

I Like Michel

TAMADA Yoshiyuki

My mind is still out of balance since my two and a half month stay in Harare, Zimbabwe. The devastating situation has left me speechless. I cannot find suitable words for expressing myself. One day I wrote to Michel Fabre, a professor of English at the Sorbonne, Paris, I'm sorry I can't write soon. After coming back home from Africa, my mind is out of balance, I'm afraid. I sometimes feel too reluctant to write to anybody. Now 'I'm sorry I write too late.' has become one of my mottoes." The reply came as follows: "It is always a pleasure to hear from you. But do not apologize if you are behind in your correspondence. Friends are people with whom one need not apologize because they like you for what you are and accept you as you are."

I met him first in 1985 at an international symposium at the Mississippi State University. He was one of the speakers. I had come to know his name through his writings. I was lucky enough to spend one night with him in the dormitory, but I was not able to make myself understood in English. I had long rejected English speaking and listening because the overbearing American influence on Japan.

I keenly felt that I wanted to share feelings with him. That motivation led me to polish my English speaking and listening.

I was glad to find that I was talking freely with him in Paris when I dropped in on our way home from Zimbabwe in 1992. He taught my children how to play domino in English. They enjoyed the play though they understood few English words.

When I called him Mr. Fabre, he said, "I call you Yoshi. You call me Mr. Fabre. It's not fair. Call me Michel."

Outside the country I am called Yoshi. I was called Tama by my basketball teammates. When I was a high-school teacher, I was called Tama-san. Some students called me Tama, like a cat. I don't like to be called sensei. Maybe I cannot identify with that word. In the same way that I like to say "Michel," I hope you call me Tama-san, not sensei.

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Tama.