things might have been different if my father were around more. My father is a judo practitioner who was skilled enough to compete in the Olympics when he was younger. My strength was nowhere near him during middle school. He would soak me in the bathtub as a punishment whenever I didn't finish school work on time in elementary school. If we put it nicely, he can be seen as a true Showa man; otherwise... Actually, never mind. I do not wish to get beaten up in judo combos at this age.

Guess one can argue that I was just influenced by him and surrounded myself in a violent environment throughout my middle school years. I would slam walls at home whenever things weren't going my way and use violence in response to my mother's incessant cries and complaints. She must have been frightened to be around an emotionally unstable son like me, but my mother would still try

to calm me down while crying in fear. But my rage did not calm down; it only got worse and got completely out of control when I hit her in the face.

Our relationship became horrible; I used to run away from home a lot and argue seven times with her every month. Sometimes my mother would get her friends to bring me home, but there were times I would resist and sleep on a park bench.

It was always the little things that we were arguing about. For example, I would tell her that I scored two home runs; she would reply, "Maybe they were just too weak." It was always small things like this.

Admiring a senior schoolmate was only one of the reasons why I decided to apply to the top school in town. I also figured that I should give my mother a peace of mind after troubling her all these years. My mother was very pleased when I got into high school, and I finally started to understand her worries a bit better.

Mentors

I thought I would be doomed if people looked down on me already before attending high school's opening ceremony. Thus, I dyed my hair red in a school full of model students, hoping that I'd be able to make friends with my classmates. Well, that did not happen. The disciplinary teacher* came up to me right after the opening ceremony and said, "Look at the colour of your hair!" The whole school already suspected that I might be a misbehaving kid; what I did just deepened that impression.

The atmosphere between my middle school and high school was completely different. Let me explain this in depth through some impressive events. One of them happened during school event preparation. I am someone who enjoys event planning, but my classmates did not want to put in much effort, and I was the only one putting in the work.

But my classmates were cheeky and would claim that they did those things while teachers came to check on our progress. I was disheartened when teachers would praise them when all they did was chitchat.

Is living cunningly really a good way to live life?

Is stepping on other people really the only way to climb up?

No, it shouldn't be this way. At least I don't agree with this way of living.

Even though the friends I made in middle school weren't excellent people, they were not the type that would steal other people's credit. Furthermore, they would make sure the shoes were placed nicely, tidy up the cutlery they used, and fold the towels they used when they came over to my place. They were all well-mannered people, helping friends in need; they never did anything dishonest or sneaky. Unpleasant memories about this cunningness I felt in my high school career implanted deeply into my brain.

I hated my high school life and started hanging out with my middle school friends again. One day we got into some trouble, and the police were involved. The police informed the disciplinary teacher, and I was suspended from school. The news quickly spread, and I got labelled as a bad kid who got suspended - not great at all. Unfortunately, I was presented again when my friends were being told off by the police, which got me suspended for the second time in less than 6 months. My school probably thinks I'm a bad influence to stay on; this could be a good chance for them to advise me to drop out. I thought my life was going to be over. All that hard work I put in to get here would go to waste. My mother cried so much after learning that my school might advise me to leave.

The head of year and the disciplinary teacher came to visit while I was suspended. Just when I thought they came to talk about dropping me out, they talked about something completely different. "Takuya studied hard to get into this school, your mother is pleased, it probably will ruin your future if we ask you to leave now. Don't get me wrong, it should be the case following the school's guidelines, but we spoke with the headmaster about it - would you like to stay and work harder?"

... I was really surprised. Since I've been suspended twice in such a short amount of time, school not only decided to forgive me but was also thinking about my future that hadn't even been considered by me. They tried hard to keep me in and were generally worried about my future.

"We asked Takuya about his middle school life, which is why we understand his struggle to get used to his high school life. Takuya does have a kind personality; we are thinking that he might just be in an unintentional self-sabotage mood."

Through those words, I realised that these two teachers were trying to understand me rather than labelling me like the others did. I treated everyone around me like enemies, but after hearing this conversation, I thought maybe I could trust them.

They didn't ask me to drop out in the end, but to write ten notebooks worth of reflection essays. Full of "I'm so sorry" and "I sincerely apologise", I didn't finish writing it until my handwriting started to look like some earthworms gathering.

I was saved by the teachers who cared about me. A sophomore-year student called me "yakuza's son" and dragged me into a toilet. It was the head of year that came to calm down the conflict. I would've screamed, "I am a yakuza's son, so what?" and beat someone up again if he did not show up, and that probably would've ended my high school career.

Surprisingly, it was always either the head of year or the disciplinary teacher who would come to stop me during a heated situation. That's too much of a coincidence. Thinking about it now, they probably kept an eye on me at all times (laugh). With that level of guidance, I did not fight anyone again until high school graduation and spent my high school years calmly. I hold so much gratitude towards these two teachers, who were like my mentors. Thanks to them, someone like me, who was deeply troubled at the beginning of high school, got to graduate safe and sound. Thank you very very much.

*Disciplinary teacher is sort of a concept that only exists in East Asian schools? I don't think they exist in the UK, but from my understanding, they are in charge of implementing school rules and usually assist the headmaster.

University Entrance Exam

I didn't do well in high school. In context, I was approximately the 353rd out of 360 students. It was just horrible, being one of the worst students in the year, but I wasn't anxious at all.

"Your grade is just horrible isn't it?"

"Do you think so? There are 7 people worse than me, though."

"Ummm... 5 of them didn't take the exam, so you are actually third from the last!"

I was acting positive when I had arguments like this with my teacher. I was attending extra tutoring classes so I thought it would all just work out eventually.

In my second year of high school, my teacher was helping me decide if I should continue to do humanities or science-based subjects. Maths was my strongest subject out of the five courses I was

taking, but my chemistry grades were shockingly bad, which made it hard for me to choose the science route.

When the school was coming to an end, my chemistry teacher said to me: "I've tried everything to improve your chemistry grades in the past two years; it didn't get anywhere, and I don't think you are able to get any further with chemistry. Even though your maths grades are good, you can't depend on a single strong subject. I believe you should consider choosing humanities subjects instead. If you work hard and concentrate on raising your English grades, you still have time to get really good scores out of the humanity route." So I decided to focus on the humanities subjects.

After that, my chemistry grades really didn't improve much, so I was really appreciative that my teacher had foreseen it. Rest of my grades quickly improved, and I started to develop an interest in literature and international history. Although that sounded arrogant, I have to admit that teachers are incredibly experienced given the amount of students they've encountered throughout their teaching career.

Since I started living a more typical high school life, I felt less pressured when it comes to study, but getting ready for the university entrance exam is another story. I'm traumatised by the way my parents pushed me to study harder as a kid, "do more mock exam papers!". The anxiety of having to be as good as my older brother, or my life would fail if I didn't do well in exams, only got worse when I started my third year of high school. My stomach would twitch whenever I heard someone say: "A university degree is important if you want to work for a good company."

To erase this pain, I spent every awakening minute aiming to get into Kobe University - my father's alma mater. Everyday, I get up really early and study until it's time to go to bed. My classmate Akira, my bass player now, would accompany me to extra tutoring class at 6 am. Studying nonstop a day was mentally and physically draining, but at least we made it to the exam.

Working hard doesn't guarantee a university offer. Sadly, I was not accepted to Kobe University. Pitch-black visions, I felt despaired, and thought my life was over. I considered taking the exam again, but my brother strongly opposed this idea: "You wouldn't work hard enough while waiting to retake the exam, so please don't do it. Which university you go to won't define your life!" So I ended up going to my second option, Kwansei Gakuin University.

Dear brother, thank you so much. If I had taken the exam again, I most likely would have failed again since, as my brother said, I doubted that I would have studied hard enough during the year off. It was hard for me to make a sensible decision when I was so sure that the university I attended would define my life. I can now confidently state that a university degree cannot truly determine a person's life.

At the time, I believed that a good university would be an important factor when looking for jobs. This may still be the belief now for those who are getting ready for their university entrance exam. There is a level of truth to it; you absolutely should study as hard as possible for exams. There are so many things you can learn from exams. It's just that your life is not finished if you don't end up going to your dream university.

When I look at my childhood friends now, some of the most unruly kids are now business owners and probably have a better life than those who went to famous universities, thus life. While some might argue that's just luck, let me assure you that these kinds of cases are far from unique.

Thereby, don't get defeated by not getting into the university of your dreams; everyone is shining through their uniqueness, an interesting soul is what makes people interesting. At least to me, I'm the happiest when I'm with people like that, and I want to work alongside people like that.

Human power cannot be overshadowed by their educational level. Truthfully, this is what I believe now.

Godmother

(Not too sure why the chapter is named Godmother since Takuya is talking about his mother throughout)

The word university gives a dreamy school life vision to people. It was time to fall in love with someone, have a sweet but sour relationship, go travelling with friends, and do all kinds of things, but that wasn't the case for me.

My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was going through a hell of time preparing for the university entrance exam. I had witnessed the way my mother cried in front of the bathroom mirror when I came back home from high school. An insane amount of hair would fall from my mother's head when she brushed it. She had to go through cancer treatment, but the side effects were torturing her spirit. The first thing that came to mind when I heard about her diagnosis was that this was all my fault. I'm sure people would say it's not; it's just me overthinking the situation. But like I mentioned, I was fighting a lot with my mother during middle school, hit her face, and got suspended twice in high school. How much pressure did I put her through? Thus, I don't think I have anything to do with her getting sick.

It was only my mother and I living together for the longest time; my older brother moved out to live his life, and my father was always on business trips overseas. I was planning to move to Kobe to start my university life, but what about my mother? Her hands were bloated due to the side effects of medications, couldn't even carry luggage. Am I supposed to just leave her alone to live that dreamy university life? I couldn't bring myself to do that. "Even just for the sake of making up all those misbehaving years I lived, I need to stay with her until she's recovered." I vowed to myself, and decided to commute two hours every day between home and university to take care of her.

Even though it was the only way to do it, I got really mad at my father, who was barely home all year. That rage got released one time when he came back from a business trip.

"Didn't you marry someone you love? Can't you do the least to stay home for a while since my mother is this sick? I gave up living on my own to take care of her!"

"Well, you can just go and live on your own if you want to."

My father tried to end the conversation like that. As if he were deciding what to have for dinner. I couldn't accept it as an answer, kept on saying,

"What about mum if I just leave like that?"

"I don't think you need to be this worried."

Couldn't keep my anger inside anymore after hearing his reply; next thing I knew, I was already shouting at him.

"Trust and love don't exist in this household! We have fucking nothing!"

As annoyed as I was towards my father, I felt the same way about my brother. He'd always lecture me when we saw each other and tell me to treat my mother nicer. Treating my mother nicer? He lives ages away; I didn't think he had the audacity to comment like that when our mother's illness changed nothing in his life. Anyone can talk the talk; it's easy to act tender when you are not around. Therefore, I lost all my respect for my father and my brother.

My mother was getting weaker, going back and forth between home and the hospital. I knew it was mainly the side effects from taking the medications, and it takes time for her to recover. But I was still worried, seeing my mother in this much pain.

You know the saying, It's one thing after another; it was exactly how my life was back then. I had a girlfriend from high school; we went to the same tutoring class. She said, "I'm going back to the tutoring class since I decided to retake the exam and aim for my dream university." She was someone I considered getting married with, and she got along well with my family. During this time, I heard some shocking news from my high school friend.

"I think she's dating a teacher from the tutoring class."

I always had this feeling. One week after exams, I got a phone call from her. She told me that she likes the tutoring class teacher more than me... She ended up being together with that teacher, and we broke up.

Obviously, I got very upset and isolated myself for a while after breaking up with someone who I generally wanted to spend the rest of my life with. My mother was worried about me when she was not in good shape herself and tried to motivate me: "It will pass; someone better is waiting for you in the future." I spent a month like this, and my mother was by my side the whole time. I was supposed to take care of her, but it ended up being the other way around. Looking back now, that was the moment I reconnected with my mother and understood the weight that comes behind the word mother. She was going through a tough time, but she still would give everything to her child in need. I hold so much respect for her.

My mother's illness got under control after cutting off one side of her breast, and she recovered well by the time I started my second year of university. I couldn't imagine the pain she went through as a man. But I can imagine the pain and the insecurity that come with cutting off a part of someone's body. That's enough of this topic for now.

Staring Into the Abyss

(Direct translation of the original title should be The Abyss of a Gambler)

My mother recovered well enough after I finished my first year of university. She said to me, "I'm in better shape now; go and enjoy your university life!" I didn't get to do things I wanted while taking care of her, which might explain what happened later. This is the first time I talk about this, the third-shittiest time in my life.

After starting my second year of university, I was all about having fun and totally forgot about studying. I was skipping classes and spent most of my time playing mahjong, pachinko, and slot machines with my friends. I was extremely addicted to gambling back then, hoping I'd get rich overnight. I would travel anywhere in the city if good money had been won.

Well, there's a reason why those gambling shops are making good money: they are profiting from the customers. My wallet was empty after the first month. Knowing this couldn't be the way forward, my friends and I started a team to gather information from pachinko shops. We had a shift system of gathering information from different shops, using the last results from the day before, trying to find the machine that would definitely win and go straight there. That was definitely a great team effort.

It was silly doing things like that, but I did profit a bit after a year of gathering information like that. I worked hard on things that were completely irrelevant. I hold no remorse for living a life like that even to this day, but I do admit that it was a wasteful time in my life.

It's impossible to always profit from pachinko and slot machines, but I learnt that the chance of winning is higher when you collect enough information and have a good game plan. What seems to be pure luck can be controlled, which was a valuable life lesson to me. Gambling can be an investment if you know what you are doing (translator's note: still, don't attempt gambling, lol). There are profits and risks in any path you might take; it's up to you to decide what's truly important to you.

This was the life I lived for a while before I decided to become a band man. Surprisingly, my desire for money has faded since that decision. Thereby, I put all of my passion into the real gamble of having a music career.

Words from Shige

Growing up, Takuya and I lived in the same apartment, so we've been friends since kindergarten. We were hanging out with other kids of the same age who were living in the same apartment until the third year of elementary school. When I think about it now, Takuya would add in new rules, even for a hide-and-seek game. He was always someone who loved to come up with new ideas and concepts and didn't like losing since he was a kid. I can still picture the way he used to cry out of denial of losing.

We grew apart during middle school as we were into different things. Takuya was interested in fashion and music. Watching him move forward, I was more admiring of him than feeling lonely or left out. I heard Takuya and Akira start a band and make original music during high school, which made me admire him even more. I almost felt like he was high above me.

Takuya invited me to join his band when I placed him so high in my heart, so I willingly followed him to this day. I do sometimes feel the guilt of making music with someone that I adore. But it was he who led me through and built the person I am today. Looking back at the way he worried and cared about me, I felt nothing but endless respect and gratitude towards him. All I want now is to continue this journey with him and see what the future holds for us together.

(Translator's note: It's kinda funny to see how Shige and Takuya hold completely different views about their relationship during middle and high school.)

Chapter 2: Tangled Music

First Impressions

I have a lot of memories with the members of my band, The Oral Cigarettes (shortened Oral below). It feels like our encounters were destined by faith. Let me write about my first impression of each member below.

Shige

Guitarist Shige is someone I know the longest from the band. We've been friends since kindergarten and went to the same elementary school, he is one of the friends I was hanging out with back then. However, I won't overlook the fact that he was one of the bystanders when I was getting bullied. Shige says, "It was Takuya who used to start an argument." I don't remember that being the case, and this is my biography, so I'm just going to write it as the way I remember it (laugh).

We had a great relationship until middle school, when we suddenly stopped hanging out with each other. Even though we went to the same middle school, Shige was one of the good kids, and I thought he was purposefully avoiding the naughty kids gang I was in. I felt like he didn't like the people I was hanging out with, and he looked down on us just like the others. But a lot of people had that impression, so I didn't really care much.

Nevertheless, we lived so close to each other, so I was able to find out about Shige's middle school life through my mother's frequent conversations with his mother. We went to different high schools. "I heard Shige formed a band," and I felt lucky to be able to know what he was up to. Because of that information, we get to play in the same band now. Thanks to my mother, Shige and I didn't lose touch. Shige is a quiet and solid person in my eyes, and we have a lot in common. Although I still believe he struggles to deal with mischievous people like me, his communication skills have massively improved. It feels like we have found the same happiness in playing together as kids again.

We went through different upbringings, but we unquestionably have similar personality traits. Our innate lack of confidence is a reflection of having low self-esteem. I think that as we go through this life path together, we are both working very hard to overcome these weaknesses.

Akira

Our band's backing vocalist and bassist is Akira. When it comes to him, my first impression was the worst. We met for the first time in an experience class at our high school. He was a friend of a friend from my tutoring class who also attended the class. The lesson was on model making, was the class, and I didn't pay enough attention in class to create a visually appealing model. Akira saw the model I made and laughed, "Wow, what is that!" Making fun of someone with the brightest smile... I wasn't sure if he was making fun of me, but I was annoyed. I believed for a very long time that I could never get along with Akira.

Akira, who is completely opposite of me and has incredible social skills, gets along with everyone. He has a unique personality and touches people's hearts with the charming smile he has. I watched as others became close with him, as if he was some kind of magician. I suppose I felt envious of him

because of that. I half-sarcastically thought, "He's so not picky when it comes to making friends; anyone would do."

Akira was annoying me one day after school.

"Hey, Takuya~ Let's go home together~!"

("... he's so annoying! Too annoying! Pretend you didn't hear him and just ignore him.")

"Why are you ignoring me~? Let's go back together! Hey!"

He probably shouted at me like this more than five times. I was practising karate at the time and kicked him out of frustration.

("Shit, I kicked him; I swore to myself not to do that outside practise venue.")

Akira's plastic backpack was broken; it didn't look fixable at all. He looked so upset that he was about to burst into tears. Even still, I pretended not to care.

"... stop following me now."

I said that and started walking, but I heard Akira's voice again.

"Why did you do that~!! Let's just go home together~!"

Akira carried his broken backpack and ran towards me. Looking at the way he was, I couldn't help but start smiling.

After making friends with Akira, I noticed that I was smiling more and felt easier to interact with people compared to before. It was because of him that I started to be more open about my feelings. Even though he would say things like, "I feel like there's a weird distance between me and other people now because of Takuya", I guess we both found some kind of balance. He has grown up a lot recently; I guess he hid some part of himself that bore resemblance to my own back in high school.

Masaya

Lastly, there is the drummer, Masaya. When I first met him, he was playing drums for another band. Being seven years older than me, he felt more like a bigger brother to me. Bands would usually go celebrating after a show, and going crazy, but Masaya hardly ever joined in. His reason for staying out was rather cool.

"Someone has to take everyone home, I'll just wait for you guys in the car!"

He cared more about taking everyone home safely than having fun himself. I found him super cool after hearing his reasons.

Masaya would join in if there were plans set in place to make sure everyone got home safe. And I could feel his tenderness when he was partying with us.

"I'm drumming for the front man."

One day he said that out of nowhere, and I still remember it so clearly.

His wishes to look after the members are evident in every word that he says. I felt nostalgic about being around people like that. The ways of the world my middle school friends taught me really reflected on Masaya. I understand him because we had gone through similar situations during our teenage years.

"People like this would not play dirty with anyone."

Wanting to bring kindness to people, even after going through the worst.

I invited Masaya to join the band after our drummer left. He didn't quit his old band - they disbanded at the same time.

If the timing was off for just a bit, we probably wouldn't be in the same band now. If I hadn't learnt what a tender and caring person Masaya is, we probably wouldn't be laughing together now.

After joining Oral, Masaya's personality altered, and he started to become a talkative yet reliable big brother of the band. But he said, "I'm just being myself again!" Maybe because he's older and more mature than us, he tries to match our energies. All in all, it's fantastic to play in a band with someone as kind and disciplined as he.

That concludes my first encounter with all the members. We have gone through high water together, growing into the tight group we are now that is genuinely proud to have each other's company.

Thank you all so much.

*Model making: obviously Takuya is talking about modelling kits here, not sure what he was building though - I'd presume it was a Gundam kit or equivalent (I would love it to be a Warhammer kit though lol). Oral members actually visited a toy shop that stores a lot of modelling kits during the Wonder About tour in Tokushima. Must have been nostalgic for Takuya and Akira.

Approach

I already talked about jamming with my older brother in chapter 1, so here, I'll focus on my life with music after that.

The first time I played in front of an audience was during a middle school event. I still remember everything about it. People gathered around the stage as soon as I started playing bass. I saw a crowd of excited faces, all swinging to the beat. It was a kind of pleasure you don't experience practising alone in a small room — it was happening right in front of my eyes. At the time, I was still struggling to trust people, still scared of being around them, so music became one of the only ways I could connect.

My passion for music didn't fade after I got into high school. Akira and I started a band through our school's music department, and outside of school, I formed a duo with Shige called Janne Da Arc. I spent almost every day in the music department, and most of my free time at live houses, watching performances by my favourite musicians. I was genuinely happy living that way.

Criticism comes with being in a band. Akira and I played with a guitarist who was meticulous about music-making. I trusted his obsession with music. I dedicated myself to following his lead, and Kotaro Oshio's CD became a treasure to me. Through Oshio's music, you could feel that he prioritised beauty over strong, aggressive tunes. We worked together as a team, united by a shared belief that we could reach our goals.

Punk music dominated Nara's music scene back then. It might sound crazy now, but punk felt like the only genre anyone cared about. Other bands would mock us: "Why form a rock band in Nara right now?" I didn't understand that mentality. Just because a different genre was trending, did we have to question the point of forming a rock band?

Regardless of what others thought, we were determined to make a name for ourselves.

We decided to stand our ground with Higher Ground (our band before Oral was formed). We worked harder, pouring more effort into every song we wrote. Our music, heavily influenced by bands like Red Hot Chili Peppers, moved us forward. We weren't chasing trends — we were creating the music we wanted to make.

As we stayed true to our style, people around us began to see us differently. Band members I admired started saying things like, "You guys are amazing! So cool!" That recognition, especially from those I looked up to, made me believe we were getting closer to becoming Nara's number one band, which motivated me even more.

However, things took a turn at a Nara band festival. After hearing some of the other bands, our guitarist commented, "They're just making noise, not music." He left the festival after making that comment.

We wanted different things. While Akira and I were determined to be the top band, that wasn't his goal. For him, becoming number one at a festival with bands like that didn't mean anything. It was the classic story of creative differences, but nothing more than that — our relationship didn't have to end the way it did.

After the guitarist left the band, we found a new bassist, and I switched to guitar. The new bassist didn't complain about our intense practice schedule — he stuck with us on our journey to become Nara's top band.

Eventually, we won Nara's high school battle of the bands. Our band gained more recognition, and we were almost selling out live house tickets — a huge step forward. By the age of 17, I was in a band that performed nationwide. We travelled to different places, playing live shows, practising, and repeating the process. "This is what life in a band is like..." Even though it was exhausting, the sense of accomplishment outweighed the fatigue. That was the foundation for me to keep pursuing music.

There was just one thing standing in our way: the university entrance exams. Balancing band life was hard enough, doing both would simply be impossible. In the end, we had to put the band on hold and focus on the big exam ahead.

Expectations

At our last live show before the band went on hiatus, many fans came to see us. Some were crying, saying, "Please come back soon." Others said, "I'll be waiting for you guys to return!" The outpouring of support that day lifted my spirits, despite the hell like schedule Akira and I had between studying and attending tutoring sessions.

However, only three people showed up at our comeback show. People began to say things like, "Those tears at your hiatus show were just an illusion." It was disheartening, and I felt a mix of sadness and anger.

"Were they really that upset, but then just forgot about us so quickly?" That's how I felt at the time. Now, I see things very differently. It's natural for people to drift apart; life changes quickly, and so do our priorities and interests. I've gone through some similar situations throughout my life. It was wrong of me to expect people to wait for us, and even worse to feel angry when they didn't. After all, this kind of thing happens even in personal relationships.

"They cared so much, but betrayed us so easily."

“We fought so hard for this, only for it to mean nothing.”

When we feel close to someone, it's natural to develop expectations. But the rage we feel when those expectations aren't met is often misplaced. That expectation was one-sided, and I was torturing myself with it.

To move past this sorrow, I made a decision: I would only place expectations on myself at every live show. I stopped worrying about others and focused on controlling what I could. Our comeback show wasn't unsuccessful because people abandoned us — it was because we hadn't made a strong enough impression to keep them around. I wasn't satisfied with that conclusion, but it fuelled our determination. We swore that one day we would play shows that left lasting memories for our fans.

A Voice that Should Have Disappeared

Akira was the vocalist of Higher Ground (before The Oral Cigarettes), we were forced to reconsider the future of the band when the drummer left the band. While we were unable to make a decision, Akira came up with an idea.

“Takuya has always been the one writing the lyrics - our songs would sound so much better if the person writing them sings them.”

“... Absolutely no way, I don't want to sing.”

“Why do you hate singing so much?”

To answer that, we'll have to go back to my childhood. Growing up, singing was something I loved. Back in elementary school, I could sing songs like Hikaru Utada with the wide vocal range I had. I couldn't understand why my brother suffered so much to reach high notes in Karaoke. My family would compliment my singing, and I was overjoyed to hear those encouraging words. The little kid who could never be better than his brother in study was good at something else, for once the spotlight shined on me.

However, that was just in elementary school. My voice changed after I joined the middle school basketball team, as a friend's hand accidentally hit my throat during a game. I had the impression that I was speaking in someone else's voice, and my voice tone became ridiculously low. I was so upset by the situation that I was unable to accept that my voice had changed. Self-confidence turned into self-abasement. I felt sad that I wasn't able to sing high notes and have a wide vocal range anymore and decided to give up on singing altogether.

Friends in middle school had already accepted their voice changes, I was envious. It was tragic being the only one who was unable to accept the change and missing his old voice.

Since I lacked the confidence in my singing voice, I was unable to accept Akira's proposition. How could I sing in front of others when I didn't like my own voice? I expressed how unsettling it was to find out how I couldn't sing anything through singing, but Akira persisted.

“Why don't we just try? It's fine if we really couldn't work it out. If Takuya agrees to be the vocalist, I'll start to learn bass. Let's both start from scratch.”

— Start from scratch.

This sentence resonated with me; I felt like it offered a second chance for me to accept what I wasn't able to accept during middle school. Akira smiled in the same way he always does; as bright and encouraging as he was like in high school, nothing has changed.

And that's the beginning of The Oral Cigarettes.

Extra Chapters: 僕を生かしてくれた人たち

Takuya wrote some extra chapters for a website called DDNAVI to commemorate his biography, where he talked about people who helped him a lot but couldn't fit these stories into the book.

There are 10 chapters in total.

Stylist Mr. SIVA

<https://ddnavi.com/serial/764129/a/>

One of the first things I did when I moved to Tokyo was go clothes shopping with a simple idea in my head: "I'm in a rock band; I need a rider jacket that I can wear on a daily basis." Since it was my first time doing clothes shopping in Tokyo, I wanted to buy something that I truly loved.

But I couldn't quite find the right one after going to at least ten stores, and in my mind, I thought, "Maybe that's that!". A stylist I was in contact with back then said to me, "Have a look at this look book if you are looking for a rider jacket. I think this is more of your style." I had a look and knew immediately that's the type of clothes I was looking for.

When I went to a stockist that sold the clothes in the look book, I met SIVA, a stylist for a brand called MUZE. A tough-looking guy came out of the store and said to me, "I've lent you an outfit before," in a friendly tone.

I found myself wondering why MUZE clothes looked so appealing to me... SIVA started to explain the attention to details that goes into his designs: "This zip was designed having Stanley Kubrick's aspect ratio in mind." That's some of my favourite films, I thought, thinking this person probably has the same taste as me. That's when I realised why I was so attracted to his design.

We became friends very quickly by talking about our favourite films. He's 10 years older than me, so naturally he has some amazing knowledge about clothes and the cultures behind them, which he would share with me. It's fascinating; sometimes he would come up to me and say, "Let me give you some music recommendations if you are into this outfit."

He's the person who taught me how to understand things that I don't know. Before that, I was only wearing clothes to make myself look cool. He said, "Your outfit is linked to your music tastes. Which is why you should be wearing clothes that contain a meaning."

People around him share the same vibe as him, and I was scared that soon enough they'd find out that I'm not as knowledgeable as them and see me as a worthless person. Motivated by their overwhelming ability to understand the world around us and the depth of their knowledge, I decided to work harder than ever to be on the same level as them.

Meeting SIVA offered me an opportunity, reminded me that I should always dig deeper into the fields that I'm interested in.

Knowing what one is interested in is connected to shaping their spirit. And I believe that the power of "like" as an emotion can create a positive impact on my future music career.

