



Video Story Transcript

Cost of Racism

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Khi6Rbz86fc>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Motoko. My son, Charlie was born in 1987. As I raised him in western Massachusetts, I have always spoken to him only in Japanese. It is important to me that my son speaks my native language. When you think about it, you realize that parents have great power and responsibility to shape their children's world by teaching them meanings of words. For example, I once took my son to his friend's birthday party and on the way home, I said, Sore wa tanoshikatta, that was fun, wasn't it?"

And my son would say, "Yeah, that was fun." You see, that way I was teaching him the meaning of the word fun. Or when his best friend at the daycare moved to another city, I said, "Now don't be sad; we can visit him over the summer and stay in touch." See that way, I was teaching him what it meant to be sad and I was glad to be there to make him feel better. But as my son grew older, there were naturally fewer and fewer occasions for me to define his feelings and experiences. And that started me worrying. Maybe some of you have a mother or father who worries too much. Maybe some of you are parents who worry too much.

All my son's life, I have tried hard to teach him not just Japanese language, but also Japanese ways of life. By saying things like, "Don't forget to take off your shoes in the house because we're Japanese." Or, "Always bow to your grandparents because we are Japanese." Or, "Eat this rice with pickled seaweed and fermented soybeans and stop complaining because that's the Japanese way." But whenever I said things like that, my son would giggle and, to my consternation, answer in English.

"No, I'm an American. I was born here." Actually, he had turned out to be quite contrary to most of my expectations. I know next to nothing about sports but my son turned out to be a jock. He loved playing

soccer. When he was in second grade, he came to me with this revelation mom, "Soccer is life. The rest is details."

I said, "What about your homework?"

So, when my son was in fifth grade he applied to and was accepted to participate in a week long advanced boys soccer camp at the University of Massachusetts. Now, my son had never stayed away from home for an entire week before this. And all the other boys will be sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Never mind I live only two miles away from the campus. I was beside myself with worry. So, when my son finally came home that Saturday afternoon, I was waiting in the doorway to welcome him home and to ask him all the motherly questions. "How did it go?"

"Fine."

"Did you have a good time?"

"Yeah."

"Did you play well?"

"Sure." And as I followed my son into the dining room, I even marveled at his monosyllabic responses to female questioning. A true sign of a Japanese manhood. But wait... something seemed to be bothering him. I looked at him, his short-cropped black hair and his beautiful face, tanned to perfect brown. His usually dreamy eyes were cast down as he sat at my dining room table.

I said, "Is there something wrong?"

Reluctantly my son said, "Well, some kids at that camp from South River made weird noises and laughed at me."

"What weird noises?"

"Ching-cho, Japanese. Hi-a Ussel."

"What does that mean?"

"You know, Mom, they were making fun of me because I'm Japanese." In a flash, all my blood boiled up to my face. Words I did not know I had in my English vocabulary, exploded in my head. Then suddenly, I realized that what shocked me the most was not the fact that those boys made fun of my son, but the fact that it was my very first time to hear my son identify himself as Japanese. Then, I had an experience that I had never had before. A flashback, I was engulfed by a childhood memory, back in Osaka, Japan, in the 1970s.

In my third-grade class, there was a boy named Akita. He was tall and strong and fast, really good at baseball. I had the biggest crush on him. One winter day, Akita missed school. So when the teacher asked for someone to bring him the math homework, I volunteered. I had never been to Akita's house before. So, the teacher drew a little map for me and wrote down his address. Akita lived in the section in the city that I had never been to. So, I went home first to drop off my bag, I told my grandma where I was going, and I headed out. I had to cross a big metal bridge with lots of traffic. And coming to an old dilapidated section of the city, all the houses were made of dark wood predating the World War II. The houses were built without any space in between. So, it was hard for me to tell where one house ended and another started. I got turned around a bit. It took me about an hour to find Akita's home. By then early dusk was failing. I rang the doorbell but

nobody answered. I tried again, maybe Akita was sick and his mother had taken him to the doctor. Maybe I should leave the math homework in between the two sliding front doors. Just then I heard light footsteps behind me and turned around and saw a little boy standing there. This little boy was about 5 years old, maybe in kindergarten. But his face was so much like Akita's that it was obvious to me that he was Akita's brother.

I said, "Hi, I'm Akita's classmate. I brought him his homework." But the boy looked at me as if he had not heard me. So, I looked at him and I realized that the boy had been crying. His face was dirty with tears and grim. His shirt was rumpled and I saw some mud on his pants. Maybe he had been in a fight. Maybe some older kids had been picking on him. I said, "Are you all right? Did you have a fight? Where is your mom?"

And I reached out to touch his shoulder when suddenly the boy glared, shoved my hand away and yelled, "Go away, you stupid Korean!" I actually did not know what he meant but he felt as if he had slapped me across the face. I dropped my math homework and ran, tears blurring my sight.

When I finally got home my grandma said, "What happened to you?"

"Grandma, this little boy called me a stupid Korean. Why? Am I Korean?" And I told her the whole story between sobs. My grandma listened quietly and she looked thoughtful.

Finally, she said, "No, Motoko you are not Korean but that little boy is and his family. But that little boy does not know what the word means. People are prejudiced around here. And kids make fun of him. So, he thinks Korean is a bad word. He's angry at everyone. He thought he was calling you a name."

"Mom, are you ok?" My son was staring at me strangely as I came out of this momentary reverie.

And I looked on my son and thought about saying something like, "You know we live in this college town where people tend to be more diverse and open minded. But in a little surrounding town like South River, people can be ignorant and full of prejudice." I also thought about saying something like, "Just tell me those kids names and I'll find out where they live. Rip them to pieces." But what I really wanted to say was, "Don't internalize the hurt you feel, the way that little boy did. Just know in your heart that you are as good as any and better than many. If I can come with you every time you leave my house to protect you, I would." But I didn't say any of those things. I just said, "Do you want me to write a letter of complaint to your coach?"

"Nah, that's OK," my son said. "I can handle it. Me and my buddies beat those guys at scrimmage, anyway." He had the biggest grin on his face and said, "You know, Mom, though what you could do to make me feel a lot better?"

"What? I'll do anything. Oh, I know. Let me give you a hug."

"No," he laughed as he ducked out of my embrace and said, "You know, there's these new Gameboy games that just came out in Japan. No one in the United States has them yet. So, if you could call Uncle Minoru," (that's my brother in Japan) "Uncle Minoru, and give him some money so he will send them to me, that would make me the coolest kid among my friends."

I said, "How much are they?"

"\$50 a seat and there are three I want."

"That's \$150!" I scream in my head. Then I just said, "I'll call him right now." All I can say is, it is expensive to fight racism.

