

# WHAT ABILITIES DID WE GAIN AT JIYU GAKUEN?

## GRADUATES ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION



**Kageyama:** First of all, let's start by telling a little bit about ourselves.

**Hanabusa:** I graduated from Jiyu Gakuen at age 20 and started working at a trading company. Then, after a year or so, I started to wonder whether I was contributing to people's happiness by selling the commodities we were selling. This led me to quit the company, after which I experienced working at many different jobs until I found what I really wanted to do. During this time, I happened to meet Seiichi Motohashi, a photographer and movie director, who is also a Jiyu Gakuen graduate. This led me to become involved in the world of motion pictures.

**Koyama:** I am a freelance writer and also do some editorial work as well. After graduating from Jiyu Gakuen, I first joined the Fujin-no-Tomo publishing company. Then, after my marriage brought me to Sendai, I got involved in various community activities and joined an NPO that works to improve local community life mainly by linking cities and rural farming areas. As a writer, I write about such community projects for a local newspaper and also for the past several years, I have resumed an editing work for Fujin-no-Tomo as well.

**Yamaguchi:** I finished the four-year undergraduate course at Jiyu Gakuen in 2008 and joined the Nikkei newspaper company. I was assigned to a position in the company's advertising section. The

### PARTICIPANTS

(FROM RIGHT TO LEFT)

**Tetsuya Morita**

(Class of 1994)

English-language school manager;  
former staff member of Japan  
International Food for the Hungry

**Atsuko Koyama**

(Class of 1976)

Freelance writer; NPO volunteer

**Aya Hanabusa**

(Class of 1994)

Movie director

**Azusa Yamaguchi**

(Class of 2008)

Cross-Media Advertising & Business  
Bureau, Nikkei Inc. (newspaper  
company)

**Kazunori Kageyama**

(Class of 1979)

Senior Corporate Officer, Hakuodo  
Inc. (advertising company)

**Kentaro Arikawa**

(Class of 1979)

Professor at The Graduate University  
for Advanced Studies

section's name has been changed to Cross-Media Advertising & Business, but I am doing the same job of marketing advertisement space in the Nikkei newspaper, as well as for its online media, targeting corporate clients. It's been almost three years since I started this job.

**Morita:** I went to Denmark, soon after graduating from Jiyu Gakuen, to study at a community college called the Folk School. Then, I got involved in a project in Zimbabwe to support the self-reliance efforts of the country's farming communities. After that, I joined another international NGO and worked in the Central American country of Nicaragua and in East Africa as well for about 10 years as a representative of that NGO. In Ethiopia, I even worked in a remote area where we needed to drive a land cruiser over unpaved bumpy roads for as many as 10 hours to get there.

**Kageyama:** And now, you are an English teacher at a language school in Yokohama.

**Morita:** Yes. I've had the experience of learning different languages and cultures overseas and learned that such experience can broaden one's view and insights. I felt that children today could have a similar experience, and that's why I chose my present job, but teaching English is merely a means. What I really want to do is to turn our school into a place that develops the characters of the students.

**Kageyama:** Well, I joined an advertising company after graduation and now belong to a sales and marketing division. In a major advertising company, the work of the marketing division includes such activities as corporate branding, advertising communication, and sales promotion. We design and carry out projects in such areas for corporate clients, and all of these activities require teamwork. A variety of specialists are involved on one project team, and we have such a team for each of our accounts, which number in the thousands. My responsibility is to manage all those teams and accounts.

**Arikawa:** I graduated from the school in 1979. In those days, students majored either in science or economics, and I was a science major. Because I wanted to continue studying, I then went on to a graduate school. Now I am a professor of The Graduate University for Advanced Studies. This university is a unique national university that has graduate students only. My field of study is insect's color vision—that is, I study what kind of mechanism insects use to perceive colors. I've been an insect lover since I was a little kid.

**Kageyama:** I understand your research is recognized even overseas, Mr. Arikawa.



Mr. Kageyama

**Arikawa:** Well, not so many people study the eyes of insects, anyway. In my first published research paper, I reported my discovery of finding eyes located at the tip of the swallowtail butterfly's tail. I made this discovery only by coincidence, but it attracted people's attention for its uniqueness.

## I finally got it after 40

**Kageyama:** OK, now let's discuss how we apply what we learned at school in the real world.

**Koyama:** At Jiyu Gakuen, we considered the school as being its own small society and engaged in a "self-governing" school life. We learned how to be a better person who tries to make the society we belong to a better one. I think this had a significant influence on me. Even now, I still have dreams in which I'm screaming: "Oh, no! I'm late for school!" (Laughs). Then, waking up, I am so relieved to know that was a dream. But this proves that my time at Jiyu Gakuen has really become an indispensable part of me.

**Hanabusa:** That's right! I had a dream of failing to bring in the weekly calligraphy assignment. (Laughs)

**Koyama:** So, when I was in my 20s, there was a time when I wanted to be away from the Jiyu Gakuen tradition and see myself objectively. I learned other things out in society, and it was not until I got into my 40s that I was able to put together what I learned at Jiyu Gakuen with what I learned later. It was then that my education really produced fruit.

**Morita:** I'm not sure if this is because of my roots in Jiyu Gakuen or because I am simply Japanese, but I have really developed the habit of self-reflection. In the Boys Department, we had to perform self-reflection and review each time during committee meetings. In some international projects that I've been involved with in the past, there were cases when certain people suggested we take time to review a project that had been just finished. They were, in most cases, Japanese people.

**Koyama:** In my case, what I learned from my involvement in farming communities is that in any society, people depended on each other to make their living. However, nowadays, we tend to compete with others and focus on winning, saying for example, "We have to produce better rice than theirs." In the market place, many people are forced to believe everything is about competing. When I see such people, I say to them that it is not "competition" but "working hard together" that



Ms. Koyama



counts. I can say this with confidence because I learned the importance of cooperation, rather than competition, at Jiyu Gakuen.



Ms. Hanabusa

**Hanabusa:** Let me talk about a film I made, the title of which is “Houri-no Shima” (“Holy Island”). It is a documentary about the people on a small island in Yamaguchi Prefecture, who have been opposing the construction of a nuclear power plant on their island for a long time. The reason behind my desire to make this film goes back to my experience at Jiyu Gakuen. The fact that impressed me most was that these people were against the nuclear plant not because of their ideology but they simply wanted to continue their self-sufficient lifestyle, which has been maintained in that place for over 1000 years. They just want to maintain for their descendants their traditional lifestyle that values the blessings of nature. That’s where I see their “thinking” and “praying.” That is the reason I thoroughly focused on filming their “real” life, and this, I believe, is a product of Jiyu Gakuen’s education.

**Arikawa:** The field of scientific research is actually a highly competitive world. If you meet people doing similar research, you hide your data from them. We pretend like we are talking friendly, but we never reveal the critical data. When I was in graduate school, one of my senior associates told me, “If your research is good enough, people don’t care if you’re a crook.” I snapped at him, “That can’t be right!” Then, almost 20 years later, he came up and told me he was wrong at that time.

**Yamaguchi:** I looked back on my career for the first time when I was asked to attend this meeting. When I first began in advertising sales, I had a hard time competing with other newspaper companies in winning contracts. Then, I had a change of mind and realized that I need to deliver the readers of our newspaper the same advertisements that were in other newspapers. I think I probably learned this idea of “doing something for others” at Jiyu Gakuen. This way of thinking often helps me when I have doubts or questions in what I am doing.

**Kageyama:** In advertising, we are sometimes asked by clients to get the best creative staff for their important ads. But, that may not be always possible because some particular members of the “best team” may be working on another project at that time. Even in such a situation, we need to provide what is supposed to be the best for the client. At Jiyu Gakuen, each student needed to be a leader of various projects, but the leader couldn’t choose the project members as he or she liked. I think I was trained there, without realizing it, to gain an ability to put the right person in the right place.

**Hanabusa:** Yes, I understand. At Jiyu Gakuen, we have a unique group system called the “family” system (In each grade, students are placed in “families” of six students and the family members are shuffled twice a year.) When I look back on this, I realize that this system provided a great learning opportunity. No matter whether you like other members or not, you need to share your school life with your family members for one semester. I think we learned what it was like to be in the same boat, and this worked greatly for me to develop the idea of finding creative solutions in cooperation with existing members, admitting other member’s strengths and weaknesses alike.

### How did Christian teachings influence your life?

**Kageyama:** At Jiyu Gakuen, we have a morning worship service everyday, and Christianity is the basis of our education. Mr. Morita, do you feel any influence from Christianity in your life?



Mr. Morita

**Morita:** Yes, it made a great influence on me. I am a Christian, and I was baptized when I was a senior in college. Teachings from the Bible are mostly very simple, like “Love your neighbors.” And, by listening to them repeatedly, they have become my inner voice. Of course, it took some real-life experience to figure out what these words really meant to me. Nevertheless, it was crucial that I did hear them when I did. I think, through the daily worship, the teachings gradually penetrated me.

**Koyama:** I was the kind of student who wasn’t able to continue things until I was really convinced. In our class, there were many different types of students. Some had an excellent understanding, and some were very honest and tried their best in whatever they did. Jiyu Gakuen respected the good sides of all these different characters, without demanding a certain standard. On the basis of such education, I think, is the founders’ Christian-based concept of human life that all children are given some gifts and talents from God. At some time in life, I guess everybody experiences some hardship—whether it is from work or human relationships. Sometimes you may feel so depressed and think yourself worthless. Even in such a situation, I think I can hang in there, I guess, because I am able to believe that my life is given from God and I should have a mission to fulfill in this world.

### We need to explain about our school because it’s so unique

**Kageyama:** How about academic life at Jiyu Gakuen?

**Arikawa:** I think it’s good. When we were at the high school, it was

often emphasized that our college was a place to study really hard, wasn't it? By the time I actually went on to the college, I was totally prepared and indeed worked really hard there.

**Kageyama:** Mr. Morita, how did you study English? After graduation?

**Morita:** Well, I think my English is largely indebted to my teachers at Jiyu Gakuen. When I first learned the English alphabet in junior high, I had a hard time writing the letters that I didn't know. But my teacher then told me to enjoy learning new things. By the time I was in senior high school, I was enjoying reading *The Japan Times*, which I found in the teachers' office or somewhere.

**Kageyama:** It's important to find motivation, right?

**Morita:** Yes, indeed. In my case, I had a chance to participate in a program to visit America with students from other schools when I was a senior high student, and this made me study English even harder. Because I was able to find the goal of talking freely with foreign people, I began to study proactively without being told.

**Kageyama:** Ms. Yamaguchi, you are the youngest here and the only one who graduated from the coeducational college (established in 1999), aren't you?

**Yamaguchi:** Yes, I felt perfectly comfortable in the coeducational college. At both the high school and the college, I was in an environment where I was able to do whatever I wanted to do. I think that worked well for me in my work. For example, at one biology study presentation on animal organs, my group was assigned to make a presentation on animal lungs. At first, we tried to draw a picture of alveolar architecture. But then we felt like using a three-dimensional model. So we asked our biology teacher to get pig lungs so that we could make a silicon model. I remember I really learned just how small alveoli really were by making a silicon mold using real lungs.

**Arikawa:** One unique thing about our school is that our graduates work in such diverse fields as advertising, photography, journalism, or guitar making—despite the fact that we all took the same coursework in the same class. In my case, I didn't gain all of my knowledge in biology at Jiyu Gakuen College. But, if you know what you are missing, you can figure out what you need to study. I think what is important in education is to provide such a foundation for further study.

**Kageyama:** I remember, when I was in high school, we needed to do a social science class project; and my group took up the subject



Ms. Yamaguchi



Mr. Arikawa



of Japan's single-seat constituency system. Our teacher told us then, "If you are really interested in this area, go and listen to someone in the Diet Members' Office." At first, we hesitated. Then the teacher said, "Just make a phone call. Someone will answer." So, we did and got an appointment with Ms. Fusae Ichikawa, then a famous member of the Diet, and she told us all about the system and answered our questions. I just felt at that moment that even a high school student could talk with such a person as long as we could make a proper phone call. Now, I tend to take action before worrying. Well, by the way, did any of you have any difficult experiences because you graduated from Jiyu Gakuen?

**Hanabusa:** No, I myself didn't have anything like that. Things like, for example, that I am female or have graduated from Jiyu Gakuen are all just one part of who I am. If somebody judges me by only looking at such small elements of me, I just don't care. It's OK for them to do so because that's their business. When I chose to study at Jiyu Gakuen, I was well aware that I would not be in the majority in Japanese society. I think now that is my strongest point, and I'm so proud that I have studied at Jiyu Gakuen.

**Arikawa:** That's quite interesting because I feel the same way. I have two sons: One is a high school junior, and the other a college freshman at Jiyu Gakuen. And I am telling them, "You will be living as a minority." There are only a few people who have experienced this kind of unique education. So, I'm telling my boys that we need to describe our experience to other people.

**Kagayama:** Yes, I think we have a mission to talk about it. Well, thank you everyone for your interesting words.