

2017 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize]

## **Mother Nature**

(Original in Japanese)

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*The forest is indispensable to human beings, which is why deforestation is a serious problem.*

I have heard this kind of statement again and again. But why is the forest so important? Why is deforestation such a serious problem? Having little interest in nature or the environment, I didn't understand why it mattered so much.

However, participating in an international exchange in grade 11 changed my mind. The main theme of our exchange was the Indonesia 100 Year Forest Project. With our sister school in Indonesia, we were divided into teams, each focusing on a different area—environmental education, community development, ecotourism, and so on. During our week together, we considered, from these various points of view, how we could preserve Indonesia's forests for the next 100 years, and we started putting our ideas into action.

I was in the Community Development group, and we were working with a local women's group called PKK, thinking about how they could sell more of the soap that they made from local tea and lemongrass. There were two main reasons why we undertook this activity. Firstly, it was believed that the soap-making business gave employment to women and helped to revitalize the village, so that promoting the activities of the women's group was connected to the development of the village. It was also thought that promoting the women's activities would indirectly help to protect the forests, because the women's group played a role in forest preservation.

During the exchange, I realized that the majority of people in the village I visited earned their income from the forest or from nature. They grew crops, or they sold products made with things they harvested from the forest. What I realized was that people's livelihoods are closely connected with the forest. Until then, I had thought that the only role of the forest was to absorb carbon dioxide and emit oxygen. In both advanced and developing countries, people

living in cities tend to think this way. But they don't realize that in everyday life, they are receiving the blessings of the forest.

A well-known example is the way people living in cities will visit a place full of nature when they need to release some stress or take a mental break. Thinking back on my own past, I newly realized this. For a long time, I have unconsciously loved nature. In nature, I was able to calm down and forget my troubles. For this reason, I often visited a nature park in my neighborhood. At what point, I wondered, did I start to make light of the blessings of nature?

Perhaps it is similar to what happens as we grow up. We forget to be thankful to our mother who gave birth to us, and as we get older, we become colder toward our mother. It is the same, I feel, with our relationship to nature and the forest. Although we are constantly receiving nature's blessings in our daily life, we lose sight of this.

Nature is humanity's mother. That is why all of us are able to relax when we visit someplace where nature is abundant.

Today, the main source of people's livelihoods has shifted from agriculture to industry. People have moved from places rich in nature to go live in cities. We often neglect the blessings that we are receiving from nature. However, I think we need to learn that our lives are sustained by nature, and that without nature, we could not live from day to day. It might seem like a very simple, obvious thing, but such simple, obvious things are the most important.

As stated above, nature is our mother. In order to preserve Mother Nature for future generations, I think we should do what we can, little by little, to protect nature, starting with the places closest to us. As an example, I am now studying the importance of 'ethical fashion,' or fashion that is environmentally conscious. Through this research, I hope to let many people know about the value and preciousness of nature.

I believe we can solve any environmental problem by loving Mother Nature. This is because when we love and care for nature, our way of thinking and acting changes.