

Timothy J-P Ducey
Law School Personal Statement

NANI GA JUUYOU DESU KA? WHAT IS IMPORTANT? WHAT MATTERS?

It is a simple question with a myriad of answers, answers different for every person who dares to ponder the question. And it is this question that was mine to ask of myself during an 11-day personal journey in April of 2006---11 days alone, excited, exhausted, warm, cold, hungry, happy, walking, alone. I had a few items just in case something should go wrong. I packed a cell phone. I had my wallet, containing about 10,000 Yen, which is around \$100. If it got bad, I had my credit card. But, other than to call my family every three days, the point was to forget my material items. For 11 days, I would survive with only that which I carried on my back: clothes, maps, a tent, a sleeping bag, a camp stove, fuel, and food. My journey would be a walk along the Sea of Japan.

I had been living in the metropolis of Osaka for the previous nine months, since July 14, 2005. Teaching English in a suburb about 30 minutes north of the center of Osaka, enough time had passed for me to sufficiently enjoy my adventure in Japan. I had hiked to the top of Mt. Fuji, spent many fun times with new friends of all cultures---English, Japanese, Australian, American, Canadian, even Welsh---toured the ancient and mysterious temples and shrines of Kyoto, talked with a number of interesting English pupils, from college students to doctors, homemakers to businesspeople, teachers to the retired. In March, as I readied for my holidays, I desired something different, something deeper, something challenging, something magical. -----

While on the surface the sum of my life up until that moment---school, sports, Scouts, singing, acting, Notre Dame, a semester in London, summer camps, volunteer work in New Orleans, time in Japan---would seem quite normal, and, I will be the first to admit, very blessed with amazing opportunities and people, beneath this pleasant and seemingly perfect calm ideal was something very different.

My father had a chronic disease, living the final 44 years of his life in constant and severe arthritic pain, enduring many agonizing surgeries and adjusting to the painful losses that come with the slow demise of the body: giving up driving, going from a cane to a walker to a wheelchair, having to use a catheter, even spending months in intensive care when things became desperate. My two brothers, 9 and 11 years older than I, respectively, taught me sports and outdoor skills, helping me in place of our father in their own way. They were instrumental in my life, but, as they are older, by the time I was 10, I was somewhat of an only child. I helped my mom, a high school mathematics teacher, care for my dad in every way I could, whether it be making meals for him, giving him injections, bathing him, or just being present to talk with him and let him know all was okay. Of course, in moments when the illness was not all consuming, there were the

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great sports chats, Cribbage games, and holiday festivities. One of my favorite times was always wheeling him down the street to a clearing to watch the fireworks on the Fourth of July. Another was my father's great talent of guessing the contents of Christmas gifts by simply holding the package to his head, pausing, and then rendering his verdict. More often than not, he was right. My father never expressed anger at his disease. The pain and losses were terribly difficult, but he endeavored not to dwell on them, rather focusing on what he could get out of life, thoughtfully finding the absolute best play he could with the cards he was dealt. By his life and his actions, he taught all who met him to savor every day and to never, ever give up. *My father passed away two months after my walk ended. Before he died, I told him the story of my journey, just as I am now telling you.* From my father, and from my parents' unyielding support for each other through incredible odds, I learned fight, humility, patience, passion, compassion, care, honor, true love.

Also living in my family's house was my mom's mom. My grandma, a pleasant and strong French woman, moved in with us when she was 83. I was 10. She died at 91, when I was 18, the day before I departed for college. Joy, love, happiness. It was fun having her with us. There were many great birthdays and Bastille Days and Christmases. But, the last eight years of her life, in a direct parallel to my father's illness, were a slow decline. She had a stroke just two months after moving in. Her will to regain what she lost in that moment was amazing to watch, as she went through physical therapy, relearning how to walk and eat and do the normal things of life. But, as happens naturally in life's progression, in her final years, she gradually slowed. Walking became difficult. Memories escaped. Even eating was sometimes challenging. My family, my mom and I, and my dad as much as he could, was there for her always, helping with feeding, bathing, and caring, staying by her side and giving our simple presence so that she would never be afraid. My grandma taught me respect, joy, heart, love. -----

And so, with my life's unique history having shaped who I was going into my journey as it commenced that rainy April day in 2006, I set out from the small port town of Hagi, Japan, to make sense of all that had come before, to discover what it all really meant, to understand what it would mean for my future. I walked alone for 11 days, venturing through the small cities and rural farm towns of Western Japan, always enjoying the many picturesque ocean vistas before me. I slept on the soft sands of beaches, the grasses of parks, the pavement of bus stops, and once the gravel of a parking lot. I cooked backpacking meals of rice and stew for dinner and ate trail-mix for breakfast and lunch. I enjoyed four days of radiant sunshine and four nights of glittering stars. One of those days, in the early evening, before sunset, I dined while overlooking the ocean. It was calm and tranquil, absolute perfection. I endured seven days and seven nights of cold,

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hard, driving rain, a pelting that truly tested my will. Many of those nights, I was quite grateful for the safety and warmth of my tent. I met some interesting people along the way: 20 Chinese foreign-exchange students, all female, out one Saturday to enjoy the cherry blossoms; a man who sat next to me one cold afternoon in a bus-stop, gifting me 500 Yen, about \$5, before continuing on his way; a woman who kindly insisted she drive me 20 miles, giving me a tour of the area, including a mountain shrine and a tectonic fault site along the sea. There were some dangerous moments: strong winds, steep drop-offs, long tunnels, fast moving trucks. When it was too treacherous, I took the train a short distance to a safe point, and then I resumed my trek. Such was my journey. I finished on Easter, my final destination being the sand dunes of Tottori, a scenic, desert-like ocean overlook approximately 160 miles from where I started. As I looked out to the sea from the majestic dunes, the wind driving past me, the sky a grayish blue, the sun's rays peering through the misty clouds, and my journey complete, it all made sense.

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At journey's end, the significance of family, already very clear to me, became ever more tangible and important. When all alone and being battered by the elements, being tested by nature, it was thinking of my family---my mom and dad's love for each other, my brothers' teachings, my grandma's spirit---that kept me going, kept me reaching for the finish. I also gained a deep sense of how individual the world is. Each person is but a miniscule being in a vast place. Each of us creates our own destiny, and we must be strong, we must fight, we must be passionate. Sure, there is luck, but nothing will be given to us. We each shape our lives through action, and our actions must be careful, deliberate, and focused. Only through passionate and thoughtful effort will our actions yield desired results. Finally, I found that while I am shaped by my history, it does not define me. How I live my life in the present, what I do now, whom I help today--- this determines my success, or my failure. These lessons I take with me as I embark upon a new journey, the journey of law. I will fight for what I believe. I will humbly work to help others. I will passionately endeavor to make change in places and communities where it is needed most. I will work to always reach the goal with honor. I will advocate for individuals and for families. I will love my family. I will forge my path, on my own terms, as I always have, ever mindful of the lessons I have learned on the journey along the way.

KORE GA JUUYOU DESU. THIS IS WHAT IS IMPORTANT. THIS IS WHAT MATTERS.

TIMOTHY J-P DUCEY --- NOVEMBER 30, 2008