

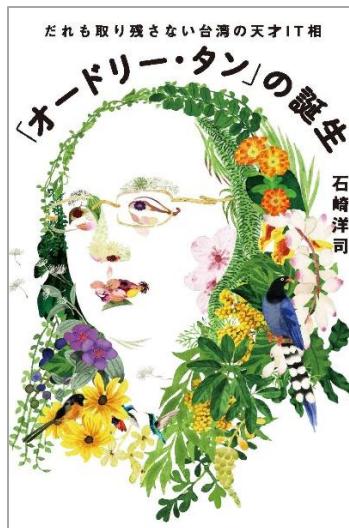
Biography

The Birth of Audrey Tang

by Hiroshi Ishizaki

Translated by Emily Balistreri

Illustrations and Cover by Maki Kobayashi



- **Target readers:** Elementary-school ages and up. It's a perfect parent-child read!
- **Keywords:** biography, diversity, understanding others, bullying, school refusal, sexual minorities, transgender, social innovation, digital democracy

About Audrey Tang (Tang Feng)

Born in 1981 in Taipei, Taiwan. Serving as Taiwan's "Digital Minister." Dropped out of junior high at age 14 and helped found a company. From a young age, she developed software and achieved remarkable things in AI, automatic translation, and other fields, earning her the moniker "IT god." Came out as transgender at age 24.

After consulting for Apple, she declared at age 33 that she was retiring from business. Became Taiwan's youngest minister ever in 2016 as part of Tsai Ing-wen's new administration. She works to open up politics and the government to the people using IT. During the COVID-19 pandemic, her decisive actions have been a great help in countering the virus's spread. She was selected as one of the American global affairs magazine *Foreign Policy*'s 2019 Global Thinkers.

Summary

180 IQ, started a company in her teens, IT god, Apple consultant, retired from business at age 33, youngest minister in Taiwan... The words that follow Audrey around appear to represent those who win in the game of society, but in various senses, life was rough; she was often ostracized.

Immediately after birth, she was diagnosed with a heart condition, and during her early years, crying or a common cold could have been the end. Due to her high intelligence, she didn't fit in at school and started refusing to go at age 8. Despairing at the world, she even considered death. Discord at home prompted her father to move to Germany, and the family faced a crisis that threatened to lead to collapse.

Thanks to her mother's desperate efforts, many different "teachers," and talented older friends, she was able to make up with her father in Germany. Encountering the internet just as it began its rise to prominence brightened the future that had once felt so dark to her.

In junior high, Audrey was recognized for her outstanding abilities and secured advancement to an elite high school, but something didn't feel right to her. The gap between everyone's rising expectations and the things she wanted to do, the gap between her body and her mind. The gap between hacker culture of solving everyone's problems together and real life where everything was a ranked competition with winners and losers...

Her salvation during that time was the diversity of Taiwan's indigenous peoples. "We can definitely find a way to not compromise ourselves while not causing trouble for others; I'm sure we can all get along." With that conviction, Audrey quit school, determined to live on her own terms.

This book is split into two parts, Audrey's Childhood and Audrey's Work, and tells the story of how she ended up a standard bearer of the new democracy, inspiring hope around the world.

Her life story contains hints for respecting diversity and finding common values that can overcome divides. It's a great book for learning about the new democracy that is digital yet warm and human-friendly.

Publication Date: April 2022

Pages: 207

Price: 1,500 Yen

ISBN: 978-4-06-527593-1

Author Profile: Hiroshi Ishizaki

Born in Tokyo. Upon graduating from Keio University, he worked at a publisher and eventually debuted as an author and translator. Won the Noma Literary Prize for Children's Literature and the Japan Juvenile Writers Association Prize for *Sekai no hate no majo gakkō* (The witch school at the end of the world). His multitudinous popular works include the *Kuromajo-san ga tōru!!* series (Here comes the black witch!!) and he has also written many other biographies.

CONTACT Morio Kitaoka

Mail:kokusai_shoseki@kodansha.co.jp

Tel: +81-3-5395-3576

KODANSHA LTD.

2-12-21 Otowa, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN

Web Site <http://children.kodansha.co.jp>



The Birth of Audrey Tang

by Hiroshi Ishizaki

Sample Translation by Emily Balistrieri

Table of Contents

Prologue: Audrey and COVID-19

- Mask panic
- Taiwan's Real-Name Mask Purchasing System
- Make a mask map in three days!
- To not leave anyone behind
- Who is Audrey Tang?
- "A society where everyone solves everyone's problems together"
- Beat fake news with humor!

Part 1: Audrey's Childhood

1. The Trouble with Being Gifted

- A congenital heart condition
- Doing the same thing as everyone else is boring
- 1 + 1 isn't always 2
- She's too much for me to handle...
- The fear of corporal punishment
- "If you would just die, I'd be number one!"
- Refusing school
- An unexpected reaction
- The brink of despair

2. Encounters

- Writing programs on a paper computer
- True gifted education
- Why did everyone bully me?
- Joining sixth grade as a fourth-grader
- Her father reflecting in Germany
- Surprising times

Is it fine for a father to arrogantly order his children around?

I want to change the education system!

3. The World of the Internet and School

A digital library and digital bulletin boards

Username: Everyone's Child

Tsung-hao refusing school

Let's make a school!

"Where are the kids' voices?"

A principal who gets it

The hacker spirit of cooperation over competition

There are three people inside me...

Holed up in the mountains

I'm dropping out of middle school!

4. The Birth of Audrey Tang

Audrey's program is a global hit!

Troll hugging and rough consensus

The open source movement

A rock musician friend!

Audrey travels the world

Coming out as a transgender

Leave no one behind

Part 2: Audrey's Work

1. g0v and Open Government

No more working for money

They're insulting the people!

Let's make a dictionary together!

Leave a record of diversity!

The reason MOEdict doesn't include Japanese...

2. More Open! More Transparent!

The Sunflower Student Movement

What we need is transparency!

Convey both sides of the debate

Use the net instead of demonstrations!

3. vTaiwan and Join

Not slander, rough consensus!

A high-schooler's proposal became a law!

4. Education Reform

Such an important meeting, yet no record of the proceedings?!

Does everyone have to learn the same things?

5. Audrey Becomes a Minister

"This person will work for Taiwan."

Listening to one voice can change how society thinks

What is open government?

Audrey and the new democracy

Afterword

Timeline

Works Consulted

Part 1: Audrey's Childhood

1. The Trouble with Being Gifted

A congenital heart condition

On April 18, 1981, Audrey was born in the capital of the Republic of China (Taiwan), Taipei, as the eldest child of Tang Kuang-hua and Lee Ya-ching.

As previously mentioned, Audrey Tang (Tang Feng) is the name she chose when she came out as transgender at age 24.

On her blog, she has said, "When you speak or write about me, whether past, present, or future, I wish to be referred to as a woman." So in this book, we'll use "Audrey" and "she" to refer to her, even during her upbringing.

Now then. Audrey was born a healthy baby, but about 40 days after her birth, her face suddenly turned purple. At the hospital she was diagnosed with a ventricular septal defect.

That means that she was born with a defect—a hole—in the wall of her heart. The doctor said, "We need to wait until she's four, when her heart will be strong enough to tolerate surgery to close the hole." And then, "We'll have her take medicine until then. Try not to make her cry or let her catch a cold. And she mustn't be allowed to do any vigorous exercise."

But Audrey's parents were both busy reporters for a major Taiwanese newspaper, *China Times*. In order to make sure frail Audrey had care during the day, they had her father's parents, that is, her grandparents, move in.

To make this possible, her mother bought two condos next to each other and took down the wall between them. The family had Tang Kuang-hua's younger sister and brother—that is, Audrey's aunt and uncle—come to live with them, too.

As a result, Audrey was showered with love from a young age living with a large family.

According to her grandmother, Tsai Ya-bao, whom she was particularly close with, Audrey learned to talk at eight months, walk at 14, and could memorize the lyrics to songs by 18.

Audrey was surrounded by a mountain of books as a child. This was because her father, a lover of philosophy, believed that no matter how much you learned, there was always more, and collected volumes on all sorts of topics.

It was only natural that such an environment would lead Audrey to take an interest in reading.

With her bad heart, she spent much more time being read to indoors than playing outside. This contributed to her strong interest in the printed word, and the number of characters she was able to read gradually increased.

At age three, she became obsessed with encyclopedias for kids, and even memorized them word for word. She learned more complicated characters, as well as the English alphabet and arithmetic.

Still, the worry of her heart condition was ever-present. If her heart rate ever went up due to exercise or excitement, she would black out. Doctors gave her a fifty-fifty chance of surviving until the age of her next surgery.

The family did their best to keep her calm during the day. When meeting someone for the first time, they were wary of what kind of person they might be, or whether they might do something that could be dangerous. There was no telling when something that would be nothing for most people might cause Audrey's heart to stop.

And at night, she went to sleep thinking, "Will I wake up alive in the morning...?"

Though young, she was already conscious of how fragile life could be.

Doing the same thing as everyone else is boring

At age four, Audrey started kindergarten.

A sense of tremendous confusion awaited her there.

Why do I have to do the same thing as everyone else...?

At school, before snack time, everyone sang a song. When they went to the bathroom, they all went together in a choo-choo train line. Everyone had lunch and napped together, too. No one was allowed to do something different on their own.

But due to Audrey's heart condition, she moved more slowly than the other kids and didn't like running around outside. She had fun staying in the classroom to read, but the books she read were walls of complicated characters, more complex than the books the other kids would enjoy.

Audrey also interacted with the teacher differently from the other children. She never took anything at face value; when told to do something, she always asked why.

This was the influence of her philosophy-loving father. He especially admired the ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, and often talked to Audrey about the Socratic method.

His attitude was that any and all authority can be challenged. No matter how great a person, or what authority they have, the first thing to do is not accept whatever they say but ask, “What gives you that authority?” And even if what they say seems correct, the next question is, “What’s the premise of that assertion?”

Audrey later spoke about how this mindset served her.

“As a result, I never became a blindly following fanatic.” (*Ōdorii Tan no shikō* [How Audrey Tang thinks] by Yaeko Kondo; Bookman).

Audrey’s father used the method when interacting with her. Tang used to hold her hand and take her on walks, during which he would ask her questions like, “What is truth?” and “Why does beauty matter in life?” or teach her about different topics like factorization in math.

Most children would find such discussions boring nonsense. But Audrey thought they were all fascinating. Tang never treated her like a child; he was democratic and serious in his approach to her questions.

Audrey loved philosophy and math, but more than anything, she loved her dad.

But there were not many kindergarteners like her.

“Audrey’s weird.”

The other kids started leaving her out.

One morning her mother was shocked when she saw her preparing to go to school. Audrey was trying to bring a knife.

“Why are you taking something so dangerous with you?”

Audrey replied with a desperate look in her eyes. “To protect myself. There are kids who bully me. They punch me in the bathroom.”

Lee knew that Audrey didn’t fit in at school. But she didn’t let that be a reason for her to stop attending.

She counted it as education for getting used to society.

“Play nice with the other kids. Find their good points and compliment them.”

In the end, Audrey switched kindergartens twice, but no matter where she went, the situation remained the same.

So did things change when she started elementary school?

They changed—for the worse.

1 + 1 isn’t always 2

At first things went fine. Audrey entered an elementary school affiliated with a university with accomplished faculty and a well-stocked library.

As the result of an intelligence test to decide class makeup, Audrey was given number one in her class roster and attracted the notice of teachers throughout the school.

But in no time, her classmates decided she was a weirdo. When she was given the opportunity to speak at an all-school assembly, she passionately held forth for over ten minutes on a favorite historical episode, but when lessons started, she immediately took on a bored attitude.

The reason lessons were boring was that she had mastered all of the material ages ago.

For instance, in first grade, students learn numbers, then addition and subtraction, and so on. But at home, Audrey was already doing simultaneous equations with x and y .

The teachers were surprised, but so was Audrey.

I thought teachers were supposed to teach you things you don't know, so why do they only teach me stuff I already learned?

There's one episode that is emblematic of what Audrey was like at the time.

It happened when the teacher wrote $1 + 1 = 2$ on the blackboard. Audrey raised her hand and said, "One plus one isn't always two. It is in the decimal system, but in binary, the answer is different."

What Audrey said was correct. In binary, there are only two numbers, 0 and 1. 2 goes up a place and is written as 10. So in binary, $1 + 1 = 10$ is the right answer.

But first-graders don't learn the difference between decimal and binary. Bringing this up in the middle of class only confused everyone.

Additionally, first grade math only uses non-negative integers such as 0, 1, 2... but Audrey would introduce negative numbers like -1 and -2. Her teacher complained to Audrey's mother. "This is causing problems."

One day after incidents like these had been happening regularly, Audrey put her hand up, but before she could ask her question, the teacher interrupted her.

"Sorry, Audrey, could you take out the classroom trash for me?"

Another time, she was told, "Audrey, during math class you can go read in the library."

She loved the library, and really, she should have been happy because she could read whatever books she wanted. But for some reason, it didn't feel good.

I'm a problem for my class...

She thought on her own as she headed for the library.

Why won't they answer my questions?

Why am I always the only one getting left out?

Why do we all have to be in class together?

And the question she'd had since kindergarten returned.

Why do we all have to learn the same thing?

She's too much for me to handle...

Audrey's knowledge and desire to learn, beyond that typical of your average first-grader, was causing issues at home, too.

During the day while her parents were out working, it was mostly her grandmother Tsai watching her and her brother, Tsung-hao, who is four years younger. Audrey's eccentric questions stressed her out.

"She asks all these difficult questions and I never know what to do. Today she suddenly asked, 'What are the black spots on the sun?' When I couldn't answer, she got all mad and said, 'You never know the answer to any of my questions, Grandma!' What am I supposed to do? She's too much for me to handle..."

Audrey's mother called her over and said, "You can't ask Grandma such hard questions. She grew up in an age when you couldn't study even if you wanted to."

Audrey hung her head. "I'm sorry. But then, who can I ask? At school they ignore me."

"Ask me or your father."

Audrey's parents used whatever time they could between work tasks to answer her questions. When that wasn't enough, they hired a tutor.

But that still didn't solve the issue. Audrey would call her mother at the office with questions even when she knew she was working. Sometimes she called to say her brother was crying.

Her mother realized something.

"She's not just asking because she has a thirst for knowledge and is eager to learn."

Audrey's classmates looked at her funny, and her teachers wouldn't even engage with her seriously, so she was anxious. That was why she wanted her mother to interact with her so badly.

"I have no choice but to spend my time with the kids."

"No, in that case, I'll quit work and raise the kids."

Tang knew that his wife, who worked at the same newspaper, was the better reporter. Lee was the number two ace who could cover everything from education issues to legislation, culture, and politics.

"Men and women are equal, so you shouldn't have to miss out on work just because you're the mother."

But Audrey and Tsung-hao chose their mother.

So it was that Lee quit her job and concentrated on raising the two children.

The new school year starts in September in Taiwan. Just before that, a letter arrived from the school. It said, "We did an intelligence test on the brightest children, and found that Audrey Tang has an IQ at the highest level. What if you transferred her to a school with a gifted class?"

The fear of corporal punishment

"Gifted" is a word in English used for children and young people with exceptionally high intelligence (IQ 130 or higher as a benchmark) or abilities.

Albert Einstein, who is famous for the theory of relativity; the creator of Windows, Bill Gates; and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg are all said to have been gifted.

But it's said that often, these people find life a struggle as a result of their advanced intelligence or special abilities. We say children who can't keep up at school are "falling through the cracks," and Japanese has word for that, plus its opposite for someone who doesn't fit in because they outpace everyone: *ukikobore*, literally "floating through the cracks." As a first-grader, Audrey was a perfect example of *ukikobore*.

Some countries have special education systems for gifted children. Japan doesn't yet, but the practice is spreading in the United States and European countries, as well as Singapore, Hong Kong, and other Asian countries.

Taiwan is one of those countries. It established gifted classes as early as 1973.

At the time, these were the target students: 1) exceptionally intelligent children 2) children with exceptional ability in a certain subject such as math or language 3) children with exceptional talent in an area such as art, music, dance, theater, sports, etc.

Gifted classes had normal lessons as well, but students could also choose lessons based on their interests in math and physics, or arts and crafts, music, and so on.

But it wasn't as if every school had gifted classes. The elementary school Audrey was attending didn't have them, which is why she was recommended to transfer.

Lee felt unsure. The only gifted lessons available were language arts and math; the rest of the classes would be with all sorts of other kids. She thought that was great, but she was concerned about the less-than-well-stocked library and the somewhat authoritarian vibes of the school.

"What do you want to do? Do you want to transfer?"

Audrey thought for a moment and then nodded—because she was indeed bored in the lessons at her current school.

Her new teacher was young and passionate about education. Audrey achieved outstanding grades and was chosen as head of the class.

Maybe I can have fun at this school.

But sadly, the opposite of Audrey's hope awaited her.

Corporal punishment.

Of course, regarding her studies, Audrey had no issues. But when it came to lifestyle, she was a forgetful child. Kids in school in Taiwan must bring their own tissue paper and a towel to school every day, but Audrey often forgot hers.

And as punishment, her teacher would strike her with a rod.

In the late 1980s, corporal punishment was still considered acceptable disciplinary action to take with children. This has a lot to do with Taiwan's history.

Taiwan is a small country, but there are people of various ethnicities living there. In addition to dozens of indigenous people, there are all the settlers who came over from China in the 17th century. These people are called native Taiwanese (*benshengren*).

The people who moved from China after Japanese colonial rule ended post-World War II are called outsiders (*waishengren*). Many of the outsiders were involved with the Republic of China government (who retreated to Taiwan after losing their fight on the mainland against the Communist Party of China) and the people who came with them, and there was a lot of friction between them and the native Taiwanese regarding the government of Taiwan after the war.

An especially severe clash occurred in 1947, the 228 Incident. In response to a violent crackdown by officials, native Taiwanese held large-scale demos all across

the country. The government responded with harsh suppression and instituted martial law.

“Martial law” means recognizing military rule in order to overcome a national emergency. Under martial law, citizens’ rights are heavily restricted. In Taiwan’s case, too, there was a harsh crackdown on anti-government action and speech, and many residents were arrested and jailed.

Education also became military style. Schools taught only what the government said to teach, and students who didn’t listen to their teachers were mercilessly beaten.

Martial law continued for 38 years. It finally lifted in 1987, when Audrey was six years old.

Corporal punishment is necessary to make students understand correctly—this attitude used to exist in Japan, as well. In the famous anime *Mobile Suit Gundam*, when the protagonist gets hit by his superior officer, there’s a line: “Who grows up to be a real man without getting beaten?” And corporal punishment has only been prohibited by law since April of 2020.

So in Taiwan where martial law was only lifted two years prior, it was a given that students who received corporal punishment like Audrey existed.

And Audrey put up with the beatings at first—because she understood. *I mean, the teacher has to keep the whole class in line.*

And she loved her homeroom teacher. She told her mother, “Our teacher is the nicest one in the school. He uses the thinnest rod when he beats us. The other teachers all use thicker rods.”

But that didn’t mean she wasn’t afraid of being punished. And she didn’t think corporal punishment was a good way to manage or educate students.

After I transferred here for the gifted class... And my teacher isn’t a bad person... Why does it have to be this way?

But Audrey’s worries didn’t end with corporal punishment. A new issue specific to gifted classes appeared.

“If you would just die, I’d be number one!”

The students in the gifted class were all overflowing with talent. And the parents had a tendency to compare their kid to the others.

“You’re great at painting, so why can’t you do language arts and math?”

Some parents criticized their children like that, and even asked for more corporal punishment for their child during parent-teacher meetings.

If that was how the parents were, then of course the kids would be comparing themselves to the others and getting fiercely envious of someone who outdid them. Naturally, Audrey with her good grades became a target for that sort of ill will.

One day a student fairly spat at her: "I wish you would just die! Then I'd be number one!" It turned out that that boy was being grilled at home, "Why aren't you number one?" as his father beat him.

Just die! Those words pierced Audrey's second-grader mind deeply. She had been taking care not to put stress on her heart since before even entering kindergarten all in order to not end up dead, so being told to die was a shock.

Unable to bear it, Audrey went to her mother. "Mom, you always tell me that we should compliment each other's good points, right? When someone jumps rope a hundred times, I really think that's amazing. And when someone's really fast, I say, 'You can do it!' and cheer them on. So why does everyone get mad because I'm good at math or answer language arts questions fast? Why do they hit me?"

Refusing school

As summer vacation came around, Audrey's condition grew more and more unstable. She was terribly anxious about what her class would be like in third grade.

She started biting her fingernails. On the last school day of summer vacation, she woke up at 5, but didn't get ready until she was about to be late at 8. And she kept repeating to herself, "Today's the day classes are decided. Which teacher's clutches will I fall into?"

Thankfully, that day classes weren't decided, but Audrey must not have been able to take it anymore. She suddenly said, "Mom, will you get permission for me to stop going to school?"

She didn't go through the process right away, but first consulted with Audrey's gifted class teacher. When Audrey found out, she launched a barrage of questions. "Mom, isn't corporal punishment a crime? So why do the teachers at my school do it? If my new teacher tries to hit me, is it okay to run away? What should I do if they chase after me?"

And when she came home from her first day of third grade, after classes were decided she said, "Mom, I'm doomed."

With her good grades, she was once again chosen as head of the class, and her new normal class teacher had told her that if any of the regular kids screwed up, they would be struck once, but the head of the class would be struck twice.

"So I'm not going to school anymore, Mom."

Alarmed, Audrey's mother accompanied her to school the next day to talk with the teacher, but this backfired.

She was no longer beaten by the teacher, but that ended up making her a privileged entity.

I'm never forced to stand as punishment, and I'm never made to clean, but now all the kids hate me and come to beat me up after school.

There were other reasons the kids hit her.

For example, the head of class was told to write the names of children who misbehaved on the chalkboard. The children whose names were on the board would be punished by the teacher later. So the better she did her job as head of class, the more the other kids loathed her.

Audrey was feeling more and more cornered. She started to hate going to school, was tormented by nightmares, and had trouble getting up in the morning.

She made a frantic appeal. "Dad, Mom. Going to school is miserable. This is life or death."

"Life or death"—this was not an exaggeration. A desire to commit suicide had sprouted inside her.

Actually, something quite serious happened. When classmates were taunting her, telling her to jump from the third floor of one building to the building across from it, she actually jumped.

One wrong step and she could have lost her life. For Audrey, who had taken diligent care not to put stress on her heart since she was tiny, doing something so dangerous could surely be called suicidal behavior.

Refusing to go to school, her mental state grew very unstable. She would say she had no appetite and go a whole day without eating anything, or she would leave for school only to return home after imagining all the questions her teacher and the other students would ask.

But her mother kept encouraging her, trying to get her to attend. She thought she understood the pain Audrey was going through. But on the other hand, the option of not going to school didn't exist in her mind.

Then a terrible incident occurred.

It happened on a day there was a test. The teacher said to finish within 20 minutes and left the room.

This is Audrey we're talking about, so of course it didn't take her 20 minutes—she was done in a flash. Then, since the teacher was gone, the kids near her started reaching out their hands.

"Hey, show me your answers."

"No, you have to take your own test."

"Oh, come on. Just show me."

Four or five kids wouldn't let up. When Audrey stood, determined not to let them see, they stood as well and began chasing her.

Audrey ran around the classroom. But she was going too fast and tripped. Then one of the kids kicked her in the stomach as hard as he could while she was down. She slammed into the wall and blacked out.

Her mother received word and came to pick her up. She took her home and when she took her clothes off to put her in the bath, she was shocked. There was a big, dark bruise on Audrey's stomach.

When she didn't say anything, Audrey said, "Do I still have to go to school?"

"...No, you don't have to go anymore. Stay home."

An unexpected reaction

Her mother's decision meant Audrey wouldn't have to attend school anymore. She also escaped the life or death situation. She must have been tremendously relieved...

But actually, she wasn't—because of an unexpected reaction, and from none other than an immediate family member.

"Stay home from school? Absolutely not!"

Her father was firmly against the idea.

"Dad..."

Audrey was caught off guard. He told her, "It's not as if I agree with teachers dishing out corporal punishment to students. On the contrary, I still remember the pain and fear of being beaten by my teacher as a child. That's why I've never beaten you or Tsung-hao, and why I have done my best not to brandish my patriarchal authority."

"Then..."

"But I don't think that means you can stay home from school. And I'm not saying that because I'm scared of being punished by the government."

The punishment he mentions here refers to the law in Taiwan that punishes guardians who fail to put their children through compulsory education.

"I'm saying it because refusing to go to school due to corporal punishment from teachers or bullying by other students is running away from reality." Her father continued, trying to persuade her. "I'm sure some things are rough. But there are no knots in this world that cannot be untangled, no doors that cannot be opened. That's why everyone works so hard. By changing yourself, you change others, and that's how we overcome problems. Did you put in the effort, Audrey?"

Audrey couldn't believe her ears.

Her father had never treated her as a child; he had always listened in earnest, on an equal standing, to what she had to say.

But now he was telling her that the beatings and bullying she received at school were not so bad. She was so distressed that she was considering suicide, but he was giving her a high-handed directive to work hard to overcome it.

But only the person getting hit feels the pain; no one else can just say, 'That doesn't hurt.' So you're in no position to tell me going to school isn't so bad. Telling me to go is inconsistent with that.

And she needed to tell him that by whatever means necessary!

A powerful antagonism against her father took root inside her.

The brink of despair

Her grandparents were also firmly against her staying home from school.

Audrey was doing visibly better staying home. Aside from the nightmares she continued to suffer, she was able to get up on her own, her appetite returned, and she could enjoy her food. Her nail-biting habit disappeared, and her stomach aches stopped.

Even so, her grandparents refused to be convinced. To these two who were caught up in old-fashioned ideas, not going to school meant dropping out of society and falling through the cracks. They were also concerned that people in the community would judge them, whispering, *There's a child in that family who refuses to go to school.*

Audrey's grandmother Tsai had harsh words for her. "All the kids in the world are going to school, so what makes you so special that you don't have to?"

"Grandma, if everyone in the world died, would I have to kill myself?"

Getting such a retort from her tearful grandchild—now it was her turn to feel hurt.

The once big, peaceful family of endless smiles was now fighting a miserable household war every day.

Audrey and her mother became isolated in the family.

Audrey's parents argued night after night about her education.

And more than anything, Audrey's relationship with her father grew worse by the day.

Trivial issues that wouldn't have caused problems before, such as how she held her chopsticks or her posture while she brushed her teeth, turned into fights, and she sometimes even ignored him completely.

Then something major happened.

In the Tang household, there was a rule that the children didn't start eating until their parents had taken their seats at the table. But one evening as Tang Kuang-hua was sitting down, he noticed Audrey was already eating.

When he scolded her, she shot back, "Who cares? I was hungry, so I ate. What's the reason I'm not allowed to eat before you?"

Her father's anger finally exploded. "Do you think that's any way for a child to talk to their father?!"

"What should a child do, then?!"

"On your knees!"

This was the father who had taught her to use the Socratic Method to question authority. But now he was brandishing patriarchal power.

"You were never like this before, Dad..." Audrey's anger peaked. She kneeled as asked, but then began beating her own cheeks.

"Slap! Slap!" she shouted as she slapped herself over and over.

Taken aback by this behavior, her mother froze, and her father walked away without saying a word—because he thought he would cry if he stayed there any longer. As a father, he didn't want to be crying in response to a third-grader lashing out at him.

Not long after that, Tang told his wife, "I've decided to go study at a German grad school. If this is how it's going to be, it's better if I'm not around. I'm sure putting some space between us will be better, obviously for Audrey, but for the whole family, too."

Lee was surprised. "But this is so sudden..."

"No, I've been thinking about going to build up my knowledge for the future in Germany for some time now. So I'm going. I'm leaving Audrey up to you."

With that, he went to Germany.

While her parents fretted that this might lead to divorce, Lee herself was busy worrying about Audrey.

Staying home from school, she was liberated from bullying, but in this bad home environment, she had been spending all her days reading and messing around on the computer. Seeing her closing up into her shell like that made Lee think of “a sea turtle that had been struck by lightning.”