

THE ONLY THING THAT SAVED ME

By Shuho Takayama as told to
Ana-Lisa Clark Mullen

Golf is a popular sport in Japan, so I started playing it when I was 14 years old as a way to spend time with my father. It was fun from the start, and eventually I started to practice on my own and played on the golf team at my high school. I became friends with my teammates and coaches, who encouraged me to pursue my dream of becoming a professional golfer.

I worked hard, not just on my game but on my studies, graduating near the top of my high school class.

When I first entered college, I had a great relationship with my golf coach and teammates. They were better than I was, so I did all I could to keep up with them. Some of the team members commented on my unique first name, Shuho. I told them that my Korean maternal grandmother gave it to me and that in Korean it means “beautiful mountain.” From that point on I felt like their attitude toward me

changed, tainted by a generations-long tension between some in Japan and Korea.

They began calling me “the Korean kid” and said I would hurt the good name of the university. Rather than allowing me to practice golf with them, they made me clean the toilets.

It became increasingly stressful to be around the team. Being away from home, I felt like I was on my own. I tried to hang on to my dream and return to the good favor of my coach and team, but after two years,

**An unexpected
friendship
helped me
change my life
from darkness
to light.**

I couldn't tolerate their harsh treatment anymore, so I returned home.

This was a dark time for me. The stress was having psychological and physical effects. My self-esteem had taken a beating for two years. My dream to be a professional golfer was at an end. I didn't know where to go with my life. And I was angry. I was angry at everyone: the coach, my teammates, and my parents. I was so angry, my thoughts scared

me. I had no friends, and I felt I was unable to trust or associate with other people. For six months, I only left home to work out at the gym.

During this dark part of my life, I made friends with Justin Christy, whom I met at the gym. When I first saw him, I thought he was a foreign-exchange student. I was hesitant to talk to him until I saw him talking to someone at the gym and was surprised to hear that he spoke Japanese. I still felt unable to trust other people, but he suggested that we train together.



There was something different about him that I didn't understand at the time. I was calm when I was around him. I started to look forward to our training time together. I had found someone I felt I could trust as a friend.

After training together for several months, Justin invited me to a dinner group that he went to on a regular basis. I was hesitant, but after several invitations I decided to go to what ended up being a young single adult dinner at the home of Richard and Corina Clark. They greeted me warmly when I entered their home, Brother Clark in Japanese and Sister Clark in English. I didn't understand what she was saying, but I attempted to respond to her. Even though several people there didn't speak Japanese, they were a fun-loving group who were warm and friendly. There was lots of laughter.

I began attending other young single adult activities and had never had so much fun with other people in my life. I wondered what it was about these people that made them so nice and friendly.

Around this time Justin asked me what I wanted to do with my life. I was surprised to find that my goals had started to change. I told him I wanted to learn to speak English and I wanted to be a friend to all, just like

I decided that I wanted to help save people who were in the same situation I was.

him. He told me of the free English classes at his church. I went to the English class and met the missionaries. Even though I had never thought about God, I felt like I should listen to the missionaries. They taught me the fundamentals of the gospel and called me almost every day. They became my good friends, which made me really happy because I didn't have very many friends yet.

I started meeting many members of the Church who went to the missionary lessons with me and became good friends with them. They taught me the gospel and set the example for me. Justin talked to me about the Book of Mormon and told me stories from it so that I wanted to read it for myself. Another friend, Shingo, who is very detail-oriented, discussed doctrines with me in a way that was easy for me to understand. He always bore

his testimony at the end of our conversations.

I had found something I believed in and a place I felt I belonged. After I was baptized and confirmed, I started to think about serving a mission, but I was worried about dedicating two years to it. I talked to a lot of people about serving a mission, especially my returned missionary friends. I thought a lot about it, and I realized that the gospel was the only thing that could

have saved me.

I know that God has given me everything: my dreams, hope, friends, and especially love. The gospel helped me come out of darkness into the light. ■

The author lives in Tokyo, Japan.



BE AN EXAMPLE

"Each of us came to earth having been given the Light of Christ. As we follow the example of the

Savior and live as He lived and as He taught, that light will burn within us and will light the way for others. . . .

"I am confident there are within our sphere of influence those who are lonely, those who are ill, and those who feel discouraged. Ours is the opportunity to help them and to lift their spirits."

President Thomas S. Monson, "Be an Example and a Light," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2015, 86.



How I Shared the Gospel with Shuho

By Justin Christy

When I met Shuho at the gym, he said he wanted to learn English and go to a golf exchange program. I told him about the English classes at the church, but it took several weeks before we were able to attend. In the meantime, as we worked out together, we talked a lot about gospel topics, about the Book of Mormon, and about life in general.

The friendship and examples of the Church members he met caught his attention and helped him learn about the gospel. It is the Spirit that leads to conversion; all we do is deliver the message and support people as they choose for themselves.

It used to be stressful for me to think about sharing the gospel. But I have found that if we just open our mouth at the right time, we will have missionary opportunities. All we need to do is invite people to a church activity or meeting. If we are open-minded, there will always be opportunities to share the gospel. ■