

A Career
Change at 17

転職

17
歳の
の

久住小春

Koharu Kusumi

The first essay of
nonfiction
Koharu Kusumi has written!
A nature-raised village girl becomes
an idol at age 12
and at age 17 now
takes a new path.
The mental state of Koharu Kusumi
arriving at a career change at age 17,
pursued since early life.
Her road to health,
her **road to agriculture**,
her **Morning Musume**○
period experiences—she talks about
everything here now!!

“The complete audition conditions”

“You could pay for bamboo shoots!”

An intense open-air classroom
“Like I’m gonna die
in a place like this!”

“An interest in agriculture”

“It’s an important thing for
the sake of being healthy”



“Kirari Tsukishima-chan,
thank you”

“Modeling aspirations”

“I’m quitting
Morning Musume○!”

“Could I really turn being
an otaku into a career?”

“Koharu talks about hygiene”

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Koharu 久住
小春
Kusumi

an unofficial translation with notes by Kirarin☆Snow

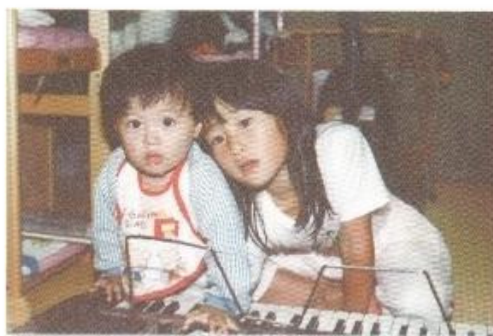
photographs

koharu kusumi





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diet note



A Career Change at 17

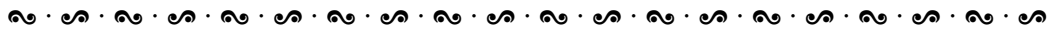
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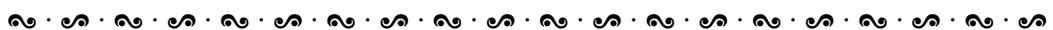


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Foreword

This is Koharu Kusumi.

It's a sudden opening, but I'll just launch right away into explaining this book (HAHA).

People dreaming of becoming models! People dreaming of becoming idols! People with an interest in the world of television! People interested in what it's like in the country! People who want to improve their physical constitution! People with an interest in health! People who have things they want to do but just can't take the first step forward! People who want to know about the life of Koharu Kusumi from birth to the present! These kinds of readers should read this book . . . I think!

When I started writing this book, I was 17 years old, but now, having finished writing it, I've turned 18.

Because of that, the parts I wrote when I was 17 came out of the 17-year-old Koharu, and the parts I wrote after becoming 18 are a product of the 18-year-old Koharu, so each piece of writing reflects the feelings I had at that point in time.

My reason for just leaving everything unchanged is that I wanted to deliver it through the words of the real Koharu.

The stories from when I was little I wrote based on what I heard from my family, and I wrote while consulting with people at the office as well.

I think there are some parts that are hard to read, but I thought, wouldn't writing in Koharu's own words best convey what I wanted to say?—so from the sentence writing style to the composition, to the paragraphs, to the arrangement of the table of contents, to the choice of words, everything was my own decision, and up through the last paragraph, was completed with my participation in the revision process.

Since everything from the start to the end is written in Koharu's own words, including some idiosyncratic Koharuisms that you won't see in any regular book, I think everyone might find some parts a pain to read. . . . I'd be happy if you think to yourself, "This is definitely Koharu's book!" and have fun reading it.

This is nonfiction of course (HAHA).

While writing this foreword, I was thinking . . . for a foreword, how much should I write, I wonder?

Whenever I start to write something, I seem to keep going on forever, so I'll go ahead and stop around here . . . (HAHA).

That said, this is a book Koharu Kusumi wrote!

So please knock on this door and look.

Of course, this is designated an unrestricted-entry-and-exit zone.

Please open it when you want to read, and shut it when you want to shut it.

And with that, I'll see you again at the afterword.

🍃 Chapter 1

Koharu's Hometown ~Life in Washima Village~

[[The birth of Koharu Kusumi (ages 0–6)]]

Ojimaya, Washima Village, Niigata Prefecture:¹ 244 households, population 985.

In this tiny quiet little village overlooking the Sea of Japan was born the second daughter of the Kusumi family: Koharu.

1992 July 15,² 10:50 A.M.: height 50.5 cm, weight 3646 g. (Photo 1)

A father the spitting image of Koharu, a natural airhead mother, an older sister who pays attention to the important things, a kind older brother. It was to a wa~rm family like this that I became a member.

It seems Sis absolutely wanted a younger sister; apparently she decorated the bamboo at Tanabata³ by writing over and over, “I wish for a baby sister. It has to be a girl.” Bro wanted a younger brother though. But up through the lower grades of elementary school, Bro and I would play baseball and soccer together. Grandma, who lived with us, would often be pitcher or goalkeeper.

Sis and Bro changed my diapers, gave me milk to drink, and so on. . . . It seems

¹Niigata Prefecture is the northernmost prefecture in the Chūbu region in central Honshū, bordering the Sea of Japan. Washima lay to the northwest of Nagaoka City, which absorbed Washima on 2006 January 1, in central Niigata Prefecture.

²Kusumi shares a birthday with Jacques Derrida, Yuki Kashiwagi of AKB48, the Nintendo Family Computer, and PSY's global megahit “Gangnam Style”, which was released on her 20th birthday (surely this cannot be a coincidence).

³At the Tanabata festival, which starts on July 7 annually, people customarily write wishes on slips of paper and hang them on bamboo.

the two of them had quite a struggle over Koharu. (Photos 2 · 3)

Stories from age 3 that I have no recollection of

When I was 3 years old, it seems I often stood at the window and waved my hands at neighbors, high school students coming home from school, and others.

Railroad tracks ran behind our house, and since it was close to the station, I apparently liked to wave to people who had gotten off the train as they passed by the front of our house. It was best especially in the evening when the greatest number of people arrived. (Although you could argue that there were only about as many people disembarking as you could count with two hands.)

It seems that the reputation, if you could call it that, of Koharu at that time was, as was often said by the neighbors, “Koharu-chan’s always smiling, isn’t she~” Did I really make myself pleasant to everybody, I wonder?

Being 3 years old meant Shichi-Go-San.⁴ I don’t remember it very well, but apparently when we went to the shrine for Shichi-Go-San, various people said to me, “You’re so cute. Let me take a photo, please,” and snapped my picture. I was told these sorts of things by everyone in my family . . . “Back then you were so cute, you know~” What did they mean by that? So . . . what about now? (HAHA). (Photo 4)

This is what a village nursery school is (HAHA)

I loved the nursery school.

I had to go there at any cost, come ill or high fever. But of course they made us go home at the end of the day (HAHA).

Being the stubborn Koharu that I was, even when I was told “don’t”, I would hear “go ahead!!” and keep at it, so I didn’t budge until eventually Grandpa had to come get me and bring me home (HAHA). (Photo 5)

Everybody at the nursery school also got to do things like go see cows at the farm.

In our area, there were 3 farms, so we went to those. There was a petting zoo with animals like sheep and rabbits, and in the vicinity of the nursery school, a place that looked like an animal pen where they had cows and pigs. After that, there’s the farm with «Michiru», a “Guernsey” cow, which they say there are only two of in Japan. This Guernsey cow milk is sold at places like the roadside rest stop, but it costs around ¥700. Expensive! The yogurt and pudding and stuff are also ridiculously expensive. As far as Koharu is concerned, these are high-class luxury goods.

⁴Shichi-Go-San is a traditional festival held annually on November 15 for three- and seven-year-old girls and three- and five-year-old boys, commemorating their growth and celebrated with a visit to a shrine or temple.

Washima Village has some things labeled “Ryōkan’s village”. Even now, the area from around Izumozaki Town to Bunsui Town has sprouted famous sightseeing spots advertising themselves as “villages related to Ryōkan”. Apparently Ryōkan-san was an Edo period Buddhist monk and poet from Izumozaki Town in Niigata Prefecture. When I was little, I didn’t know very much about Ryōkan-san, but for local people, just about everybody, when they buy milk, buys “Ryōkan Milk”. (Photo 6)

Little Koharu’s reality! ~A day in the life of Koharu~

Koharu “I wear skirt.”

Mother “No.”

We often had this kind of back-and-forth.

As it was, the nursery school had a rule prohibiting wearing skirts. But because I loved skirts, I wanted to wear them no matter what.

Mother “Put on your trousers.”

Koharu “O——kay.”

But in the end I put on trousers like Mom had told me to.

Mother “I’m going to work now, okay?”

Koharu (*Yes! Mom left already!*) I instantly changed into a skirt and went to nursery school.

At noon, the school provided lunch for us, but we had to bring rice. It had to be white rice, the school had decided. But because the Koharu at that time hated plain white rice, I first put furikake⁵ in my bento box, then rice on top of that, and brought it to school with the furikake hidden. It looked just like white rice, so the secret didn’t leak out. But, afraid of what would happen if someone did find out, I started with the rice and ate it all right away. So when the Koharu who until then had hated white rice and had always left it for last suddenly started vigorously eating it all at once, the teacher was quite surprised (HAHA).

Teacher “You’ve turned into a rice eater~~~”

Koharu (*Score!*) I was highly praised!

After coming home from nursery school, I’d take the scissors I loved and cut my own clothes into pieces, and when that wasn’t enough, I’d take the trousers put away in the dresser and cut them up as well, among other things. A precursor of pre-ripped jeans (HAHA)? When my family wasn’t in the room, I seized the chance to attack the carpet and rip it to shreds too. . . . After that, I would put on my favorite Western-style clothes and even have a one-person home fashion show.

⁵Toppings sprinkled on rice, typically a mixture of ingredients.

“Ding-dong ding-dong”—around when the 6 o'clock evening bell rings, Mom comes home. Hurriedly I change out of my skirt and into trousers and wait for Mom in the entryway.

When Mom's car stops at our house, I quickly go out and get into the car. I love the car, and even though it was just pulling into our house's parking space, I would get in anyway. Even for a minute-long ride, it was very exciting.

Then Mom came inside and, upon seeing the carpet, she got angry—“But I just bought that (GRRR)”—and after she saw the scissor-shredded clothes, she fumed—“Why'd you have to remake everything your way!”

Koharu's nature becomes clear ~Age 6~

In Koharu's hometown, nursery school is for up to age 5, and kindergarten starts at age 6.

Maybe it was Koharu as usual, but I was apparently a kid who just stubbornly refused to sway from her opinions.

Although they said that if you don't extract your baby teeth early you'll get crooked teeth, it was unpleasant no matter what, and I wouldn't get mine pulled at any cost. . . . But when they started wiggling and getting loose, it got bothersome and I even pulled them out myself.

I totally loved sashimi, and I absolutely wanted to eat it even when I had a fever and felt dizzy. It was like “I'll only eat this!” (HAHA).

According to Mom, I was basically a child who never cried and practically never shed a tear.

I was healthy and hardly ever caught much of a cold, and I never had to go to the hospital, but one day I broke my arm. Mom said, “Your arm is too thin, so it broke” (HAHA).

So after that, I said to everyone in the family, “If you touch my arm, it breaks, so don't touch my arm—!!” I remember that pretty impressively. After that, I couldn't pull any pro wrestling moves on Sis (HAHA).

Since I was little, I've been a precise Koharu. Because I neatly put my toys away and cleaned up after myself, it seems even Mom never had to warn me to “clean up properly” or anything like that. The way I used things was also precise; apparently I took care not to break crayons when I used them, and I even put them away by lining them up in the exact order they'd been in when I first bought them.

I was apparently a super-friendly kid who was always smiling. Because of that, I often got food from people. The neighborhood women would often accost me with “Why don't I give you a mikan~”⁶ and “Go drop in for a bit and have yourself some candy now~” and so on. Moreover, since I wasn't too good with cake and sweets

⁶A sweet and seedless citrus fruit smaller than an orange; also known as the satsuma mandarin.

but liked senbei,⁷ what Grandma and others gave me was generally senbei, so it felt just right (HAHA).

[[Four seasons in a retro village]]

The area of Koharu's birth is, generally speaking, nothing but farms. If you look it up on Google Earth, I can't be specific but there's a label for it there in the middle of the mountains.

In this carpet, green on one side, e~very once in a while you can see the black roof tiles of Japanese houses. Not one modern Western-style house that one might spot in Tokyo is present; certainly through the eyes of a city dweller, the scenery spread out must be reminiscent of bygone days, I think.

To the Koharu who had just arrived in Tokyo, the ordinary turned out to be surprising, and what I thought was common knowledge proved to be completely different. . . . Since I thought village life was normal, whenever I talked to anybody, my head was full of "?"s.

Winters with tremendous snowfall

6 o'clock in the morning. "Ding-dong ding-dong"—every morning, without fail, the village bell rings at 6 o'clock, waking us up.

The snowblower starts to move. If it fails to push all of the snow to the edge of the road, cars can't run, and anyone walking gets submerged knee-deep in snow at times. At night, salt is sprinkled over the area outside in front of the entrance to our house. This is because salt strewn over snow makes it melt more easily. At the time Mom goes to work, she puts salt in a water bottle and takes it with her. The purpose of doing this is so that when the time comes for her to come home, since the car's glass will have frozen over, she can melt it. She also uses it when the car's door has frozen shut and refuses to open. (Photo 7)

No matter how hard everyone works to clear the snow, every day heavy snowfall piles up and soon buries all the rice fields completely.

Year after year, where the region's snow removal has been successful and where it hasn't becomes a topic of conversation.

Though one isn't used to seeing them in Tokyo, "red-and-white poles" are noticeable along snow-covered roads. They're erected in the snow precisely to stand out so as to prevent cars from falling into the rice fields where, along snow-covered roads, the boundary between the road and the field fades away.

Niigata's traffic lights are vertically oriented. After discovering horizontal traffic lights in Tokyo and thinking it was strange, I tried asking about it and was told

⁷A Japanese rice cracker.

that in regions where snow falls, traffic lights are set up vertically to prevent accumulating snow from blocking them from view. (Photo 8)

For the Kusumis, the year starts with “New Year’s Eve”—“The New Year’s performances are on December 31, aren’t they?”

December 31. Starting in the morning, Mom prepares osechi.⁸ The osechi contents: herring roe, kamaboko,⁹ and nishime,¹⁰ crisp and crunchy. The crunchiness comes from the daikon radish, kombu,¹¹ dried squid, etc., all mixed together. On top of that, Koharu’s favorite: fried shrimp. Whenever there’s an event with fried shrimp and sashimi, the Kusumis always show up. The local ŌZAKIYA delivers it. Ōzakiya is mainly a ramen shop, but they also have a catering service with tamagoyaki¹² and oyakodon¹³ and other items. When Morning Musume¹⁴ had live performances in Niigata, every time we would order this place’s tamagoyaki for refreshments. Both members and staff would ask, the moment we arrived in Niigata, “When is the tamagoyaki coming~? Is the tamagoyaki here yet? Is the tamagoyaki here yet~?”—in the dressing room, the tamagoyaki, even more than Koharu, was everyone’s favorite (HAHA). (Photo 9)

On the last day of the year, Koharu helps out at home. 6:00 P.M. “Ding-dong ding-dong”—Washima Village’s bell rings three times every day at 6 in the morning, 12 noon, and 6 in the evening to let us know the time. On New Year’s Eve, starting at 15:00, we would take a full nap. To prepare for staying up late. When the 6 o’clock bell rings, dinner starts! On New Year’s Eve, everybody eats the osechi, and after we finish, we generally grill dried squid and eat it. The Kusumi family’s way of eating dried squid is to dribble soy sauce over mayonnaise and sprinkle shichimi¹⁵ on top. At the Kusumis’, we immediately eat up the osechi when the 6 o’clock bell rings on the 31st, so the New Year really starts at that point.

When it turns 0:00, we have toshikoshi-soba.¹⁶ At the Kusumi residence, we have the two noodle varieties of soba and udon, and we pick and eat whichever one we prefer. Speaking of the main New Year’s Day, we just eat New Year’s Eve

⁸Traditional foods eaten during the Japanese New Year, compartmentalized in special boxes.

⁹Processed fish paste.

¹⁰A stew made mainly from vegetables boiled until almost dry in soy sauce and water.

¹¹A type of edible kelp.

¹²A Japanese omelette.

¹³A rice bowl dish with chicken and egg.

¹⁴The flagship group of the Hello! Project idol collective, debuting in 1997 with five members. Members leave the group by graduating, and new members join with each new generation. Kusumi would join the group as the sole member of the 7th generation in 2005. This should win some kind of award for being the most unnecessary footnote ever, given the likely readership.

¹⁵A spice blend containing seven ingredients, such as chili pepper, orange peel, black sesame seed, white sesame seed, Japanese pepper, ginger, and seaweed.

¹⁶Soba noodles eaten on New Year’s Eve.

osechi leftovers and mochi.¹⁷ Afterward we just idle around. That said, in the area of Washima Village, there aren't any stores that look like they do business on New Year's Day. The town's quietest time of the year passes by on New Year's.

After I came to Tokyo, I went to Hatsumōde¹⁸ at midnight for the first time. It was at the Hachiman¹⁹ shrine close to home. Though it was winter, the place was full of food carts and lots of people were making noise; I thought they were having some kind of special festival. It was afterward that I realized it was Hatsumōde.

A gap between Tokyo and the village—“You could pay money for bamboo shoots!”

With the passing of the snow-filled winter and the arrival of spring, various vegetables start to sprout.

During this season we get fuki²⁰ shoots, Japanese mugwort, pomegranate, mushrooms—anything growing in the area that we took back with us Grandma would deep-fry or stir-fry for us.

Every year when it's around May~June, the Kusumis have a “bamboo shoot hunt” custom. Dad and others drive up to the mountains near the Kusumi house and come back with the car loaded up with tons of bamboo shoots. From that day on, it's bamboo-shoot cooking every day. It gets pretty satiating, doesn't it? I thought that with our huge pile, bamboo shoots were something you could normally eat as much of as you wanted to, so when I came to Tokyo, I was surprised to find Japanese-style restaurants offering bamboo shoots at a good price. I thought, they charge money for bamboo shoots even though they grow all over the place?

It's the same with vegetables. After coming to Tokyo, I was surprised, thinking, you buy vegetables at the supermarket! The price is high, but there are a lot of varieties. I thought vegetables were things you grew in the fields and afterward exchanged with others in the area. Grandpa and Grandma's field had watermelons, squash, potatoes, taro, onions—they had everything.

When spring comes, animals waking up from their hibernation make their appearance in the village. Among other scenes, I would open the front door to find, right in front of my eyes, a raccoon dog standing there with a self-satisfied look; we would be in a nice mood riding in the car and gaze out only to see raccoon dogs calmly crossing the road. Such spectacles were quite commonplace.

¹⁷A Japanese rice cake.

¹⁸The first shrine visit of the New Year.

¹⁹The Japanese god of warriors and archery.

²⁰Also known as giant butterbur. Fuki shoots can be stir-fried with miso or fried as tempura.

The snake incident—“Go throw it out quick! By my sister”

During the school vacation, we go pick up shed snake skins.

Around this time, the fad at school was SHED SNAKE SKINS: everybody would be gathering snake skins.

Friend “I fou~nd a snake skin!”

Koharu “Where? Where?”

Friend “Lucky!! Isn’t it nice~”

Koharu “How nice~”

If you carry a snake skin, you can boast to your friends.

As for the touch, it isn’t like other things but rather dried out and a little wet.

There was a superstition that if you put a snake skin in your wallet, you’ll save up money.

I too, of course, put a shed snake skin in my wallet.

One time I was spotted by Sis.

Sister “What?? What? What? That thing!”

Koharu “It’s a shed snake skin~! Isn’t it nice~!” I said proudly.

Sister “Ew!! Gross, gross! Throw it out! Mo~m. This brat brought in a snake~ Do something~!” she said, looking disagreeable.

Mother “Throw it out~”

Everyone had a revolted look on their face.

Koharu “Eh??” I was surprised.

But it’s so trendy at school and if you had one, you’d make everyone jealous. . . . I couldn’t believe their words.

Koharu “If you put a shed snake skin in your wallet, you’ll get rich, you know~ It’s good, isn’t it~ He~re, should I give it to you? No, I won’t give it to Sis, will I~!”

Sis looks at me with a cold gaze.

Sister “I don’t need it— Go throw it out quick! It’s dirty! Oh, and don’t enter my room with those hands. Disgusting.”

Koharu “You saying that makes me want to touch you (HAHA).”

And with those hands, I touched her all over.

Sister “Waa!! (GRRR) Screw you!”

“Whack!!” I was beaten up.

Koharu (*Craap—*)

Being told *no* to keeping the snake skin was disappointing, so I sneakily put the snake skin underneath the door to Sis’s room for her!

Koharu *(Hehe (HAHA)—serves you right! Cheeky Koharu disposed of the snake skin indeed! Under Sis's door, no less!)*

The next day, during the school break, everybody again found a shed snake skin.

Koharu “Gross!”

My friends were surprised. Just as expected. Because until the day before, I'd been eagerly looking for snake skins. But I remember Grandma saying, “Because it saves up money, the snake takes good care of it.”

The Ameyoko of the Washima area

Washima Village is close to the mountains and close to the sea too. After a 10-minute drive by car, you reach the Sea of Japan. When summer arrives, the Kusumis go to a town along the coast called Teradomari. There's a place there along the coast called Kakujo Market, where tents are lined up in a row, selling crabs and fish, dried squid and miso manjū,²¹ and grilled corn, among other things.

I loved playing at the beach during the summer, and buying various things at Kakujo Market and having a barbecue. (Photo 10)

Nowadays, “Teradomari Ameyoko”²² is written on the sightseeing maps, and it seems like a fairly famous sightseeing location. Now that I think about it, I don't know how many, but a huge number of cars have stopped there since those days. In the old days, I used to think, “adachi”? what's that?—but the map said it was actually just a place name in Tokyo of all things! I might have had a light shock when I realized “adachi” = “Adachi”.²³

Barefoot exercise ~A day of the barefoot life for everyone~

At school, when summer starts, we practice all at once what's known as barefoot exercise.

Normally when we arrive at school, we change into slippers in the entryway, but during the barefoot exercise period, after getting to school we have to take our shoes and socks off to participate in daily activities. Not only indoors, but we had to be barefoot for physical education classes too, when we went out onto the playground. Upon coming back from the playground, we wash our feet at the foot-washing area before entering the school building. Showerheads come out of the ground on this side of the entrance, and we step forward while washing our feet before finally drying them on cloths and entering the building. Since we were

²¹Manjū is a steamed bun filled with bean paste.

²²Ameyoko is a busy shopping street along the tracks of the Yamanote Line between Ueno and Okachimachi Stations in Tokyo.

²³One of the special wards of Tokyo, located in the north.

barefoot, thumbtacks would stick to our feet again and again, and the ground outside was so hot from the summer heat that I thought our feet would totally burn up, so I despised barefoot exercise. Just in case, before the barefoot exercise period starts, we pick up fallen rocks from all around the school grounds. . . . But it was truly endless steady work, wasn't it?

In addition, we grew loofah, and there was even a class for making scrubbing brushes out of the fruit.

Coming home from school, we made boats out of bamboo grass and played by setting them afloat in the river. Whenever I talk about that, people say, "That story, is it a Shōwa²⁴ story?"—but it's a story of the present time. It's not a historical tale but a contemporary one.

Chemicals come falling from the sky

In the summer, in farm-covered Niigata, "aerial pest control" happens 2 to 3 times a year. Days when helicopters spray chemicals over farms and fields all at once. Days that are a bit special, with the times for going outside being set, and the time school starts being moved later in the day. I haven't seen it myself, but an acquaintance told me that at the time of the aerial pest control, if you went outside, you'd see white powder hanging in the air. Dangerous, dangerous. I was scared of the chemicals and would absolutely not go outside. Instead, even after it ended, for a long while afterward I stayed inside. I thought, you can't be too careful, right?

Washima festivals—"At Yoyogi Gymnasium, there's a festival every day, isn't there?"

When autumn starts, there are several events that everybody in the village participates in.

On with the yukata²⁵ and off to the middle school playing field. People in the village gather there, so those days are super exciting. When we heard the Washima Ondo,²⁶ we immediately joined together in a ring and danced, doing our best to mimic the adults. I loved dancing.

Another attraction: the food carts. I say food carts, but now that I think about it, there were only 2 of them. Also, once in a while Dad would fry yakisoba.²⁷ Even though that was all, those were special days for Koharu.

²⁴The period from 1926 to 1989.

²⁵A light cotton summer kimono.

²⁶Ondo is a genre of Japanese folk music, often used to accompany local community dances. The Washima Ondo is presumably an ondo song local to Washima.

²⁷Stir-fried ramen-style noodles.

These festivals were exciting, but after I came to Tokyo, I was surprised by how festivals reached an entirely different scale. More food carts than you can count show up, and it's hard to walk around with such a huge congestion of people. Every time we drove by the front of Yoyogi Gymnasium,²⁸ I thought, "There's always a festival going on here~"²⁹ So jealous~" Well, around the 10th time I passed by there, I was surprised when I noticed that for the first time there wasn't a festival going on! I was under the impression that there was a festival all the time.

A real sports day for everyone from kids to the elderly!

There's a sports day where everyone in the village participates. Districts compete against one another. From elementary school students to grandfathers, everyone attends the sports day. For districts with small populations, taking turns one after another over and over can be dreadful (HAHA). Generally everyone is always ranked together. But it's having families with fast feet that wins you the championship.

Even the elementary school marathon tournament became something of a village event. Every year in September, all the elementary school pupils depart from the school, break out of the fields, and run up to the mountains. On those days, people in the village come out to support the 1st and 2nd graders running 3 laps around the playground and the 3rd graders and up running to the mountains and coming back.

In addition, there are things that kids and people in the village cooperate on.

One house in every several is designated a "110³⁰ house", and it's arranged so that anytime there's something troubling you, you can rush in. As a sign, a "110 house" seal is affixed to the entryway. Sis and Bro and I luckily haven't ever rushed into one, but we can feel relieved just knowing that such houses are there.

There's something like a village newspaper that elementary school students deliver called the "schoolwide distribution". The elementary school students on duty go from house to house passing out sheets of paper compiling village event news, information, etc. Sis apparently had trouble passing them out properly (HAHA), but I took such a thing too seriously, so I delivered it to one house after another faster than anyone else, and went around screaming in a super-loud voice, "He~~~~re's the schoolwide distribution!"

²⁸A sports arena in Yoyogi Park, Tokyo.

²⁹There was indeed a festival going on the first time I visited Yoyogi. Kusumi's experience is not unusual.

³⁰110 is the police emergency telephone number in Japan.

[
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**2010! An on-the-scene relay
broadcast of a one-day visit
home! Typical, isn't it? (HAHA)**

“Is Koharu’s hometown so unusual?”

After the decision to publish this book had been made, I went back to my hometown for a visit along with some of the staff.

《First, we idly passed by the elementary school and looked》

- Koharu** “Here is the elementary school. Ah! The portrait I drew is still there. (Photos 11 · 12) Below it is all of the elementary school fields.” (Photo 13)
- Staff 1** “Really~ it’s vast, isn’t it~”
- Koharu** “Yes, we grew various vegetables here. For the field class, village farmers served as field teachers and taught us how to grow vegetables. On top of that, we kept chabo³¹ and other animals.”
- Sister** “Chabo? I had a sheep and a goat!”
- Koharu** “(HAHA) (HAHA) Their names?”
- Sister** “The sheep was Moko, and the goat was Mee.”
- Koharu** “Just like that——(HAHA).”
- Sister** “Naturally they went for walks too. While being suitably led.”
- Koharu** “(HAHA).”
- Staff 2** “What do you use to feed them?”
- Sister** “Grass growing around there. Since however much you need, it’s there.”
- Koharu** “We kept chabo, and those who spot an egg that a chabo laid get to keep it and take it home with them, so people who find eggs are so lucky. Everybody would fix their eyes at the chickens and say, ‘Lay an egg——’”

《After that, we went to the roadside rest area and the junior high school and the pool Koharu often went to》

- Staff 2** “(HAHA) That pool or something is nice, isn’t it? It’s retro and nice, you know~” (Photo 14)
- Koharu** “Is that so? (HAHA).”
- Staff 1** “Eh? What about the junior high school’s pool?”
- Sister** “It’s shared like that (HAHA).”

³¹A breed of chicken; also known as the Japanese bantam.

- Koharu** “On top of that, this is the kindergarten’s pool too (HAHA). It’s shared with the kindergarten, of all things. Only the elementary school is separate.”
- Staff 1** “You mean it’s a town pool that everybody uses?”
- Sister** “Yes. The playing field in front of the school is also used for club activities, for 1 thing, but on the weekends, it’s the baseball field that fathers use (HAHA)—and at night, people use it for night baseball under the lights.” (Photo 15)
- Koharu** “Eh? Isn’t that Dad? He’s playing grass-lot baseball.”
- Father** “Ah, thank you so much~ for coming over from so far away.”
- Staff 2** “We apologize for any inconvenience. Koharu-chan is letting us see her hometown.”

《We went and looked at the station》

- Staff 1** “This is like ama~~zing. It’s a station but it doesn’t even look like one. . . .” (Photo 16)
- Staff 2** “There’s still a remnant of the past remaining, eh? That over there also looks like it~ Back then you’d walk along the stairs over there and go under to get to the platform on the other side, wouldn’t you?”
- Staff 1** “I have a feeling we’ve slipped through time to like a different era.”
- We started to explore the station by ourselves.
- Staff 1** “Ah, it’s a timetable. I’ve never seen a timetable like this before (HAHA). The trains really do run only this number of times in 1 day, don’t they?”
- Sister** “If you miss the 8 A.M., another one doesn’t come until 12.”
- Koharu** “But since our house is nearby, even if we leave after the departure bell rings, we’d still make it in the worst case!”
- Staff 1** “Certainly it seems like even if you’re late, both the driver and the passengers would be happy to wait for you.”
- Staff 2** “How many carriages does a train usually come with?”
- Koharu** “Just 2.”
- Staff 2** “Ah~ it’s like that, I see~ If there are many of them, they’ll be in the red, which isn’t so good, is it?”
- Staff 1** “Eh?? There’s a mailbox here, but they come only once a week.” (Photo 17)
- Koharu** “That’s it. That’s it. Because of that, I was always hurrying so I wouldn’t be late when I dropped off the mail in the morning on those days. Ah, I also mailed my audition résumé from here (HAHA).”
- Koharu** “Ah, do you see that retro bus stop?”
- Staff 1** “Yeah. I have to look at the schedule. Ah~ just like I heard, it really does come only a few times a day, doesn’t it? You really have to not miss it, eh? If you do miss it, it’d be a disaster, right?” (Photo 18)

- Koharu** “That’s right~ I’m always frantic! But Sis often misses it by the tiniest bit. It’s disappointing, isn’t it! So when the bus passed by the front of our house, we had to run and chase after it to get on. The driver is nice and totally stops for us.”
- Staff 2** “That’s good, eh? That’s a value unique to the country, isn’t it? In Tokyo, it’d be absolutely impossible.”

There were staff members who had their parasols out, but in this village, their fancy parasols felt out of place (HAHA).

《We headed toward the classroom where Koharu learned calligraphy》

- Staff 3** “Do we turn here, I wonder?”
- Sister** “Yes. One-way traffic and the like pretty much don’t exist here, so it’s nothing to worry about at all. When I went to Tokyo, I was surprised when I saw nothing but one-way streets.”
- Koharu** “Ah, the calligraphy classroom is this one.”
- All** “Eh? Which one?”
- Koharu** “That one. It’s that one.”
- All** “Eh?? Which one??”
- Koharu** “Eh? It’s right in front of your eyes. That one.”
- All** “Mm? That one?”
- Koharu** “That’s right. That’s right. Ah, do you see it approaching right ahead?”
- Staff 2** “Looks like it.”
- Koharu** “This one. It’s this one.”
- All** “Eh? Ehh? I was thinking it was this one over here!”
- Koharu** “That’s somebody’s house. Like a house people normally live in, you know~ But it isn’t that—*this* is the calligraphy classroom.”
(Photo 19)

Everyone stared with marveling eyes.

- Staff 1** “What about the key? No way, this padlock? Impossible~”
- Koharu** “It’s not because someone’s living here; it’s so that nothing gets stolen, isn’t it?”
- Staff 2** “About how many people come inside here?”
- Koharu** “Ah, there’s a lot, so we’d make a line up to the hallway. Because of that, I’d always be the first to go, but I’d go too early, so even when I got here, no one would have arrived yet (HAHA).”
- Staff 1** “There are many pupils, aren’t there?”
- Koharu** “It’s about $\frac{2}{3}$ the size of a school class, isn’t it? Also, speaking of which, there were elementary school students in years 1~6, and even a few middle school students, so I thought it was a good number.”

- Sister** “Even if you wanted to have lessons, they’re not held elsewhere, so everyone goes to the same place.”
- Staff 2** “That number of people can fit inside here, huh~ So they have to line up, don’t they~”

《The soroban juku》

- Koharu** “You can also see the soroban³² juku³³ from here.”
- All** “Eh—where, where? Isn’t there nothing but fields?”
- Koharu** “It’s that building.”
- All** “Eh? Ah—that hut? No way!”
- Staff 1** “And it’s amazing, isn’t it? Retro. At a glance, it doesn’t even look like a classroom.”
- Koharu** “Yes. I attended classes here~”
- Staff 2** “Ah, there’s a proper sign. And it’s elegant, being written on a tree. Both the calligraphy classroom and the soroban classroom are really worth seeing.” (Photo 20)

《New · elementary school》 (Photo 21)

- Koharu** “The elementary school I attended had to close due to a merger. This new elementary school is an extremely fashionable one that looks like it could be used for shooting a drama or as the setting of a photoalbum~”
- Staff 1** “Fashionable~”
- Staff 2** “What’s going on with this?”
- Koharu** “They’re all one-story buildings, and they’re connected in the middle, but the appearance is that they’re separated into school grades. And the one that looks like it’s in the very center is the animal pen.”
- Staff 2** “It must have cost a lot of money, right? Without a plot of land, it’d be impossible to build a separate building for each grade, wouldn’t it?”
- Koharu** “It definitely cost a lot, huh~?”
- Staff 1** “Is that a bus?”
- Koharu** “That’s the school bus that transports students to and from school.”
- Staff 1** “It’s true~ It has *school bus* properly written on it~”
- Staff 1** “Eh? What’s that? It’s a pretty bird that looks like a white swan!”
- Koharu** “It’s like an objet d’art, you know, isn’t it? A bird that might have come a long way out from a fairyland, right? If it’s in this area, it’ll appear again here and there.”

³²The Japanese abacus, still in use today.

³³A type of private school offering instruction outside of or complementing the regular academic curriculum.

- Staff 2** “Isn’t it really just a swan?”
Staff 1 “Eh? Isn’t that amazing? Normally they’re solitary creatures, aren’t they?”
Koharu “There’s nothing else to see around here, so shall we go to the coast?”

《We headed toward the sea》

- Staff 1** “The sea’s near here?”
Koharu “It is. We’d often go there. Sis would bike there in her swimsuit. Ah, that big pretty swan-like bird was just there again.”
Staff 1 “It really was— I saw it for the first time. But with nothing but mountains around, I can’t imagine the sea being here too. Marvelous.”
Koharu “It’s certainly like that, now that I think about it. From right where the mountains are, you can’t see the sea, and from right where the sea is, you can’t see the mountains, can you? And there’s a campground too. And incredibly, the sea is right below that campground (HAHA).”
Staff 1 “It’s amazing. We might really see the sea. We’re going more and more into the mountains.”
Staff 2 “Amazing, isn’t it? This road. The scenery’s amazing. Because it’s nothing but mountains.”
Koharu “That’s right. There aren’t even radio waves in this area.”
Staff 2 “This must not be a place where you can get radio reception~ It must be terrifying at night~ You’d get the feeling you couldn’t get back home, eh?”
All “(HAHA).”
Sister “Certainly . . . (HAHA)—but at night, if you don’t turn up the car lights, you won’t see what’s in front of you and you’ll crash into the mountain. Besides, if you don’t turn them up, you won’t notice cars coming toward you in the opposite lane. Because there aren’t any streetlights . . .”
Staff 1 “Wow~ ama—zing. It’s the sea~ Just a little while ago, we were in the mountains, and now suddenly the sea pops up ahead. This is the Sea of Japan?”
Koharu “Yes. Since there’s a bypass right now, it’s most convenient to take that road, but you can still follow the coastline all the way toward either Jōetsu³⁴ or Kaetsu.”³⁵
Staff 2 “What is this area a part of?”
Koharu “Chūetsu.”³⁶
Staff 2 “Ah!! Let’s drop in here for a bit.”

³⁴The southwestern region of Niigata Prefecture, home to its third-largest city, Jōetsu.

³⁵The northeastern region of Niigata Prefecture, home to its capital and largest city, Niigata.

³⁶The central region of Niigata Prefecture, home to its second-largest city, Nagaoka.

《Roaming around Kakujō》 (Photo 22)

Kakujō is a place that sells a lot of seafood. Grilled whole squid, grilled corn,³⁷ grilled shrimp, grilled crab, grilled fish, etc., are put on skewers, and you can buy and eat them right away at that place.

- Staff 1** “This place is full of cars, isn’t it~ Is it always this crowded?”
Koharu “Could it be a sightseeing spot, I wonder? There’s often a lot of people who come by car or bus from other prefectures, you know.”
Staff 2 “Where’s the parking lot? And the ticket machine?”
Koharu “Ticket machine? There’s no reason to expect a fee. In this area, pay parking lots don’t exist.”
Staff 2 “That’s right, isn’t it? This place is completely different from Tokyo, huh?”
Sister “When we came to Tokyo, I was surprised. Huh? ¥1600 for only 2 hours? For example. A while ago, I was charged around ¥8000 for no reason at all.”
Koharu “I too was surprised at seeing nothing but pay parking spots in Tokyo. Last month the parking fee was higher than the rent in Niigata!”

《We stopped the car and walked along the row at Kakujō》

- Staff 1** “Did you come here often?”
Koharu “When we lived in Niigata, we would buy various things here, take them to the beach, and eat them. Dad would often say, ‘Since the kanimiso³⁸ isn’t so appetizing, I’ll eat it for you, so just eat a lot of the crab meat.’ Now that I think about it, that was Dad’s crime of conscience, wasn’t it (HAHA)? Also, he would often fly kites with us at the beach.”
Sister “Koharu~ There’s crab soup~”
Koharu “Looks tasty~ But I’m also leaning toward squid for some reason. Ah~ but sushi is good too, isn’t it?”
Staff 2 “No, I feel like these skewered dango.”³⁹
Koharu “Eh? *Dango* of all things? With this much seafood around . . . dango?”
Sister “And it’s very hot right now too . . . dango, in this blazing sunshine?”
Staff 2 “This looks the tastiest though.”
All “(HAHA).”
Koharu “I want to eat sushi.”

³⁷This is seafood?

³⁸The miso-like internal organs of a crab.

³⁹Dumplings made from rice flour and served three to four pieces on a skewer.

《We entered the sushi shop》

Staff 1 “Eh? It looks like someone’s house.”

Koharu “(HAHA) There are a lot of places like this in Niigata. Let’s go in—”

We all looked at the menu and were in the middle of deciding what to order.

Staff 1 “It’s cheap, isn’t it?”

Koharu “Niigata is cheap, but the quantities are extremely large. Basically everything is one huge size.”

《The items we ordered came out》

Staff “Eh? The miso soup’s big!”

Miso soup filled the 18 cm diameter bowl. And with quite a lot of ingredients, it was delicious.

Staff 1 “This is quite a lot~ I can’t even finish one portion~ I’ll give a little to you, Koharu.”

Koharu “Sushi’s multiplying on my plate~ (HAHA).”

Staff 2 “This is delicious.”

Koharu “Ah—! You’re eating dango. It’s the dango you’ve had your eyes on from the beginning, isn’t it?”

Staff 2 “That’s right. I was totally set on it.”

Koharu “Please let me try a little. Ah, it’s springy and tasty.”

Staff 2 “Well then, let’s go to a café in a bit.”

《Café search》

Staff 2 “Where’s the café?”

Koharu “Eh . . . *are* there any cafés in Niigata? Now that you mention it, I might not have ever seen one. . . .”

Staff 2 “Isn’t there at least one?”

Koharu “No. There might not be any. But maybe there’s one on the way to Nagaoka Station.”⁴⁰

Staff 2 “This is the first time I’ve ever done something like search for a café~ (HAHA). So shall we drive to Nagaoka Station?”

Koharu “There are cafés inside department stores, and there’s one inside the train station, but beyond that I haven’t seen anything in Niigata besides Starbucks and chain stores like that. And those are the closest. In this area, I haven’t seen any cafés of the kind you’d normally drink coffee in that are along the road and not in a department store or something.”

⁴⁰The main train station in Nagaoka City, which absorbed both Washima and Teradomari in 2006.

- Sister** “There are probably some bakeries and such that also have coffee, but other than the kind inside the station building, there might not be any cafés that people would normally call cafés.”
- Staff 2** “That’s impossible, isn’t it~? Let’s drive around for a bit and look. But I think since the Shinkansen⁴¹ runs through Nagaoka Station, we can expect there to be at least one café.”
- Sister** “Ah!! Doesn’t that look like one?”
- We got closer and looked.
- Sister** “Ah, it wasn’t a café. I was deceived. It’s a cake shop.”
- Staff 2** “Even with cake, it’s strange to sell just cake without a space next to it to eat in.”
- Staff 2** “What? Why is there a line like this for a McDonald’s?”
- Koharu** “This isn’t like Tokyo, where there’s like one in each and every station.”
- Staff 2** “Indeed. The drive-through makes a line—I get it.”
- Koharu** “There isn’t a café, is there. . . .”
- Staff 1** “If we’ve searched this much without finding one, I don’t think there really is one. Even looking it up on the Net, nothing comes up but McDonald’s and such. The rest look like they’re only inside department stores.”
- Staff 2** “There’s nothing we can do. Well then, shall we go to the hotel café soon and have some tea?”
- All** “Sure, let’s do that.”

《At the hotel》

There’s . . . no café. . . .

- Sister** “Looks like there’s this *café restaurant* inside, but is this it?”
- Staff 2** “Ah~ that’s the one. Shall we go?”

After we get there, a surprise.

A sign saying JAPAN IS A DESSERT BUFFET!!

- Staff 2** “For real? Even at the hotel there’s no café? Isn’t it inconvenient, I wonder?”
- Staff 1** “That kind of custom isn’t one dating back to the olden days, is it?”
- Koharu** “I imagine not. Now, being in Tokyo, we’ve totally gotten used to having cafés around, but up until now, when we were living in Niigata, it wasn’t inconvenient even without them.”
- Sister** “I’ve never had tea and such at a café, even when I was a student. Until now, that’s been normal.”

⁴¹The high-speed passenger rail network in Japan. The Jōetsu Shinkansen line connects Tokyo and Niigata and passes through Nagaoka.

《In the car on the way back》

- Staff 1** “It was different from the images and such, wasn’t it? Being able to come and see the real thing was nice. The atmosphere was as though we’d really had a timeslip and time had stopped.”
- Staff 2** “If I stayed here, I might even lose my grasp of common sense, in a good way. But without any cafés, a part of daily life, it makes me completely worried~ Naturally it would be normal for you, Koharu. If you’d stayed in the village!! But coming out from that village into the city, even if you’re not an eccentric, you might be seen as unusual. But common sense in the village and common sense in the city are a great deal different. Without coming and seeing, we wouldn’t have understood this.”
- Staff 3** “With mountains, and the sea, and fields all over—it’s Nature. What a nice feeling it is, driving along!” (Photo 23)

For Koharu, it was as though nothing at all had changed; I just showed everyone around my very ordinary hometown. But for everyone else, it seemed to be full of rare things, with lots of surprising places.⁴²

⁴²At the risk of subverting the text with even more unwarranted Nabokovian annotations, I would like to contribute a brief report of my own experience visiting Kusumi’s hometown, about two years after the visit she describes in this section. Although I was not able to see all of the points of interest in her guided tour here, I found Washima to be not entirely as unexpected as Kusumi makes it out to be, though that is likely due to my having read and reread this book prior to my visit, thus spoiling myself of any potential for surprise. Perhaps I would have benefitted from a guided tour myself, but having traveled alone by train from Tokyo on a holiday (within a holiday, as I had reached Tokyo from Chicago by way of Madrid, Stockholm, Istanbul, and Osaka, with a side trip to Seoul), and without anyone to visit in particular, I did not find the opportunity to speak with anyone in the area, except for those travelers who pulled up next to me as I was walking along an empty road surrounded by fields to ask for directions to someplace or other—directions that I, alas, being even less of a native of the area than they, could not give! Having lost my way myself, I was pleased to find a few vending machines here in the middle of the country—a ubiquitous feature of the Japanese landscape that may come as a surprise to some—affording me some relief from the blistering heat in the form of a bottle of chilled mikan juice (what flavor could be more appropriate?). After wandering around and catching sight of signs for several businesses with *Kusumi* in the name (operated by members of Koharu’s extended family perhaps?), I found my way back to the train station with the beloved mailbox out front, disappointed that the famed tamagoyaki restaurant was closed for the holiday, but delighted to have had the chance to make this most oddball of pilgrimages, albeit one that almost ended in disaster after some confusion as to which of the two trains showing up simultaneously at the station I was supposed to take. Fortunately, I was able to make it safely back to Tokyo in time for an evening concert with IU, who would a couple of weeks later inspire another pilgrimage of sorts, this time to Venice, which I had the spectacular misfortune to visit during a public transportation strike . . . but that is another story for another time, and a footnote being not the most ideal medium for a travel essay concerning unusual visits to unexpected places, I will allow the reader to finish the chapter and proceed with the next one.

Chapter 2

Rural Elementary School Life

[[A thoroughly diligent student
(lower elementary grades)]]

Entering elementary school ~My backpack suddenly got decorated by Sis!~

At the time I entered elementary school, I was bought a backpack, of course.

And that backpack suddenly got decorated by Sis.

Sister “I’ll make it cute for you.”

First she laid lamé on various spots on the backpack and turned it into a sparkly backpack.

Koharu “Cute.”

Sister “Isn’t it! Why don’t we do a little more!”

She put stickers on it. Having come this far, she couldn’t be stopped! What’s she going to do after that, I was wondering—when she started drawing a picture on the backpack with a pen.

Koharu “Eh? Are you scribbling with a pen? Is that all right?”

Sister “This isn’t scribbling! It’s art, art! Leave it to me! I’m drawing cute things!”

Koharu “Isn’t this enough already?”

Sister “Ah, shall I draw here too?”

By which she meant the spot she was pointing to right in the middle of the backpack.

Koharu “Stop it already. They’ll get mad at me.”

Sister “Really? Did they tell you you can’t have art on your backpack?”

Koharu “No, but everyone’ll be totally surprised at it though.”

Sister “Well then, I’ll do more next time, eh?”

That's all she did, and Sis herself doesn't seem to remember this, but when I brought in that flashy backpack, they got angry at me. So after coming home, I immediately cleaned off just a few of the things Sis had drawn.

A determined, thoroughly diligent elementary school student

The elementary school I attended had 90 pupils in all. There were around 19~30 per grade. Of course, they weren't divided into classes or anything like that. Because there was just one class.

Right when I came home from school: homework! While my homework wasn't finished, I wouldn't even eat dinner. If I didn't understand the meaning of a problem or something like that, I'd call my teacher on the phone right away.

During music period, I opened my mouth wide and sang with a voice louder than anyone. But in the middle of class, my teacher often got mad at me—"Koharu-san! Stop the chit-chat, please." It was everyone, not just Koharu, who chit-chatted, but since Koharu's voice is loud and stands out, it was often just me who got warned. A vocal disadvantage (HAHA).

Once a month, there'd be a parents' day, and every time, Mom would come to observe the class. On those days, it seems I'd face Mom and keep waving my hands. Instead of facing forward, I was set on grinning at Mom sitting in the back and waving to her, so it seems she directed me with her eyes—"Turn and face the front"—but to Koharu, apparently that message didn't get across.

Abacus Calculation I & Mental Arithmetic I⁴³

To speak of accomplishments, there's no ballet classroom, piano classroom, or any stylish lessons like Kumon⁴⁴ or English at all, but what just about all the children in our area attend is calligraphy and soroban. 2 terakoya⁴⁵ buildings from long ago. Thanks to everyone, they're still flourishing, even with 2 buildings! It seems they're continuing to serve as classrooms even now. It was the same for the Kusumi children as for everybody: when we entered elementary school, we started attending those two.

The soroban juku was every day except Tuesday, starting at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Since just about all the elementary school children went, it was terri-

⁴³Kusumi does not mention any mental arithmetic class in this section. How bizarre.

⁴⁴An educational method developed by Toru Kumon in Osaka in the 1950s and now employed at thousands of Kumon Centers in Japan as well as overseas.

⁴⁵Private elementary schools established in the Edo period for educating the children of commoners.

ble waiting for your turn. I would go earlier than anyone, set out the soroban equipment, and save myself a seat. In that great confusion of a soroban classroom, even just the equipment being out of alignment would be enough to start a bit of quarreling, and in any case it was bustling. One day, while I was on my way toward the soroban juku, 2 bicycles crashed into me at the same time, but although it hurt a lot, I still went to the juku all covered in blood. Even when I was asked by everyone, “What happened? It’s dangerous though, isn’t it?” I would do my soroban anyway, and when I returned home, it was surprising how much Sis raged—“What’s with that body? Normally you’d come home right away if such a thing happened, wouldn’t you! Don’t injure your body! What’ll you do if it leaves a scar!”—so I started crying—“I got run over by middle school students~ Somehow or other~~”—and more and more, Sis totally flipped out—“Who ran you over? Give me their names!!”—as I recall (HAHA).

As for calligraphy, it was every week on Sunday, starting at 8 o’clock in the morning, but on those long-awaited Sundays, Koharu, who wanted to use the break effectively and was itching to have class, went to the classroom starting at 6 in the morning and made the teacher worried.

School events with too much nature

At our elementary school, there were many events in connection with nature.

* Field time

The school had earth-shatteringly large fields, and there we would learn how to grow vegetables and flowers and have a class on growing plants. The teachers who teach these things are neighborhood farmers. (Photo 24)

There’s also a rice farming class. This too has neighborhood farmers come to serve as teachers. Planting seedlings~harvesting: it lasts a year, and with the resulting rice, there’s a big mochitsuki celebration.⁴⁶ Families also gather at the school and participate. (Photo 25)

* Personal-experience learning

We also had horse riding as one of the classes at school. (Photo 26)

* The Rabbit Hill adventure playground

There’s a forest behind the school, and when you climb the mountain there, you’ll find a handmade adventure playground that pupils’ parents made for us. Koharu often played there. (Photos 27 · 28)

⁴⁶Mochitsuki is the traditional mochi-pounding ceremony, in which cooked rice is pounded in a mortar before being formed into various shapes to be used in making different kinds of confectionery and other dishes.

* Hanami⁴⁷ school lunch

When spring comes, everyone carries their school lunch outside and eats it under the school's blooming cherry trees. (Photo 29)

Encounters with umeboshi

It was probably around my 2nd year in elementary school that I started to think, Umeboshi⁴⁸ is delicious! Not that I was particularly interested in healthy things—I just often bought stuff like umeboshi and dried squid and ate it, rather than thinking chocolate and snack foods were tasty.

This is the Koharu who, when going to a convenience store, goes not to the sweets corner but to the otsumami⁴⁹ corner first.

When I find umeboshi that I haven't eaten before, I'll buy it and eat it right away, and when I pass a store that looks as though it might be selling umeboshi, I'll always drop in.

While I do like red umeboshi, it's the green and crunchy ume that I love in particular. I know that Tokyo people don't eat green ume much. Koharuwise, green ume are the sensation of afternoon snacks and fruits.

[[Modeling aspirations (middle elementary grades)]]

A day in the life of vacation-day Koharu

Starting in the morning, I watch rental videos. Since around this time, I've loved SMAP!⁵⁰ For afternoon snacks: umeboshi, dried squid, and other otsumami-type stuff. Not being too good with snack foods and chocolate, I loved things like umeboshi and dried squid more. As for beverages, I'd drink aojiru,⁵¹ tea, water.

After every day, for every item I ate, I would write that number of calories in a notebook, taking care not to over-calorie myself.

From the afternoon onward, it was time for making candy. For Koharu, who loved candy-making, looking at a recipe book while making candy was a daily routine.

My family saying, "Tasty, tasty," and eating it with pleasure made me terribly happy.

For dinner, my family would all eat together every day at 18:00.

⁴⁷The traditional custom of viewing cherry blossoms in bloom.

⁴⁸Pickled and dried ume (Japanese apricot).

⁴⁹Snacks to accompany alcohol, such as dried seafood, nuts, and crackers.

⁵⁰A Johnny's & Associates pop band active since 1991.

⁵¹A vegetable juice drink made out of kale or other green leafy vegetables.

When dinner ended, we put aluminium foil on the stovetop, grilled dried squid, and ate it.

The things we ate went together with Dad's alcohol otsumami.

The Strongest! God! The Master, let me call you! ~Relative Miku-chan~

I had a close friend in the area, Miku-chan; we would often play together. Even our faces looked alike, and we'd be mistaken for twins. (Photo 30)

That kid was incredibly hyper and generally a terrific friend. Once I start writing, it seems like I'd never stop, so I think I'll just write about a few of the things that happened when we were little.

《A dance party》

Miku-chan "Let's have a dance now."

It was sudden. She said that all of a sudden.

Koharu "Uh, sure. All right."

Miku-chan "So let's present in 10 minutes, hm~?"

Koharu (*What do I do . . . ? I'm so embarrassed. What kind of dance should I do . . . ?*)

10 minutes passed.

Miku-chan suddenly went to the entryway, bringing her pet dog with her.

And then, using that pet dog, she pulls off a dance.

Koharu (*For real? Dancing using a pet dog of all things . . . that's just like her!*)

Miku-chan was incredibly interesting and wonderful. No matter what she's doing, she always ends up exceeding expectations. She's a person who doesn't betray your hopes.

And then Koharu's turn.

. We couldn't help laughing.

《Midway through playing》

As always, the 2 of us got along well playing together.

Miku-chan "Toilet—be back in a bit."

15 minutes passed. . . .

Koharu (*Miku-chan's been in the toilet a long time, hasn't she~*)

30 minutes passed. . . .

Koharu (*Eh?*)

She still hadn't come back. So I decided to go look for her.

Koharu "Eh?? Miku-chan?" I was surprised.

Miku-chan was in another room, sitting under the kotatsu⁵² and eating squid.

Miku-chan "Koharu, you have some too~"

After Miku-chan had left the toilet, her grandmother had been eating squid, so just like that, while she was there, she'd apparently forgotten she'd been playing with Koharu.

《A quarrel?》

While we were playing together in the middle of the day, Miku-chan started quarreling with a friend over the phone, and for some reason she was crying out loud, but with Koharu being there, before we knew it, she'd forgotten about it.

《In the middle of the night》

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, Miku-chan just woke straight up and said, "Koharu~ aren't you hungry?"—and started making ramen. Of course she made Koharu's portion too. Though I thought, "Ramen in the middle of the night? We'll totally get fat. . . ." there was no way I could refuse to eat, so I too ate some, but the ramen Miku-chan had made really turned out ridiculously delicious. I was impressed.

《A make-believe performance》

Suddenly I'm told, "Let's have a drama," and the make-believe acting begins.

To start with, we begin by first writing scripts, but in the end, Koharu's script gets rejected, and we go with the one Miku-chan wrote instead. Then for some reason Koharu gets the male role. And then, when we get tired of it, we stop when we feel like it (HAHA).

《My birthday party》

She came to Koharu's birthday party and participated, and on top of that, she lured everyone with stickers—"Everyone~ I'll give you stickers~"

Before we knew it, Miku-chan was playing the leading role at Koharu's birthday party.

⁵²A low table with a blanket spread out around it and a heater underneath.

《Aliases》

Miku-chan had an alias (I think she was calling herself Kaori Hoshikaze, probably). Then she made up an alias for Koharu too. Just as expected from Miku-chan! I was surprised she even went as far as writing that alias as the name on her calligraphy kakizome.⁵³

《Leading-edge fashion》

Miku-chan picked up the Licca-chan⁵⁴ doll that was Koharu's personal property.

What's she going to do~? I thought, and just then, she said, "This is the leading edge of fashion," and cut the skirt diagonally; Licca-chan was clearly being turned into Tarzan. After that, with half of her bottom showing, she transformed into Jagged-Western-Style-Clothes-Wearing Caveperson Licca-chan, had clothes exposing her belly button, and got her hair cut; finally Miku-chan drew stars☆ directly on Licca-chan's face beside her eyes and said, "Sparkly~ cute~"—Licca-chan was riding the leading edge of fashion. Even this Licca-chan, when subjected to Miku-chan's hand, gives off this kind of impression (HAHA).

Modeling aspirations

Around the middle grades of elementary school, I came to read fashion magazines, and I came to be very interested in models and Western-style apparel. I aspired to become a model and wanted to adopt a pretty style for myself too. My favorite reading: *CanCam*.⁵⁵

From early on, Sis would often allow me to play dress-up with her dolls, and I generally loved Western-style apparel, so there were many times when I would put on the clothes Sis had bought for me and have a fashion show in front of the mirror.

At the extracurricular lessons at school, we were told by the teacher to "put on a cap or you'll get sunstroke," but I thought caps and such were out of fashion, so instead I put on one of the sun visors that were in fashion at the time, making my teacher angry—"But that's open in the middle and the sun will hit you—that's not what I meant! Koharu-san—"—but being unstylish was worse, I thought.

No matter how much of a rainy day or a snowy day it was, or even a potato-field day, I didn't want to wear rubber boots and instead wore regular boots. Even though it was cold and I was lightly dressed, I endured it for the sake of fashion! When I grow up, I wanna have a job in Western-style clothing~: that was the dream I came to have at around this time.

⁵³The first calligraphy of the year, customarily written on January 2.

⁵⁴A dress-up doll introduced in 1967 that has enjoyed tremendous popularity in Japan.

⁵⁵A fashion magazine published by Shogakukan starting in 1981. Kusumi would eventually achieve her dream of becoming a model and would debut as a *CanCam* regular with the 2011 November issue.

Diet notebook

By nature, I wouldn't gain much weight, but more and more, I came to start doing a daily weight check, thinking, I wanna have an ideal figure!

To diet, I'd do anything if I heard it was good. Every morning, without fail, I'd try eating grapefruit. For toning, I'd try having a good stretch and things like that; generally, when I got any new information, I'd try it out right away.

All of my friends around me would consume things like sweet juice, but for Koharu, it was tea and water, thoroughly non-calorie. Since everyone had juice, I was embarrassed and would hide the packages, saying, "This is juice, you know~" But once in a while, someone would say, "Orange juice? Can I have some?"—"What a pinch! The secret'll leak," I'd think, and saying, "Koharu's is *really* terrible—it's awful, awful," I'd hightail it out of there.

My interest in dieting never ran out, and I tried lots of things after that too.

I'd do various stretches every day. Stretches to prevent a sagging butt, waist-constriction stretches, leg-slimming stretches, etc.—I'd do various exercises while keeping a record in my notebook.

[Yearning for the city (upper elementary grades)]

An intense open-air classroom—"Like I'm gonna die in a place like this!"

At school, I got to join the badminton team of my heart's desire, and as a 6th grader, I joined the tea-and-flower⁵⁶ club.

Outside of school, I was a part of the village volleyball team, and since there were so few members, I served as captain. (Photo 31)

Besides those, I also participated in free activities happening in the village. Those are called JUVENILE CLASSROOM. Village people volunteer as teachers. Because of that, it varies who comes by on those days.

The main event includes a class for experiencing things along the lines of "Let's make friends with nature because nature is so wonderful." This being the countryside, there's a considerable charisma with regard to nature.

You can start learning in the 3rd year of elementary school, but I didn't join at first.

⁵⁶The traditional Japanese tea ceremony and flower arrangement.

It was because I'd think, I already get tired of looking at nature and stuff even at the best of times, but going out of my way for something like going to look at nature. . . . But when I became a 5th grader, with my friends inviting me, saying, "Let's join. Let's join," I was half in doubt—"It's that fun?"—but under the influence, I decided to join.

First, the starting event: STAMP RALLY.⁵⁷

(Plunk. I want to give up already. . . .)

On top of that, it was raining.

(In the middle of all this rain, going into the mountains and searching. . . . It's a little too stormy, isn't it. . . .)

Since I hadn't been treating the juvenile classroom seriously, I'd put on fashionable clothes and gone with fashionable boots. Then we were told to put on our rain gear. But I thought, "No way I'm going with rain gear!" so instead of putting on rain gear, I was the only one participating using an umbrella.

As a result: no mistake, I got totally soaking wet. Or perhaps I should say, I thought this STAMP RALLY, at this age, was too rigorous in the first place.

After this, I was absent from all events of this sort.

One day, a while after that, an announcement for a TRIP TO FUKUSHIMA⁵⁸ came from the juvenile classroom, and since it seemed interesting, I joined in.

《A camp in the Fukushima forest》

Going there was a shock!!

Koharu "This can't be a forest camp!! It's everywhere! Nature!"

Teacher "Bears do come out, so group leaders, plea—se ring your bells!"

Koharu *(Wait, what? Bears coming out. . . . What in the world?)*

Koharu "Eh——— Or rather, bells just for group leaders? But everyone besides the group leaders will get eaten by bears, won't they!"

Teacher "Thi—s is an actual bear."

Koharu "Huh? Huh?" I was confused.

I saw—an actual specimen of a bear appearing in this forest?

Koharu "(Is it a threat?)"

Thus we learned how to respond when bears appear.

⁵⁷A stamp rally is an event involving traveling to different locations, each with a stamp and inkpad, to imprint a booklet or other document with a unique design from each. This can take the form of an organized contest with the goal of getting the most stamps or be simply various places such as train stations having distinct stamps for visitors to stamp their booklets with.

⁵⁸Fukushima is one of the prefectures of Japan, located in the Tōhoku region, to the north of Tokyo and immediately to the east of Niigata.

(Thinking back now, we were the butt of a joke, but at this time, it was do-as-you're-told.)

Camp started. We all went into the forest.

No one had a bell but the group leaders!

Koharu “Like I’m gonna die in a place like this—”

Koharu stuck right by the group leader’s side.

The bells were overly large so all the group leaders looked like Buddhist monks.

Koharu “The bells, they aren’t too huge, are they? Is it heavy?”

Group leader “It’s too heavy. Having this kind of thing attached to you, it’s so heavy you can’t run away and you’ll get eaten by a bear.”

I stayed next to the bell and assumed a ready-to-escape stance just in case.

We slept with bells attached to the camp tents too, but for some reason the bells hanging on the tents were small.

Even bears could show up in front of the camp, so when it came down to these little bells, this night was scary.

Even if the tent bell rang and you noticed a bear, by then it would already be too late, wouldn’t it . . . but even while I was thinking that, before we knew it, it was already morning.

《Fishing for wakasagi》

The first time I went fishing for wakasagi.⁵⁹

I was surprised! We were to catch them with our bare hands!

Koharu “Gro—ss.”

Friend “Koharu, should I catch yours for you?”

Koharu “Yeah. Catch it. It’s gross, so no way~~”

Friend “Tha~t’s ni~ce. OK!”

What a pro. Just like a fish . . . like playing with a fish. . . .

People who are used to it quickly grab them with their hands and put them in buckets.

Country kids are good at playing with nature, and few kids would say, “I don’t like bugs~”

I, having caught not a single wakasagi, felt out of place.

The wakasagi we caught, we fry and eat right there. It was something brutal, I thought, but once I tried eating some, it was tasty, so I could eat it quickly (HAHA).

⁵⁹A fish native to Hokkaidō that has been introduced to lakes elsewhere; also known as Japanese pond smelt.

《Making monaka and bee collecting》

Making monaka⁶⁰ is simple: all you have to do is put red bean paste inside the monaka in between the wafers, but Koharu was doubtful—“This is something for elementary school students to do?” But once I tried doing it, this got really fun and I liked it.

After that, there was beehive harvesting.

Koharu “Beehives? But we’ll get stung!”

Teacher “It’s dangerous, so please put these veils on.”

Veils were handed out.

Since I was too frightened, I said I was in “poor physical health” and just stood by until the end without participating.

Because of that, I don’t know how frightening this really was (HAHA).

Yearning for the city—“Miyabi Natsuyaki-chan!”

At the time I entered the higher grades of elementary school, Sis was a high school student. Sis, who was going back and forth as far as the interior of Niigata City, came back with a tan from a tanning salon, and freely enjoyed herself, and so on, always having a city aroma about her, and for me, this hardened my resolve. She was busy having fun and wasn’t at home much, but Koharu was always on her mind. When I said, “But I wanna keep in touch with you a lot . . .” she bought me a cell phone and emailed and called me every day.

I even went into the city stealthily by myself, taking 2 hours, because I wanted to see Sis.

Right around this time, I saw Berryz Kobo⁶¹ appearing in a magazine and got a shock. Miyabi Natsuyaki-chan,⁶² the same age as me, with blond hair! earrings! other such features of city style! There’s no one at Koharu’s elementary school like this (HAHA).

I got hair extensions attached by Sis, and when I went to school, everybody said, “White hair? White hair is growing on your head, you know.” It was like the word *extensions* didn’t exist in the country.

⁶⁰Mochi wafers with red bean paste in between.

⁶¹A Hello! Project group formed with eight members in 2004.

⁶²Miyabi Natsuyaki (1992–), a member of Berryz Kobo.

Koharu's first experiences

《Home-delivered pizza》

Until now, I'd thought the pizza at the supermarket was the real thing, so I was surprised. To be precise, they didn't deliver to our home, but we spent 30~40 minutes going to get it ourselves. It was extremely delicious; "Now this is real pizza~" I thought.

《31 Ice》

A 31 Ice⁶³ opened at the shopping center about 20 minutes away by car. I was surprised at all the ice cream colors!! By the way, last year a mobile crêpe shop on wheels came to our area, and it seemed there was a long line with everyone from young children to the elderly.

《I entered a cinema for the first time》

I was surprised that an authentic cinema was so huge. Until then, I'd watched movies at the "movie-showing club" where you could watch them in the village. It was in a tatami room,⁶⁴ and it was OK to bring your own candy and toys. On the way back from school, things passing for tickets sold and sold for ¥600.

⁶³A colloquialism for the ice cream franchise Baskin-Robbins, often called 31 Ice Cream in Japan.

⁶⁴A room with straw tatami mats used as floor covering.

Chapter 3

The Audition

Résumé mailing

Sister “Me, when I graduate from high school, I’m going to Tokyo~”

Koharu “Eh~ no way~ What am I going to do. . . .”

Tokyo, huh~. . . . With me still in school, it’s impossible, isn’t it. . . .

But it’s impossible without Sis around. Couldn’t I maybe follow her somehow?

Sister “Come with me. You should enroll in a junior high school there.”

She said so absentmindedly, without restraint.

I was overcome by feelings of loneliness and impatience.

But I still had a wish that perhaps by some miracle I too might get to go with her.

The Koharu at this time was frantic, wanting to follow Sis.

Koharu “What would I have to do for us to get to go together?”

Sister “I want to take you with me, but normally, if we told Dad and the others you were going to Tokyo, they’d say no, wouldn’t they? Ye~~ah. I wonder if there isn’t some way they’d let us? Ah, what if you enter show business? Koharu can do it.”

It was another preposterous proposal.

Koharu “Then maybe I should do that.”

Even I was tempted by Sis, and I replied to her lightly (HAHA).

Up until then, I’d thought something like show business for Koharu was a~~~~bsolutely impossible, but with one word of Sis’s “Koharu’ll be fine,” for some reason, even though I hadn’t entered or passed an audition, I was already having delusions and imagining the two of us living in Tokyo.

If the two of us get to live together, would I get to have my own room at last, I wonder? I got happy imagining things like that.

If at that time Sis had said, “For Koharu, that’s impossible,” I would have thought, “It’s impossible,” and that would have been the end of it, I think. A sister’s words must be frightening!!

Then one time I randomly discovered in a regular fashion magazine an application for a MORNING MUSUME_o AUDITION. When I looked at the application requirements, it said for ages 12 and up, so after having had that exchange with Sis, I thought, “12 years and up? Eh? I’m 12. I have to apply!!” and showed this to Sis.

Sister “Do it!”

Koharu “Eh——”

How dare she so simply . . . (HAHA).

Koharu “But it’s absolutely impossible though. The other people applying are good, aren’t they?”

Sister “Koharu, go join the 7th generation.”⁶⁵

Right after we talked, that very day I wrote up my résumé. As for the photos, Sis took them with a disposable camera.

It was do-as-you’re-told. Even my hair got forcibly fixed, and without any concern for Koharu being in pain or anything, it was as though even that wasn’t as important as taking pictures with Koharu looking good.

Sister “What’s up with that strange face? Arrange yourself properly!”

Irritated at Sis being like that, I made only strange faces on purpose.

And so. . . . In the end, Sis exploded.

Sister “You piece of— ×××”

Koharu “Enough. Sto~p already.”

A fight starts. Sis comes chasing after me as I flee from one place to another.

Then I get hauled back by my hair.

I sobbed, and both my hair that had been painstakingly tied back and my face got messed up with tears, so naturally it turned into a situation unsuitable for anything like taking a photograph.

Koharu “I hate you so much~~”

I went to Mom’s room.

《Three hours later》

But it was for Koharu’s sake that she did it. . . .

Still, I wish we could have taken photos that time, huh~ I was filled with regret.

⁶⁵The 7th generation of Morning Musume_o.

Even though up until then I must have hated her, I now wanted to go to her, so I hesitantly turn toward her room.

- Koharu** “Sis . . .”
Sister “What?? (GRRR)”
Koharu “Let’s take a picture~”
Sister “You should have said it earlier! It’s too late now.”

I trudged back to my room.

《The next day》

Sis prepared the camera for me.

- Koharu** “Thank you——”

I start to like Sis again. This time, without the failures of the day before or anything like that, she took the photos cordially.

《Résumé completion》

Several days later, a notification came.

The audition included a singing exam.

I know, right? But it’s an audition for singers, isn’t it? What should I sing now. . . .

- Koharu** “What should I sing?”
Sister “Do we bring our own CDs, I wonder? Or is it a cappella?”

Both Koharu and Sis had no idea at all what kinds of things go on at an audition, to begin with.

- Sister** “Albums and so on don’t have karaoke versions, so how about if you pick a song that you have in single CD form?”
Koharu “Got it. This, or this.”

The songs I picked: Ayumi Hamasaki-san’s “SEASONS”⁶⁶ and Tomomi Kahala-san’s “as A person”.⁶⁷

- Sister** “Try singing both.”

I tried singing both of the 2 songs.

- Sister** “You were more nervous with ‘as A person’, but you didn’t seem to miss any notes, so why don’t you go with this one? With some more practice you could produce a high voice, so it’d be good to go with this one, wouldn’t it?”

⁶⁶Ayumi Hamasaki’s 16th single, released 2000 June 7.

⁶⁷Tomomi Kahala’s 14th single, released 1999 July 22.

With that, I decided to sing “as A person”.

- Sister** “When’s the audition day?”
Koharu “It’s on the — of —.”
Sister “Do you want to go shopping too? Well~ shall we go the day before and do some shopping?”
Koharu “Are we telling Dad about me auditioning?”
Sister “We can do it after you pass.”

- Sister** “If we tell Dad before the audition day, he might say no, but if we only report that you’d passed after you pass, then he’d no longer have an opening to slip in any word of complaint, will he?”

I too was on board with this strategy.

Every day, the Koharu who loved Western-style clothes was bubbling in anticipation of getting to go shopping in Tokyo, in anticipation of getting to go on a trip with Sis, and had jittery feelings about entering the audition.

As for my crucial audition judging song, I didn’t even remember the lyrics. . . .

The day before the audition

The 2 of us headed to Tokyo.

Sis had come to Tokyo several times already, so I walked following her.

- Sister** “Shall we buy some clothes?”
Koharu “Yeah. Yeah. I want clothes.”

She took me to various clothing stores and bought me lots of clothes too.

- Sister** “What do you want for lunch?”
Koharu “Pasta——”
Sister “Pasta? Well~ shall we go eat some pasta then?”

With that, we walked, properly holding hands so we wouldn’t get separated.

Getting to buy lots of clothes I liked, getting to eat the pasta I liked, made me completely forget about the audition.

- Koharu** “I wanna go to Harajuku!”⁶⁸
Sister “Harajuku?”
Koharu “Crêpes!”

Nowadays, I think, Crêpes and such are everywhere, aren’t they! but at this time, it was Harajuku = crêpes, so we went to Harajuku just to eat crêpes.

Once we’d gone to Harajuku, every 1, 2 minutes I was scouted, one time after another.

⁶⁸A district between Shinjuku and Shibuya in Tokyo, known as a center of fashion.

I can't give out their names, but from offices I'd never heard of to major companies, I was scouted by various people.

Get a business card, take it, next! Take it, start walking, next! was what it felt like. But I had more interest in eating crêpes, so I walked while thinking, "Let us eat crêpes already——"

Even in the middle of the line for the crêpe shop, I was scouted. But it wasn't that Koharu was special, just that there were a lot of recruiters in Harajuku, I think. I don't know how it is now, but I think at that time, people like that were swarming all over Harajuku.

Afterward as well, I was taken to places I wanted to go, and in the blink of an eye, it was evening.

In the evening, we went to Roppongi⁶⁹ for a meal.

Sister "So how do you think you feel about the audition? Are you nervous?"

Koharu "I'm not nervous. Looking forward to it. Tokyo is fun."

After finishing our meal, just as we were, we went someplace to stay for the night.

Koharu "What should I wear tomorrow?"

Sister "Why don't you try something on?"

I picked out clothes to wear the next day and then decided to go to sleep.

The room had 2 single beds, but I hadn't ever slept by myself yet, so on this day too, rather than sleeping by myself, I slept with Sis, two in a single bed.

I could fall dead asleep in an instant.

The day of the audition (the second · third rounds)

I changed into the clothes I'd picked out the previous night.

Sister "If you walk in heels, your feet'll get tired and it's dangerous, so I'll take your high heels there for you, and you should go in sneakers."

I paid attention to what Sis said and put on sneakers.

While eating breakfast at the hotel, I called Mom.

Koharu "So right now~ we're eating breakfast, you know~ I'll email you photos~ Bye-bye~"

Right after that, we headed toward the audition hall.

The assembly hall was in Ariake.⁷⁰

When we arrived at Ariake, I changed into high heels.

⁶⁹A district of Minato, Tokyo, known for its nightlife.

⁷⁰A neighborhood of Tokyo home to the Tokyo Big Sight exhibition center and several sporting arenas.

Because we'd arrived a little early, we went into a convenience store nearby. There were a lot of girls there who'd come to audition.

Sister "Shall we go soon?"

Koharu "Yeah."

At this time, I wasn't nervous at all yet. Because I was with Sis.

When we went to the assembly hall, we were told, "Audition participants, please line up in this direction. Escorts, the upstairs café has been made a waiting area, so please wait there," and I let go of Sis's hand.

Right away, I turned anxious. Right away, I got nervous.

Koharu "Eh~ what do I do . . ."

The words Sis had said right before we parted were

Sister "When you're asked a question, speak promptly, answer everything that you're asked, and even if you don't understand, absolutely do not clam up."

Koharu "Yeah. I'll be back."

I said good-bye to Sis.

But I sent reports by email, one by one. "We're lining up now," "I'll be singing very soon," "It's over," etc., I kept on exchanging.

While lined up, everyone nearby, without a care for their surroundings, started to have some intense singing practice.

Koharu (*Eh?? Everyone's amazing. . . .*)

I was completely overwhelmed. Everyone indeed looked as though they were used to it, giving the impression of having participated in many auditions and such~ As for me, I couldn't do anything but just quietly line up and fiddle with my cell phone the whole time.

This being my first experience with anything like an audition, and moreover not having anyone around who had entered one, I didn't understand what was what.

This might be the first time in my life I've seen such motivation. . . . No, I should say it *is* the first time, I think.

While everyone was practicing their singing, I thought, "Awful. I have to remember the lyrics!" and being flustered, looking at my lyrics card, I didn't think, let's do a good job singing, or anything like that, but rather, I mustn't make a mistake in the lyrics somehow! Though, now that I think about it, for something like a mistake in the lyrics, no one would realize it.

Finally, it came to be my turn. . . .

The second round began.

Judge "One chorus, please."

Koharu “♪♪♪♪♪”
Koharu “♪♪♪♪ breaking into the 2nd verse ♪♪” (*breaking into the 2nd verse, let alone the one chorus*)
Judge “Yes. That’s good enough〜”

I was quickly told that.

Not understanding the meaning of ONE CHORUS, Koharu had rushed into the 2nd verse and continued singing.

But I was satisfied.

As for why, the truth was that I was anxious over what I’d do if I cut myself off in the middle in case I had to sing everything (full size), so to be safe if that were the case, I thought I’d continue singing until the judge stopped me.

But while drawing forth lyrics from my mind, I sang like I was chasing something . . . I totally sang at about a fast “How many beats is this?” kind of tempo.

I thought, I don’t ever want to regret this!—so I put my head in full operation within a short span of time and crisply responded to questions.

Judge “Are you half?⁷¹ Your face looks halffish, doesn’t it?”
Koharu “Ah, I’m often told I’m newhalfish,” I shot back cheerfully.
Judge “. . . (HAHA).”

I thought the word *half* was an abbreviation of *newhalf*,⁷² so at this time, I didn’t understand why they were laughing.

The audition ended.

Right away, I called Sis.

Koharu “It’s over now〜”
Sister “Do you know where all the escorts are waiting? Go there.”

I hurried to where Sis was, wanting to report the details right away.

Koharu talked about the audition in minute detail.

With Sis there, I was calm.

She didn’t ask anything at all about the surroundings, What sorts of kids were there? and so on, and showing no interest in such things, she didn’t ask about anything but Koharu.

Sister “You talked promptly? You didn’t hesitate? You didn’t fall silent or stop speaking?”

I’d intended to talk promptly, of course, but with excess pressure from Sis, I came to feel kind of uneasy. . . .

⁷¹Of mixed race or ethnicity.

⁷²A term referring to a range of male-to-female transgender identities.

- Sister** “Were you asked questions?”
Koharu “I was. I was told, ‘You look newhalfish.’”
Sister “Huh? What do newhalves have to do with anything! It wasn’t *halfish* or something like that?”
Koharu “Ehh? *Half* and *newhalf* mean different things?”
Sister “They *are* different! Did you just burst out with something like that?”
Koharu “What do I do. What do I do. What do I do . . . (WAAA).”

I almost cried (WAAA).

- Sister** “Did you get a laugh?”
Koharu “Ah~ it was because of that that they were laughing. I was thinking, why are they laughing?”
Sister “If that’s all, then it’s probably all right. So? Next!”

When I’d finished telling Sis everything, I started wandering around the waiting area.

- Koharu** “Just a minute—I’ll go see what’s happening and come back.”
Sister “Stop it. Everyone’s sitting still, aren’t they? They’re all being nice and quiet.”

Without being mindful of others, I started looking around.

- Sister** “Hey, everyone’s looking, you know!”

Sis seemed terribly embarrassed. . . .

Koharu, not listening to what she’d said, frolicked around.

Amazingly, Sis had already left me alone.

At that time, Sis was dealing with a phone call coming from someone at another entertainment office.

Sis was already thinking of what to do in case I failed.

Whenever I think I want to do something, whatever it is, I tell Sis. Sis goes all out to support what Koharu wants to do. No matter how small a thing it is, she devotes all of her energy to doing her best until it comes true. That’s been the case for ages.

“We are announcing the successful applicants, so everyone please move. Escorts also, please go together.”

Right away, I got nervous.

I was entirely many times more nervous about them announcing the successful auditioners than I’d been about the audition itself.

We arrived at the place where they would announce the results.

- Koharu · Sister** “Eh!! There’s this many?”

Both of us were astonished.

- Koharu** “It might be impossible . . .”
- Sister** “From here, how many people will get to go on to the third round, I wonder?”
- Koharu** “Maybe about half are going to be dropped?”
- Sister** “It’s more than that, isn’t it?”
- Koharu** “Eh, then about 200 people?”
- Sister** “I don’t know.”
- Koharu** “There are too many people. More than all of the students at school.”
- Sister** “It’s not like that, is it? It’s above the population of our hometown, isn’t it? (HAHA).”
- Koharu** “I’m sorry, Sis. I failed.”

My self-confidence vanished at the number of people.⁷³

- Sister** “Why? This doesn’t mean you failed, you know. If you’d failed, you wouldn’t have been noticed by the judges.”
- Koharu** “I definitely want to pass! I definitely don’t want to fail!”

“Now we will announce the successful applicants.”

- Sister** “Let’s hold hands.”

The two of us linked hands with quite some force.

“Number —.”

- Sister** “Huh? They’re flying through 50 people or something at once?”⁷⁴

I was over 100 numbers ahead, so just when I was thinking it would be a while. . . . The first person’s already close to number 100. . . .

“Number 173.”

- Koharu · Sister** “Kya—————”

I passed! I passed!! I passed!!!

In the middle of that totally si——lent hall, the two of us, without thinking, screamed “Kya————” and hugged each other.

- Sister** “Well done, Koharu.”
- Koharu** “I can’t believe it.”
- Sister** “I can believe it even less, probably.”

People who had passed were taken to yet another place.

And then the third round started.

I thought, here I absolutely can’t miss! I have to pass!!

⁷³2,784 out of 21,611 total applicants passed the first round and were invited to the second round.

⁷⁴This is roughly consistent with the fact that only 82 of the 2,784 passed the second round.

My motive at first was, it doesn't matter, but now, I already had "I absolutely want to pass this audition. I want to debut as part of Morning Musume." as my dream.

As for the third round, since I got to stay with Sis until right before the examination, I wasn't nervous.

At the third round too, with singing and talking and so on, it involved mostly the same things as the second round.

For the third round, it seemed that a notification would come by phone afterward, so on this day, at this point, it was decided that we would go home soon.

Even though I'd returned to Niigata, I had the results of the third round on my mind, and other than when I was asleep, I spent my life constantly thinking of those things.

This audition's state of affairs was broadcast on the *HaroMoni*⁷⁵ program, but because *HaroMoni* wasn't broadcast in Niigata, of course nobody around knew anything about my entering the audition, and at this time, even I myself had no idea how many people had passed, what the audition's state of affairs was, etc. Anyhow, I felt like, call me quick~

Just one call—Koharu was terribly anxious!

What I was afraid of was . . . what if Grandpa answers the phone. . . . It was that. Grandpa, getting an incomprehensible phone call, totally hanging up without even saying "Hello." I wished for Grandpa not to hang up.

"Ring ring ring."

The phone rang——

"Yes. Hello."

The one who'd answered . . . Sis.

With this, I was instantly relieved. Whew~

And then, and then, the result:

Success!!

I was super happy.

Sister "Next, it looks like we have to go to Tokyo with our parents too."

Koharu "Really?"

Since we hadn't told Dad about me entering the audition, we had to tell him soon.

Sister "I'll tell Dad, so you don't have to say anything."

Koharu "Got it."

⁷⁵*Hello! Morning*, a weekly TV show on TV Tokyo (2000–2007), featuring Morning Musume and other members of Hello! Project. Kusumi does not include the "o" in the show's abbreviated name. Blasphemy.

We headed toward Dad's room.

- Sister** "Dad. I have something to talk about."
Father "No way. I don't want to hear it. It seems better not to hear it."
Sister "(HAHA) But~ it's good though (HAHA)."
Father "What is it?"
Sister "Um~ first of all, I'm sorry."
Father "What did you do~? (HAHA)."
Sister "The other day, I went with Koharu to Tokyo, and the thing is, Koharu entered an audition, you know~ She passed all the way up through the third round, so I have to tell you. I thought."
Father "An audition for what? When did she enter it?"
Sister "Eh, the other day. A Morning Musume^o audition. So, she got up to the third round in Tokyo, and we got the results of the third round by phone just now, and she advanced, so for the fourth round, since we have to go to Tokyo with our parents as well, we'd like you to come with us next week."
Father "OK~ Great, then it's Tokyo for everyone next week, isn't it?"
 . . . No way, such a quick OK pattern. . . .
Father "Does Mom know?"
Koharu "Yeah. She knows."
Father "What? It was only me who didn't know? (GRRR)."
Sister "But~ it's good though."
Father "It's not good! Well~ it's OK. Next week, it's Tokyo for everyone, right?"
Sister "Yeah. Thanks in advance."

The fourth round

With Dad and Mom and Sis and me, we headed to TV Tokyo.⁷⁶

Since *HaroMoni* wasn't broadcast in Niigata, I had no idea at all how many people were coming to the fourth round that we were going to today.

But apart from that, with everyone going to Tokyo, it felt like going on a trip and was really fun.

The meeting place for the fourth round was TV Tokyo.

We totally got to the place a little early, so we decided to wait at a nearby family restaurant until it was time.

⁷⁶A television station with headquarters in Toranomon, Minato, Tokyo. In addition to appearing on various Hello! Project shows on TV Tokyo, including *Hello! Morning*, Kusumi would eventually play the lead character in the TV Tokyo anime series *Kirarin☆Revolution* and become a regular on the TV Tokyo children's shows *Oha Suta* and *Oha Koro*.

Our family waited while talking amongst ourselves: What kinds of things might they ask at the audition?

- Sister** “Seems like the kid in that seat over there is coming for the audition, doesn’t it?” Sis said suddenly.
- Father** “Really?”
- Koharu** “Feels like it, doesn’t it? Probably is such a kid.”

But in a family restaurant, with a lot of families being there, there’s no way we’d have like gone to the same place with the same timing.

- Father** “Shall we go soon?”

We arrived at TV Tokyo.

Then we were directed to the waiting room.

And then. . . . That kid at the family restaurant was there.

The kid that Sis had rightly said, “Seems like that kid is coming for the audition, doesn’t it?” about.

- Sister** “Wow. It’s a pattern, seriously (HAHA).”

At the meeting place, there were 5 families.

Here were the 5 taking part in the fourth round. It was at that time that I first learned that.

“Audition participants, please come this way.”

Koharu and the kids entering the fourth round were called.

Where we were headed: the makeup room.

The people in charge of makeup for Morning Musume_o started doing the makeup for the 5 taking part in the fourth round. Hairstyling too, we had done for us by pros.

It was the first time I’d worn makeup, outside of Shichi-Go-San and such.

The particulars of the fourth round were that we were to “sing a Morning Musume_o song”.

I decided to sing “Furusato”.⁷⁷

Then, going on air, I made a mistake in the lyrics.

For the *HaroMoni* broadcast, it would be cut to clean it up, but I messed up the lyrics so horribly.

“I’m definitely out. It’s over,” I thought, and at the interview after that, my voice turned dry and crumbly, making it look like I had no confidence.

⁷⁷Morning Musume_o’s 6th single (“Hometown”), released 1999 July 14.

Afterward, as we were, we had a family interview.

The family, Koharu included, talked with the company people.

Coming back, we were told, “We think we’ll have a training camp, so we’ll let you know about that again by phone.”

《On the return Shinkansen》

- Koharu** “I definitely already failed. It’s no good.” I was thoroughly in a slump.
- Sister** “Why did you mess up the lyrics? The judges might have been thinking, ‘This kid, did she come to audition without even remembering the lyrics?’ If you make a mistake singing just once, what are you going to do after you pass and you have to sing one song after another? Practice so you make absolutely no mistakes!”
- Koharu** “. (WAAA).”
- Father** “You’ll pass though, won’t you? Koharu was the best, certainly!”
- Sister** “But they were saying there’d be a training camp, so isn’t it the case that they won’t be dropping anyone from today, but that everybody’ll have the training camp? Koharu! Recover yourself at the training camp!”
- Koharu** “Ehh! Everyone can go to the training camp? I want to go! The next time, I’ll definitely show them I can do it right! Absolutely!”
- Sister** “Since your appearance is right on the mark, it’s such a waste, isn’t it! You can’t change your appearance, but you can change your insides, can’t you! Lucky, aren’t you! If you don’t keep at it, you’ll regret it your whole life, you know! Just imagine it when you fail!”
- Koharu** “I imagined it. It’s definitely bad. Life would be over.”
- Sister** “I know, right? It’s bad, isn’t it? If that’s the case, keep at it so it doesn’t turn out that way!”
- Koharu** “So that I’ll have the training camp.”

I put my hands together and started to pray.

- Sister** “It’s all right! If you keep at it, you’ll pass for sure!”
- Koharu** “I’ll do my best.”
- Father** “It’s your life, Koharu! There’s nothing I can say! I can only support you! Everyone in the family will cooperate for you! Because it’s your dream, Koharu. It’s good, isn’t it?”

Sis eventually got in a trance with her ekiben,⁷⁸ and started silently eating her bento. Then I happened to fall asleep.

⁷⁸Bento (boxed meals) sold at train stations for consumption during train trips. They come in a variety and often feature local specialties.

The final audition

We returned to Niigata, but we were supposed to still keep things a secret from Grandma and the others.

Several days passed, then a call came.

It was a call saying, “The staff of *HaroMoni* will be coming to your home to gather information.”

When we heard this story, it seemed that the successful applicants hadn’t been decided yet. It seemed to be just an interview or something that they were coming to Koharu’s home for.

《The day the staff of HaroMoni came》

We didn’t know what time they would come, so I was feeling restless from the morning onward.

“Excuse——se me. Is Koharu-chan here~~~~?”

Koharu “Did the staff come, I wonder?”

Koharu “Ye~~~~s.”

I headed to the entryway.

Koharu “Eh????”

No way—Tsunku♂-san.⁷⁹

The “Excuse——se me. Is Koharu-chan here~~~~?” we’d heard just then had been Tsunku♂-san.⁸⁰

Tsunku♂-san “Is this Koharu-chan? We came to hold the final audition.”

Koharu “Eh—————”

Tsunku♂-san “Yes. These are souvenirs (*^_^*).”

Out of nowhere, he gave me a Tokyo Banana⁸¹ among other things as souvenirs (HAHA).

Koharu *(Or, how should I put it . . . why is Tsunku♂-san here? The final audition? Eh? Isn’t it supposed to be just an interview? What does he*

⁷⁹Tsunku♂ (1968—), main producer, lyricist, composer, and backing vocalist for Morning Musume and other Hello! Project acts.

⁸⁰Kusumi’s account of her first encounter with Tsunku♂ differs somewhat from what was recorded and aired on *Hello! Morning*. In particular, Tsunku♂’s introductory line was actually “Hello. Is Koharu-chan here?” and was not nearly as dramatic as Kusumi makes it sound. I leave the details and possible mismatches of subsequent dialogue to the interested reader.

⁸¹A sponge cake filled with banana custard cream, individually wrapped and elegantly packaged, a popular gift item.

mean? And the training camp? What happened to the training camp? Eh, does this mean I passed the fourth round? Or else. . . . A report that I've failed? No, but he wouldn't go out of his way to come here if I've failed though, right? If that's the case, then who in the world passed the fourth round? Could it be that all 5 have passed?)

The moment I thought, Huh? Tsunku♂-san???

Tsunku♂-san and the staff people came into the house one after another.

Hey hey hey hey, the floor of our house, it's totally getting out of place now (HAHA).

It seemed the whole family thought the same thing (HAHA).

The moment I thought that. . . .

“Di———ng.”

Eh??? What what what???

“Di———ng.”

Tsunku♂-san had begun to pay respects at our home's butsudan⁸² (HAHA).

Unbelievable, isn't it———(HAHA).

Is he even greeting the Kusumi family ancestors? (HAHA).

This scene . . . is like amazing . . . (HAHA).

After that, I had a talk with Tsunku♂-san.

Koharu “Having come this far, I'd like for me to pass.”

Tsunku♂-san “How many do you think are passing this time?”

Koharu “3 or 2.”

Tsunku♂-san “Who's going to pass, do you think?”

Koharu “Since there's only 5 left~ I can't choose, though. The other 12-year-old⁸³ plus Koharu maybe~? I think. . . .”

Tsunku♂-san “Including yourself too, aren't ya (HAHA).”

Koharu “(HAHA).”

Then, a short while later. . . .

Tsunku♂-san “We're having the final audition.”

Koharu “Eh?”

Tsunku♂-san “We'll have the final audition now, right here.”

Koharu “Eh~~~~”

Tsunku♂-san “Because I've invited the ‘Furusato’ accompanist.”

No way—an appearance from the actual “Furusato” accompanist.⁸⁴ Σ (° □ ° ;)

⁸²A household Buddhist altar, typically a wooden cabinet holding a religious icon, auxiliary items such as candlesticks, incense, bells, and fruit or rice offerings, and for some, spirit tablets representing deceased family members.

⁸³Ai Suma (1992—), who later successfully auditioned into the Hello! Project group SI☆NA.

⁸⁴Takao Konishi (1965—), who also arranged the song originally.

Koharu thought of various things.
 So they came carrying instruments, and. . . .
 There's no way they plan to carry those instruments in here?
 The house is going to fall apart, isn't it? (HAHA).
 But leaving that aside, it seemed someone else had appeared. . . .
 Ah, is this person the actual Furusato accompanist?
 It's not just Tsunku♂-san here, but yet another amazing person he's brought
 along~ (WHAA). To this village.
 Sharply, with the window open all the way, the accompanist forced the notes
 out of the piano. Σ (¬□¬) !
 The villagers will be completely astonished (HAHA).
 Though . . . that aside, I haven't practiced singing.
 But I haven't been informed yet about who the successful auditioners from the
 fourth round are, so I haven't done anything like practice properly (WAAA).
 Speaking of which, just when I was thinking of things like that, I then started
 getting a lesson from Tsunku♂-san.

Then the final audition began.

Even though it was our home, around me were, in addition to my family, Tsunku♂-
 san and a lot of staff members, surrounding and looking only at Koharu.

Surrounded by that many people, I sang the song. But I wasn't nervous.

Even more than that, I thought, "I'm definitely going to sing perfectly, and I'm
 definitely going to succeed! Here's my chance to show off my best! I'm going to
 do it!"

On the contrary, I turned pressure into motivation!

The final audition began.

Koharu sang Morning Musume's song "Furusato".

“♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪♪”

Then I finished singing.

*(Was I able to sing it skillfully, I wonder? I don't want to fail. . . . I want to pass. . . .
 Please. . . .)*

The final audition was over in the blink of an eye.

Tsunku♂-san “I'm going to talk with your mother and father, so can you go to
 another room?”

Koharu “OK.”

I went to a different room and had a different interview.

We talked about things like photographing the place where I sit at my writing
 desk, and my mental state regarding the audition.

I think we talked for quite a long time, but to clean it up for *HaroMoni*, it was all cut (HAHA).

Then Tsunku♂-san and the others left.

Could you call this kind of thing the calm after a storm? I thought.

“Snap!” I was frozen with fright.

Koharu “What do I do now. . . . This is the last of it. . . . He said it was the last audition. . . .”

Sister “That was so awesome!”

So she said while hugging me tightly. Several times she said, “That was so awesome. That was so awesome.”

Sister “Out of all the auditions up till now, this was the best, you know. It was only the final round that I thought was a good one, to say nothing of being the best. . . . It was that good. I was amazed. You sang well. Skillfully. It was so awesome. You had the guts. You passed that on to the people watching you. It was a feeling of having no regrets. But that was because we could see your capabilities beyond what we were hoping for.”

Koharu “I didn’t think you could praise me that much.”

Sister “But you were so awesome though. You always seemed like you had some regrets still, but at the final round, you had no regrets—isn’t that a good way to sum it up?”

Koharu “Yeah! I’m going to pass?”

Sister “Until we hear the word ‘success’, I’ll still have a feeling of tension.”

Koharu “If you put it like that, then did they go hold an audition at the home of each of the 5 still remaining, I wonder?”

Sister “Doing that would be rather difficult though, wouldn’t it (HAHA). After all, out of the 5, they’d only go to the homes of those who’d passed the fourth round, right?”

Koharu “Who was it that passed then~”

Sister “Who might it be~ huh~”

Since it was around midday that Tsunku♂-san and the others had come, we hadn’t yet eaten lunch, so after that, our family went out to eat lunch a little late.

There we talked about what had happened up until then.

Mother “I didn’t know Tsunku♂-san was coming or anything like that, so I was surprised.”

Father “I was surprised too.”

Sister “I was surprised. Him saying, ‘Excuse me, is Koharu-chan here~?’ (HAHA).”

Brother “Me, I don’t understand it very well, but. . . .”

Sister “It’s OK not to understand though.”
Koharu “Yeah yeah. It’s OK not to understand.”

My brother hasn’t understood any of what’s happened until now. So he hasn’t cared about it either (HAHA).

Sudden TV cameras

Then each day began as usual. Koharu, as usual, goes to school.

I’ve gotten to the final round, but since *HaroMoni* isn’t broadcast in the village, everyone at school naturally knows nothing about it. So even in the neighborhood, everything is very much just as always.

But Koharu’s head was full of thoughts about that audition. That stuff hardly ever strayed far from my mind. I was worried about the results of the final round, and I couldn’t help worrying.

In the middle of that, we were told on the school broadcasting system, “Today after school we will be having traffic safety guidance, so all students please gather in the gymnasium after school.” I thought, “Traffic safety?? But Koharu’s head hurts from thinking of nothing but the audition, and this isn’t the right situation to listen to that kind of talk,” and decided to go home, feigning ignorance.

Classes at school all finished.

Naturally, I’d planned to go home, but for some reason, I gathered with everyone else in the gym after school like I was supposed to.

A short time later

Koharu (*Eh, what? What? What’s the meaning of this?*)

In the back stood a number of cameras.

An announcer appeared on stage.

Announcer “This is TV Tokyo.”

Koharu (*What’s the meaning of this? No way. TV Tokyo? TV Tokyo!!! This is just for Koharu, isn’t it! It feels like, no way, official business for Koharu? And so? Is it? . . .*)

Announcer “This is TV Tokyo’s Hello Morning. As a matter of fact, right now the Morning Musume。 Audition 2005 is being held, and Koharu Kusumi-san applied to that audition.”

Koharu (*Just as I’d thought. What’s going to happen now?*)

I was wondering what was going to happen, but on the gymnasium screen they projected a VTR⁸⁵ of the audition's progress up until now.

The entire school's pupils watched it.

Since HaroMoni wasn't being broadcast in this area, it was really the first time for me too, watching my own audition shots. But now . . . there was no way I could ever have imagined they'd decide to have me watch it together with all the other students at school. . . . So embarrassing. . . .

After we finished watching all of the VTR, I was brought up on stage.

Announcer "You still don't know the final results, do you?"

Koharu "No. I don't."

Announcer "Actually, today we've brought the VTR announcing the results of the final round."

Koharu "No way. No way. No way."

(I'm scared. I don't want to hear it. Announced in front of everyone like this, the result turning out to be that I've failed or something? No way. . . . No way. I'm scared. . . .)

Announcer "Do you feel you don't want to see it?"

Koharu "No, I want to see it!!!"

Announcer "Then let's watch the results announced in front of all the students in the whole school and see."

Ta-da!

Out of nowhere, Tsunku♂-san appears on the screen!

Tsunku♂-san "Everyone at Hokushin Junior High School, it's nice to meet you; I'm Tsunku♂. I went searching for an ace for Morning Musume. Then a great number of people tried out, but at this time I've made the new member decision for Morning Musume. I think I want to announce it in front of everyone."

"....."

"....."

"Koharu . . . Kusumi . . . has passed with flying colors."

"She's the only one."

I was startled!

My face turned totally white.

⁸⁵A short video recording shown as part of a live event, such as a concert or sporting event (originally an abbreviation of *videotape recorder*).

It was the same sensation as with the second round announcement.

Koharu *(I did it. Koharu passed. I succeeded, didn't I? I did it. Sis.)*

Everyone applauded.

Announcer “How do you feel?”

Koharu “I’m surprised I was the only one who passed.”

Announcer “Who do you want to tell the most?”

Koharu “Sis.”

Announcer “Why?”

Koharu “Because she’s supported me all the way, and even kept me company during singing practice.”

Recollecting, I almost cried. But switching my feelings around, I firmly resisted tearing up.

Announcer “Is there anything you want to say to the members of Morning Musume_o?”

Koharu “From now on, please be friends with me as a fellow member.”

Announcer “You want to meet them and tell them in person, don’t you?”

Koharu “Yes.”

Announcer “In that case, why don’t we have them appear! Here is all of Morning Musume_o!”

Koharu *(Eh? Huh? What? What? What?)* I was bewildered!

Just then.

Out of nowhere, in this junior high school gym, all of Morning Musume_o appeared!

In the village in this village, Morning Musume_o?? It was an exceedingly miraculous sight.

Musume_o “Koharu Kusumi-chan, congratulations on your success.”

I was handed a bouquet.

Musume_o “You’re already now part of Morning Musume_o.”

Musume_o “It’s a rare thing that we have the final candidate be just one person, but this is the first time the success announcement has been given like this, in jersey attire, isn’t it~ I think (HAHA).”

Koharu *(How embarrassing. Now that you mention it, I’m in a jersey. . . . For this kind of thing, I would have come wearing a cute hair ornament or something (HAHA). Instead—a jersey . . . O (><); (><) O. This is a broadcasting accident, isn’t it? Is it all right? (HAHA).)*

Announcer “Kusumi-san, please greet everyone in Morning Musume_o as a new member.”

Koharu “From now on, having become part of Morning Musume_o, I’ll try my hardest at dancing and singing and so on, so even though I’ll be an annoyance here and there, please treat me well.”

A short while later, Morning Musume_o left.

After that, I reported my aspirations clearly in front of the camera: “I was terribly surprised and almost cried. From now on, I’m going to work hard enough at both dancing and singing that I won’t lose to other people, and I want to work hard as a member of Morning Musume_o soon.”

There was a crowd of people around talking, but Koharu—not so much! After my success had been announced, my head had kept on being full of just thoughts of wanting to quickly report the news to Sis.

Right away, I called Sis on the cell phone I’d put in my pocket.

Sister “Yes.”

Koharu “I passed.”

Sister “Eh?”

Koharu “I passed the final round! I’ve joined Morning Musume_o!”

Sister “Huh? But we don’t know if it’s true! We haven’t had a phone call yet, you know. What gives?”

Koharu “Morning Musume_o came to the junior high school, and just now we had the success announcement!”

Sister “You should have told me earlier (GRRR). Isn’t it late?”

Koharu “But I couldn’t use the phone all throughout. I just now finally hurried and called you.”

Sister “Not getting to see Koharu’s moment of success or anything is beyond the worst! I wanted us to hear the final results announced together though. It’s so regrettable—I’m about to burst into tears!”

Koharu “First thing, though, I’m about to go home soon.”

When I hung up Dad appeared right in front of my eyes.

Koharu “Ah, Dad!”

Dad “I knew about your success, but in order to make this plan today a success, I stayed silent. The staff came to the school principal and to me a few days ago to request it, and we had a meeting.”

Koharu “Sis didn’t know about it, did she?”

- Dad** “But if I’d told your sister, since you two are so close, the story would have gotten around to you, I thought!”
- Koharu** “Sis is shocked cuz she didn’t know about it! We’re going back home right away, first of all.”

We got home.

When I opened the door to the entryway, Sis was already standing there in a daunting pose with folded arms (HAHA).

- Koharu** “Sis!! (AHHH).”
- Sister** “First of all, congrats!!”
- Koharu** “I’m so happy.”
- Sister** “But! What was the situation like? Explain in detail!”

I talked in detail about the events that had happened earlier at the junior high school.

Thereupon. . . .

- Sister** “Dad!!! What gives? It’s your fault I couldn’t see with these eyes the very moment of Koharu’s success, isn’t it!! Why didn’t you let me know? It’s not like I’d have told Koharu if I heard it! I would have thought of how that sort of thing would affect Koharu, and I’d for sure have kept quiet until the program!!”

Sis was quite angry at Dad. Without calming down, she kept being angry for some time.

Dad too seemed to be feeling a little regret: Maybe it would have been better to tell only Sis?

Naturally, Dad and Mom had come for the fourth round’s family interview, but for the audition itself, Sis had made arrangements for everything, so since she’d been continually supporting Koharu’s dream with all her energy, I think she wanted to confirm something like my last success with her own eyes and ears.

A family meeting

- Koharu** “Mom can’t make a living in Tokyo though. I can’t take the bus or the train, can I? It’s different from the village train. Every day I’ll be a lost kid. Sis, you can’t help it somehow?”
- Sister** “After high school finishes, I’ll go right away, so this time, go with Mom! I’ll call every day, and I’ll go see you every week . . . so, first of all, go with Mom for now.”
- Mother** “What are we doing about the house? There’s Grandpa, Grandma, and 2 students too.”
- Father** “About that—can Sis do everything?”

- Sister** “For Koharu’s sake, I’ll do anything.”
- Father** “I’ll talk with Grandpa and Grandma! There isn’t anyone who can go with you, but besides Mom, it’s just people who absolutely can’t go. So Mom will go to Tokyo.”
- Koharu** “I see.”
- Father** “Ah, there’s still someone else who doesn’t know about these things (HAHA).”

It was my brother.

- Koharu** “I’ll go tell him.”

I went to my brother’s room.

He was lying down watching TV.

- Koharu** “I got into Morning Musume.”
- Brother** “Seriously? Heh~~”

.....

It wasn’t just that (HAHA). He didn’t even move from his position lying down.

My brother is the family’s most naturally airheaded, and his behavior is unpredictable (HAHA).

The next day, Dad talked to Grandma and Grandpa.

Grandma cried. She cried at parting from Koharu. Koharu is sad too.

Since both of my parents worked for a living, ever since I’d been born, during the daytime it was always Grandma who raised me, so for Koharu, always having Grandma around was what life was like until then.

I went around saying parting farewells to people I’d been indebted to until now.

While I was getting everyone’s words of support—“Do your best, OK?”—steadily the actual feeling of going to Tokyo came surging out.

As you might expect of a small village, everyone all knew Koharu.

The day we proceeded to Tokyo

Friends and neighborhood people came by the house to say “good-bye”.

The very last person I talked to was Grandma.

- Koharu** “Grandma, I’ll be back, ’kay?”
- Grandmother** “OK. OK.”

Grandma was in tears and it felt like her voice wouldn’t come out.
Koharu too had gotten sad.

- Grandmother** “It’s sad, isn’t it?”

Grandma had been looking only at my face while she kept holding my hands.

Grandmother “Do your best, ’kay?”

Koharu “OK.”

Grandmother “Come back and show your face once in a while.”

Koharu “Yup. Yup.”

Grandma doesn’t let go of Koharu’s hands.

I’m also sad, but . . . saying, “I have to go now,” I slowly let go of her hands.

Koharu and Mom rode in Sis’s car.

Grandma kept on waving her hands until Koharu was no longer in view.

Koharu (*I love you, Grandma. Bye-bye for now. . . .*) I too kept on waving my hands all the way until Grandma had vanished from sight.

Arriving at the Shinkansen boarding area.

Sis gave me a letter.

Sister “Read it on the Shinkansen! After that, read it every day as much as you can! Cuz there’s a lot of things written there that it looks like you’ll forget.”

“Koha——!!”

Koharu “Eh?”

When I turned around, my friend was there. My friend had come all the way to the platform of the Shinkansen boarding area as a surprise.

It was 5 minutes before the departure of the Shinkansen.

Friend “I thought I wouldn’t make it, but I’m glad I did! I ran super-fast.”⁸⁶

Koharu “Thanks. You surprised me~”

Friend “Koha, do your best, OK?”

Koharu “Yup! Thanks.”

Koharu and Mom headed toward Tokyo.

On the Shinkansen, I read the letter I’d gotten from Sis.⁸⁷

After I’d passed, it felt like time had passed by in the blink of an eye.

Every day after I had entered the audition felt like it was running by me at a considerable speed.

I think these were the shiniest days of my life up until now.

⁸⁶From Washima to Nagaoka Station is about 20 km. That’s some running there, Koharu’s friend.

⁸⁷Kusumi does not reveal the contents of this letter. What a let-down.

Koharu herself had quite a lot of fun.

At this point in time, when I'd succeeded at the final round, Koharu's audition came to an end after a long long time.

It was only a short period, but I experienced a whole lot. It was so enjoyable.

I'd passed at the first audition I'd entered since being born, and until just the other day, I hadn't ever imagined I'd become anything like an idol. It was still an unknown world. But this coming true was no good by itself, I thought. Even after it comes true, it's a serious matter, isn't it? I thought. After it comes true, it's a matter of how Koharu is going to extend this dream. I thought I'd treat seriously the dream I'd laid hands on after so much trouble.

Chapter 4

My Morning Musume。 Period

〔 Life in Tokyo for the first time 〕

The beginning of Tokyo life

I was given Morning Musume。 single CDs, albums, and PV⁸⁸ DVDs, all stuffed inside cardboard, and told to memorize it all right away.

In addition to those, dance lessons came in, singing lessons came in, and I didn't sleep at all. I didn't have a minute, a second of sleeping time or anything. And still they said, "Practice some more," and they said, "Why can't you do it!!" No sleep. But with 1 day having only 24 hours, I couldn't make time on top of this or anything like that. I haven't slept in 2 days already. I'm dizzy. But I have to do more. Enough already. . . . I wanna go back to Niigata.

They couldn't even let me eat a meal. When I mentioned that to Mom, she said to the manager, "You can't even let her eat a meal?" The word that came back was "For things like that, you have to find a break on your own and eat." But 12-year-old Koharu didn't understand such a thing. Without a single word of "It's OK to have lunch," I thought it meant I couldn't eat. After I passed, it was instantly hell, I thought. I regretted having come to Tokyo.

But after getting everyone's support and coming out in front of everyone, I couldn't do something like go back now.

And so, on 2005 May 6 at the Nippon Budokan,⁸⁹ I debuted in front of everyone as MORNING MUSUME。 Koharu Kusumi. Starting with the tour title carrying Koharu's

⁸⁸An abbreviation for *promotional video*, a commonly used term synonymous with *music video*.

⁸⁹An arena in central Tokyo, originally built for martial arts events, but also serving as a venue for large musical performances.

name—*Baribari Kyōshitsu ~Koharu-chan Irasshai~*,⁹⁰ I became a full-fledged member of Morning Musume_o.

Every day, painful and pressured

Having come to the capital as a 1st year middle school student, I had to make my Morning Musume_o work and school coexist.

Besides lessons, TV work also cut in, and took work pressure even more toward the extreme. Koharu, having just entered middle school, has to go to school too, and having just joined, has to memorize several times as many moves and lyrics as everyone else. My being late to school happened again and again, and they got in touch with my manager. From that point on, my teachers and my manager started an exchange journal. What hour I started attending class today, what sorts of classes I took, etc. Thinking about it now . . . thank you to all of my teachers and classmates.

While I was going to school, work came to mind, and with me doing just about everything for the first time, there were many occasions when things got stressful for Koharu, 12 years old at the time. Going to work every day was a pain. “But I don’t wanna go. . . .” “I wanna quit already. . . .” Every day my thoughts were like that.

I was the youngest out of all the members, and I had joined just by myself, so I ate meals by myself too.

I lived without consulting anyone.

“Thanks. Kusumi. Practice like you’re supposed to without falling asleep! There’s no time for sleeping, you know!”

When work ended, that’s what I was told by my manager, with for some reason an unsociable face and an angry tone (that’s what it felt like to Koharu). But I bit down hard on my teeth and smiled brightly.

Koharu “Thank you☆,” I said enthusiastically.

Being told severe things by my manager, having things I couldn’t do pointed out—those kinds of things happened a lot every day. Every day, in the bathroom, on the futon, I cried. While I was crying, emotions came steadily swelling up, and with my tears not stopping, I kept shedding tears outside of work.

“There’s like no one who understands Koharu’s situation. . . .” “Cuz I’ll never forget such a painful thing as this my entire life.” That was how my thinking went.

⁹⁰*Crunching Classroom ~Welcome Koharu-chan!~*—Morning Musume_o’s 2005 summer/autumn concert tour. Kusumi omits the “!” in the title.

It hurts! It hurts! It hurts! Help!

On one of those days, I was suddenly stricken by a headache. The headache occurred at the end of M Sute (the TV Asahi⁹¹ series *Music Station*⁹²).

When M Sute had ended, and everybody was getting into the car (a jumbo taxi⁹³) to go back, I felt something was a bit out of place, but since it was at a bearable degree, I thought I shouldn't trouble everyone and decided to endure it. Then I was the last to get out of the jumbo taxi. At this time Mom had come to pick me up, so after that I headed home with her in a different taxi. The incident took place at that time. Intense pain ran up to an extent I'd never before experienced!! In the taxi, I did nothing but scream!

Koharu "It hurts! It hurts! Mom, help me!!"

Mother "Koha, what happened?"

Koharu "My head feels like it's splitting into pieces. It hurts here! Do something!" I sobbed.

Mother "Should we buy some ice at that convenience store over there??"

Koharu "No. Don't go anywhere (BAWW). I'm scared!"

Mother "I'll call your manager!"

It was because Mom thought she had to take me to a company-designated hospital that she called my manager. You can't just go anywhere you feel like! she was thinking, I think.

And so, like that, we headed for a company-designated hospital. But as a consequence of going outside of urgent care hours, I only got stable with an intravenous drip and then returned home without being able to get a detailed examination.

In the end, the cause of the headache was fatigue and stress.

And then even Mom collapsed from fatigue and stress.

This is something I heard afterward, but it seems the manager in charge at the time I'd joined was especially strict toward newcomer kids.

We were told things like "You think you practiced enough at that before coming here? Cuz you can't do anything at all~" but everybody overcame that and is now working hard and participating actively.

It's not just in show business, but in society—even though there are kind people, there are also many strict people and disagreeable people, I think. Though every day was so painful and full of stress, when I think about that time, no matter what it was, I had the feeling I could work hard at it.

After that, I met Manager B-san, who I could really trust, and even work got fun.

⁹¹A television network founded in 1957.

⁹²A weekly one-hour music program premiering in 1986.

⁹³A van providing taxi service for multiple passengers.

[[Thanks, Kirari Tsukishima-chan]]

(2006)

My sister, coming to Tokyo

One day, an event occurred that greatly changed the feelings I'd had up until now. That was my sister's moving to Tokyo.

Until now, she'd come to Tokyo about once every 3 weeks, but this time she was coming to Tokyo for real. So things changed a big deal, emotionally. Until now, I hadn't had anyone to consult with, but now there was someone beside me named SISTER who could consider me from an objective point of view and listen to Koharu's stories. She always thought of Koharu and was a close ally. I was happy. From this point on, work got fun. If you ask why, it was because everything kept getting better. I started to do dance practice with Sis, and even my way of dancing changed; I gained confidence. Sis made a solo playback of the DVD of moves and checked all the minute details, and she made me practice until I'd gotten it down completely right; it wasn't just practice, but problems with my way of thinking and my feelings were sternly brought to my attention. Our quarrels too turned violent, but with Koharu and Sis's quarrels, even though they turn violent in an instant, at the moment they end, we go back to being the two of us as usual (HAHA). Suddenly, we completely transform into the two of us as always.

Gradually, I got to get to know how one feeling could change what a dance looks like this much. Even with the MCs⁹⁴ at lives⁹⁵ and such, at first I'd just say stuff the way I'd been told, but along the way, I started speaking with my own words, and I began to express my feelings of gratitude to fans.

"I'll work harder, harder, harder!"—I came to be living only for my work.

On break days, Sis took me to places I liked, and that relieved my stress in a good way, and it was fun too.

My work kept getting more skillful too, and the Koharu who until now hadn't been praised by anyone got praised. I was so happy I wanted to cry. Until now, following what people said, I hadn't been able to look at myself from an objective point of view, but I came to be able to tell who should say what, that what was right was right; I viewed everything from an objective point of view, case by case—no, it wasn't as far as that, but I felt like I myself had grown up a little. And my willpower held steady too, I think. Whatever came my way, I could handle it without feeling nervous.

I take in the good points from the stuff I myself want to do, the things I've been

⁹⁴Segments during breaks between songs in a concert in which the performers talk to the audience.

⁹⁵Live events, including concerts and TV appearances.

told by people. But just from taking things in, I stopped becoming someone who'd follow exactly what they were told. So from this time on, I could live honestly, I think.

At that time, my work as KIRARI TSUKISHIMA in the anime *Kirarin Revolution*⁹⁶ was decided.

Thanks, Kirari Tsukishima-chan—"I've gotten so much from you"

In 2006 March, when I'd passed 1 year in Morning Musume_o, I made my voice-acting debut as KIRARI TSUKISHIMA in the anime *Kirarin☆Revolution*, and another idol activity began anew for me as Kirari Tsukishima.

Koharu encountered Kirari Tsukishima and got a lot of things. Once I start talking, it'll end up being a frightening number, I think.

My co-starring voice actors included a lot of big veterans. But everyone was terribly kind, and I looked forward to going to the scene every time. Even now, everyone's still close, and we all meet up and such. I think we've achieved an irreplaceable friendship circle.

I'm often asked, "Isn't the post-recording⁹⁷ difficult?"—but for Koharu, it was fun. More than anything, for doing the post-recording, I was praised for the first time: "You're pretty good." With that, my self-confidence grew bigger, and I felt like, Let's keep at it! My first time working by myself. As hard as I worked, that much all came back to me.

I'd only made my debut in Morning Musume_o a year before, but starting in 2006 July, I got solo single CDs released as KIRARI TSUKISHIMA STARRING KOHARU KUSUMI (MORNING MUSUME_o).⁹⁸

Then I got to do lives as Kirari Tsukishima too.

My appearances on *Oha Suta* (TV Tokyo's *Oha Suta*)⁹⁹ were as Kirari Tsukishima too. So from around this time on, I got to be asked a lot on the street, "Are you Kirari-chan?" At events and on the stage of *Oha Suta*, I had many opportunities to come into direct contact with girls wearing Kirari Tsukishima costumes, kids wearing men's fan t-shirts too big for them, and so on. I was always gaining power from coming into contact with kids like that. It made me happy riding the train and

⁹⁶*Kirarin☆Revolution* was broadcast on TV Tokyo from 2006 to 2009 for a total of 153 episodes. Kusumi omits the star in the title here.

⁹⁷Voice recording after filming.

⁹⁸Kusumi released 6 singles under this stage name, starting with "Koi☆Kana" on 2006 July 12, as well as singles as part of the *Kirarin☆Revolution* groups Kira☆Pika and MilkyWay.

⁹⁹A TV Tokyo children's show (short for *Oha Studio*) that premiered in 1997 and airs on weekday mornings.

seeing time after time the sight of little kids singing Kirari Tsukishima songs.¹⁰⁰

At first, it was supposed to be a 1-year anime, but thanks to everyone, we got to continue for as long as 4 years.¹⁰¹ I got to do lives too, many times. Since I was the much-loved Kirari, when the graduation live¹⁰² came around, it was sad. “I won’t be singing anymore. . . .” When I thought of that, it was painful. I was lonely.

But it was thanks to everyone supporting me. It’s all in my memories, and it’s a treasure.

My encountering Kirari Tsukishima even brought a very good influence to the Morning Musume◦ Koharu Kusumi after that, and having confidence, I came to be able to present myself as one among the members.

Recollections looking back on the MoMusu◦ Koharu Kusumi

《The Hawaii tour》

When we went to Hawaii for 5 days for our Hawaii tour, I got a stomach virus on the first day, and anything I ate would all come back up, so for 5 days I could only drink water, and only Koharu came back as skin and bones.

It was painful with everyone around me eating tasty stuff but me just having water. Would drinks be all right, I wondered, but when I drank things other than water, even that put me in sharp pain, so I could drink nothing at all but water.

《Photobooks》

I got several photobooks published, and while going to various places for photographing, I had the most terrible experience I can remember.

The lodging was a strange place, and when I opened the refrigerator, there were things sitting in there like “How long has this soda been here?”—and with the atmosphere being scary, I went to Manager B-san’s room and we slept on the same futon.

The bath was scary too, so I stepped in with the door open, and one time after another, I kept shouting to Manager B-san: “I’m here—! Are you there—?”

The plans weren’t great either; after we reached the site, we started looking for photographing locations, but just went around and around and around and around the mountain roads . . . for like 8 hours!!

At around the time we would’ve already finished in the usual case, it hadn’t even been decided where the photographing spots would be. This was quite a

¹⁰⁰I saw someone wearing a *Kilari* (the Italian dubbed version of *Kirarin☆Revolution*) backpack at the airport in Milan. Kusumi would probably be thrilled to see such a thing.

¹⁰¹Actually 3 years, airing for three seasons from 2006 April 7 to 2009 March 27.

¹⁰²*Kirarin☆Revolution Final Stage*, on 2009 May 4 at the Nakano Sunplaza in Tokyo.

painful job for me, together with Manager B-san. Getting to go with my closest friend Manager B-san was the sole salvation.

《**The 10-year commemoration unit**》

Kaori Iida-san,¹⁰³ Natsumi Abe-san,¹⁰⁴ Maki Goto-san,¹⁰⁵ Risa Niigaki-san,¹⁰⁶ Koharu Kusumi—this group of 5 was given singing activities as a 10-year commemoration unit.¹⁰⁷

With the 5 of us going around doing a countrywide tour, these were activities where I was surrounded by my seniors. There were many instances where I followed their example, and it was a good learning experience. Abe-san often let me sit next to her on the Shinkansen, and conversations with her were quite fun. With Iida-san being pregnant, and Goto-san not being in great physical shape, every time, the setlist would change and the distribution of singing parts and standing places and so on would change, and every time it was a commotion and a lot of excitement. We even had 3 people standing on the stage even though it was a 5-person stage.

《**The distribution of singing parts · the standing positions for dances**》

When a new song is finished, Tsunku[♂]-san hands out the distribution of singing parts.

For the single “Aruteru”,¹⁰⁸ I got the center position for the first time. I was also able to get solo parts. I felt my hard work had been recognized, and I was happy. Even my clothes were different from everyone else’s. I worked hard at recording too. But when I looked after recording had ended, my solo parts had vanished. It was quite a good position at first, but there were many times the long-awaited position I’d received was completely wasted on me. Usually you come to the center when it gets to be your part to sing, but for me, I was in the center even when I wasn’t singing. Maybe with something like being in the center not singing, it looks like focusing on the good parts, but it’s not like that! It was just that after the singing part ended, I was just dancing in the center even though I wasn’t singing for some reason.

For “Mikan”,¹⁰⁹ for example, I was doing the same thing. Sis always got angry—“It’s such a waste!!”

¹⁰³Kaori Iida (1981—), first-generation member of Morning Musume_o.

¹⁰⁴Natsumi Abe (1981—), first-generation member of Morning Musume_o.

¹⁰⁵Maki Goto (1985—), the sole third-generation member of Morning Musume_o.

¹⁰⁶Risa Niigaki (1988—), fifth-generation member of Morning Musume_o.

¹⁰⁷Morning Musume_o Tanjō 10nen Kinentai (Morning Musume_o 10-Year Anniversary Commemoration Unit) was formed in 2007 from former and current members of Morning Musume_o, and released two singles.

¹⁰⁸Morning Musume_o’s 31st single (“Walking”), released 2006 November 8.

¹⁰⁹Morning Musume_o’s 35th single, released 2007 November 21.

It was like that with dance lessons too. Even though I was deployed in the center, since I was tall and blocked people behind me, I ended in the back partway through, and stuff like that.

《Meals said to be unusual》

Whenever I'm asked by Manager B-san, "What's good for breakfast?" I always recommend umeboshi and squid and stuff. Because of that, I often got a "You're such an old person!" in retort (HAHA). But from this time on, I got switched on to sweets! Anyway, I was recklessly eating things like white chocolate.

I think my principle was probably that when I could do it according to my feelings, I'd take care for health's sake, and when I couldn't, there was no way I would. So I was often told by even the members and my manager things like "You eat a lot but you don't gain weight, do you—" Certainly, even though I ate a lot, I didn't gain weight. When I eat way too much, certainly I get a little fatter, but at times like that, what Koharu would often do was turn the dinner rice into konjac noodles!

It's just the main cooked rice that's replaced with konjac, together with side dishes and such kept as usual. After about three days, I lost three kilograms (HAHA).

《Meeting, parting from Manager B-san》

The person who became the manager in charge of me starting about 2 and a half years after I debuted, I often talked to about everything from trivial things to work. I could really trust this Manager B-san, who it was always appropriate to talk to, and whose properly thinking of Koharu passed down to me day after day, day after day.

Since my nails are weak, I said I wanted to get gel nails. But there are little kids among Koharu's fans too. I had to put on an appearance that those kinds of kids could use as a model, good for them to mimic. It was a conflict between junior high school student Koharu and idol Koharu.

Manager B-san was always preparing iron-containing ALFE Mini¹¹⁰ and a bench-coat for Koharu's sake. Especially after the post-recording started, it got easier for my throat to hurt, so I always carried an aspirator and didn't talk to anyone for an entire day, just conveying information in writing and so on. With happenings like that, Manager B-san's honey lemon preparation method was turning extremely pro (HAHA).

It was decided that such a manager as that would no longer be in charge of Koharu.

¹¹⁰A vitamin drink produced by Taisho Pharmaceutical.

Although we quarreled a lot, we were together just about every day. I'm full, full of memories too.

While I tidied up my baggage, I spilled tears.

"Who's going to look after me!?" I said, crying at the end. I couldn't imagine anything like switching to somebody else, and when I thought, "Absolutely no way!!" tears burst out.

On the day of Kirari Tsukishima's graduation stage, this Manager B-san separated from being in charge of Koharu. But even now, we're such close friends that on break days, we go out for meals.

[[I'm a health otaku!]]

Unusual health

After my arrival in Tokyo, I was busy with junior high school every day, my work as part of Morning Musume_o, and my work as Kirari Tsukishima; I was tormented by sensitivity to cold · lumbago · constipation · anemia · nasal inflammation; and it got easy to catch even a cold, which until now I'd almost never had. Above all, my sensitivity to cold was quite horrible: my temperature didn't match the other members', and while everyone was warm, I was cold and shivering. And my stomach hurt constantly, making everyone around concerned.

I've even done a live during which everything in front of my eyes got yellow due to anemia, and I was like "It's dangerous staying like this—I'm going to collapse."

My throat. . . My voice . . . won't come out

At the time of the musical *Ribbon no Kishi*,¹¹¹ my work as Kirari Tsukishima had piled up; generally I had to use my voice a lot, and it often got so that I'd go to sleep and wake up another person, differing only in voice. I went to the hospital and got medication, but there was no way I could get well right away by taking it, and moreover I was told by the doctor, "If you don't use your voice, it'll get better faster. Your voice gets worn down, so when you exceed your vocal use capacity, it stops coming out." Certainly, at this time, I had to use my voice every day. I was using a 24-hour voice with all my might. Thinking about it now, I think it's probably obvious that if you use your voice 24 hours a day, that would get it extremely blasted, but at this time, I was thinking, QMy voice is like so weak, isn't it (HAHA).

¹¹¹A musical adaptation of the manga by Osamu Tezuka (*Princess Knight*, literally *Ribbon Knight*), performed by members of Morning Musume_o, v-u-den, and others in 2006 August at the Shinjuku Koma Theater in Tokyo.

I kept on taking medicine for my throat, and outside of work, I communicated by writing words on paper.

Of course, with pressure in my heart, might it not have put tension on my throat? The nerves in my body were racing, each and every one of them, and I was constantly thinking of something 24 hours a day. The inside of my head was always entirely filled up, and maybe because there was always energy in it, on break days, when that was taken out, I'd catch a cold and be held up in bed by fever and other things.

Even by myself, I got worried and went for a physical exam; I even got an MRI inspection and a blood test.

Finally, I went as far as starting to have a brain exam.

I collapsed at last (2007 winter)—“If we go with surgery, will it leave a scar?”

Koharu “My stomach might be hurting. . . .”

In the middle of dance practice, my stomach started hurting. But since it was at a bearable level of pain, I didn't worry about it too much.

I arrived home.

Koharu “It feels like my stomach hurts or something. . . . Ah, maybe I'm too hungry~”

Sister “I'll make you something.”

Sis made me mackerel cooked in miso, and I ate that.

Then something unusual happened.

Koharu “My stomach hurts. I don't know if it's my stomach or my intestines or what, but it doesn't feel like a normal stomachache.”

Sister “Did you eat hunched over? Food gets stuck in your stomach that way, doesn't it?”

Koharu “Seriously?”

The pain being too much for me, I was writhing around on my bed.

Sister “Jump like crazy!”

I endured the pain and jumped like crazy.

Koharu “It's not getting better! It hurts.”

Sister “That's exaggerated, isn't it—do a bridge and stretch your stomach out!”

I endured the pain and did a bridge.

Sister “Arch some more! Your arch isn’t enough!”

I did a bridge, putting more arch into it.

Koharu “Will this really make it better?”

Sister “Not if you don’t try some things first.”

After a while. . . .

Koharu “It hurts it hurts it hurts it hurts.”

Sister “Quiet! I’m watching Hana Yori Dango¹¹² now, so anything you tell me now is useless!”

Koharu “But——it hurts——”

Sister “Wait till this is over.”

I started writhing more and more.

Sister “For real?”

Koharu “It hurts~ (WAAA).” It hurt too much, and I started crying.

Sister “I’ll confirm it one more time, but you’re not exaggerating, are you? Don’t tell me after I’ve called the ambulance that you just ate too much and already got better after 5 minutes~! or anything like that.”

Koharu “It hurts so much I can’t take it. It hurts more than earlier!”

Sister “For serious! For real! Let’s go to the hospital!”

It’s now 10:00 at night.

Sister “The hospital isn’t open anymore, is it? I’ll look for a hospital that’s open for urgent care, so have your insurance card and stuff ready.”

Koharu “I can’t move. I’ll go in pajamas.”

Sister “That’s fine. I’ve already called a taxi.”

We headed toward the hospital.

Nurse “Please wait here.”

Sister “She’s in pain, so please look at her soon.”

The doctor came.

Doctor “I don’t know what the cause is, so let’s see what the situation is like tomorrow. It’s because we can’t do an examination at this time.”

Sister “What are you saying? If she could bear it until tomorrow, we wouldn’t have needed to come all the way to the hospital for urgent care! She’s in pain, so do something, please!”

¹¹²*Hana Yori Dango* (*Boys Over Flowers*) was a 2005 television drama series on TBS, adapted from the manga series of the same title by Yoko Kamio. Given the timeframe, this is probably *Hana Yori Dango Returns*, the 2007 sequel.

Doctor “The only thing we can do is relieve the pain, so shall we hook up the intravenous drip?”

Sister “What kind of intravenous drip is that?”

Sis started asking about the IV drip, and I don’t know whether she agreed with it, but we decided to hook up the IV drip.

Doctor “Please wait a little while.”

15 minutes passed.

Koharu “It hurts~” I screamed all over the place.

Sister “What’s happening? The doctor! Excu—se me!”

Even with Sis yelling in a loud voice, no doctor comes; not even a nurse comes!

Sister “I’ve told them to hurry up cuz it hurts, but no way there isn’t even anyone here? What kind of hospital is this! In this kind of place, you’ll just get sicker and sicker! Koharu! We’re leaving!”

Sis carried me.

Sister “I’m sorry. Just hold on a bit, OK? But it’s not as safe to stay in a place like this, is it?”

Koharu “Yeah! It’s not safe being seen by that doctor!”

Sister “What’s this hospital turned into? If you can’t see anyone, don’t open for urgent care or anything! No doubt we’re going to a different hospital!”

Next, we headed to a university hospital.

Sister “Koharu, you look like you’re fainting! Hang in there! We’ll get there soon!”

Right away, I was carried to a bed, and after I got an IV drip, the examination started.

Again, the cause was unknown.

Doctor “So the result of the examination is that there isn’t anything abnormal. . . . But the way she’s feeling pain is abnormal. With her feeling pain like this, it’s strange that there’s nothing abnormal, so what shall we do? Shall we see how things turn out at home?”

Sister “No, until the cause is understood, or her pain recedes, please keep her in the hospital.”

It had already gotten to be about 3 o’clock in the middle of the night. Sis kept by my side and rubbed my stomach. I don’t know if it was the IV doing its work or

what, but I apparently got a little sleepy. But whenever the IV wore off, immediately intense pain ran through me! Because of that, they kept adding to the IV every time.

Eventually I started vomiting nonstop.

Sister “She’s still in a lot of pain. What do you think the cause of it is? Tell me everything, please.”

Doctor “Please wait a little; I’ll have another doctor come too, OK?”

Various doctors came by. Everyone marveled at me.

It stayed like that until morning.

The pain came to be more and more awful.

Doctor “May I talk to you for a bit?”

Sis was called and went off. It seems a few of the hospital’s doctors talked with her.

A few minutes later.

Sister “Koharu. Can you listen for a bit? Cuz as things are, they’ve decided to hospitalize you now. They said you might have a stone in your stomach.”

Koharu “Hospitalized? The rehearsal for the live is tomorrow! What do I do?” I started to cry.

What about HaroMoni? The post-recording? My head was full of thoughts about what I’d do about such work.

Sister “Of course they’ll discuss work matters with you later. It’ll happen one way or another, so get hospitalized.”

Koharu “I’ll be together with Sis, right?”

Sister “No, I think the visiting hours are limited.”

Koharu “It’s definitely no good with just that! Definitely stay with me 24 hours.”

Sister “I understand. I’ll go ask, so just wait.”

Sister “It’s only completely private rooms that have beds prepared for family members and allow them to stay, I was told, so I picked one of those rooms.”

By age, Koharu was admitted to the children’s ward.

Just as expected from pediatrics! The walls were cutely adorned with Anpan-man¹¹³ pictures and such. They seemed too cute and I could laugh (HAHA).

I was told I couldn't even eat food, and without being able to drink any beverages, I just got my nutrients from the IV.

The doctor came to my hospital room.

- Doctor** "I can't tell from the X-ray, but from where the pain is and so on, I think it's probably symptomatic of appendicitis—most certainly, I think."
Koharu "Appendicitis? Oh no. Surgery?"
Doctor "So there's the option of dispersing it, and the option of cutting and removing it"—we heard about those in detail.
Sister "If we go with surgery, will it leave a scar?"
Doctor "Yes, that's right."

We heard further details, and decided to go with the option of dispersing it.

In that condition, for 4 days, I lived without even drinking water or eating.

You might be thinking, it's only appendicitis, isn't it? I don't know whether everyone's respective symptoms are different, but for Koharu, even walking was painful, and I couldn't even walk by myself. But thanks to the IV and medications, as long as I didn't move from my bed, I mostly didn't have any pain.

Since food was entirely forbidden, I wanted to eat something because generally anything would be good. So every day I thought in anticipation of what I'd eat after leaving the hospital.

Out of boredom I kept playing the DS *Kirby* game¹¹⁴ Sis had gone and bought for me. With too much free time, I finished quickly and got the all-clear (HAHA).

Taking turns with Sis, Mom came during the daytime.

- Mother** "I heard Yoshida-san is coming to see you today."
Koharu (*Yoshida-san—who's that?*)

Knock-knock: there was a knock on the door:

- Mother** "Ah, Yoshida-san just came, didn't she?"
Koharu "Please~"

¹¹³A popular cartoon character with a head made of anpan (a sweet roll filled with red bean paste), created by Takashi Yanase in 1973.

¹¹⁴This is either *Touch! Kirby* (*Kirby: Canvas Curse/Kirby: Power Paintbrush*), released in 2005, or *Hoshi no Kirby Sanjō! Daroach Dan* (*Kirby: Squeak Squad/Kirby: Mouse Attack*), released in 2006, both for the Nintendo DS.

Yoshizawa-san! It was Hitomi Yoshizawa.¹¹⁵ Having been told Yoshida-san, I'd been wondering who that was, but it turned out to be Yoshizawa-san.

Koharu (Mom . . . you messed up.)

The stone in my abdomen was not dissolving at all.

Sis decided on the surgery to take it out.

That was the result after she'd spoken thoroughly with the doctor and thought that it would be the best option.

I was scared, but I too agreed to that.

The truth was, being hospitalized this time was the first time I'd been hospitalized since being born.

Koharu "I get the jitters just being hospitalized, but now with surgery. . . . It's just too frightening!"

Sister "A doctor with a good arm will naturally be in charge of your surgery, so you'll be all right!"

The day of the surgery.

Koharu "I'm scared I'm scared I'm scared I'm scared. What do I do! What do I do!"

Sister "But you'll be fine!"

Nurse "So, shall we go? Koharu-chan. Hang in there, OK?"

With me still lying in bed, just like that I was transported to the operating room and had the surgery.

The surgery ended safely.

Apparently Sis was shown Koharu's extracted appendix. "This is the extracted appendix," they said. And she even got a commemorative photo of it (HAHA).

I came to my senses. I opened my eyes and the very first thing that came to my mouth was "Sis . . . Sis. Sis." Even though she was right in front of my eyes, my surroundings were blurred from the anesthesia and it seems I kept crying out "Sis".

Nurse "Miss, come this way please! Koharu-chan, your sister is here. You're OK; your sister is right next to you. You're OK; you're OK. Koharu-chan, you hung in there, didn't you~ You were great~"

Due to the anesthesia, I don't have very many memories of this.

Sister "I'm here. You're OK," she said, grasping my hand.

¹¹⁵Hitomi Yoshizawa (1985–), fourth-generation member of Morning Musume◦ and leader of the group at the time.

Koharu “Be quiet! Be quiet!”
Sister “You yell for me and now you tell me to be quiet (HAHA).”

I don’t remember it, but it seems I’d yelled for her that much but then got angry and kept telling her to be quiet, be quiet, over and over again. I laughed, hearing about it afterward.

My cut stomach hurt. Though it hurt when I laughed, whenever I tried to resist laughing, I ended up laughing too much without stopping, and it hurt (EHHH).

As for the scar, it almost didn’t stand out!

The other doctors were surprised at how small the scar was. “It’s just like Dr. ———, isn’t it? Always making extractions with small scars like this. I was surprised,” they said among their fellow doctors. It was a scar around 1~1.5 thumbnails’ size. It was really surprising how small it was. I’ve been shown other people’s appendix scars, but Koharu’s was so small it was completely surprising. After a few months, the scar disappeared completely, and now there isn’t any scar at all.

On the very day the surgery finished, I was informed in my hospital room that PV shooting would happen right away.

Naturally I can’t move.

But the PV shooting day is fixed and can’t be altered.

While I watched the DVD of moves in my hospital room, I decided to memorize the dance with my eyes.

That song was “Kanashimi Twilight”.¹¹⁶

Koharu “What is this? Isn’t the dance really violent, of all things?”
Sister “(BWAHAHAA).”
Koharu “If I dance this, my appendix cut’ll instantly open up, won’t it?”
Sister “Eh? You’re kidding, right? It’s probably already too dangerous from the ‘jajan♪’ at the beginning of the song onward (HAHA). Your appendix cut’ll already open up at the start.”

About one week after I was hospitalized, I tried to taste hot water. It was a little at a time, but I could drink.

The day I was able to eat properly was the day before I was discharged. Eating food for the first time in about 10 days, I thought it was amazingly delicious.

Then Koharu was safely discharged.

Everyone in Morning Musume_o had already finished up the PV shooting several days before.

So right away, I entered a separate PV shooting just by myself.

¹¹⁶Morning Musume_o’s 33rd single (“Sorrow Twilight”), released 2007 April 25.

There were several scenes that were shot of 3 members lined up and not just Koharu, but for those, they'd decided that the 3 members would do the shooting once more together for Koharu's sake. I'm so grateful. For that time, thank you so much.

A hospital otaku

Before I knew it, work had become the number-one thing for Koharu. So having a body in generally bad condition was no good, and I couldn't stand it. My physical strength had gone away too, and it was painful dancing and singing for around 2 hours during lives, with 2 performances in 1 day. I always did the lives feeling like I was going to die, and going too far past those limits, every time I'd think, "Won't Koharu totally die?" . . . but unexpectedly, humans don't collapse that easily.

Originally, I liked the MCs more than dancing, . . . but nevertheless, with my physical strength waning, it was frustrating to be tired at dancing.

Various poor physical conditions overlapped, and I thought, isn't there some way out?—but with nothing but the hospital coming to mind, I went to the hospital. I went to various hospitals and went hospital-hopping. Because it was bad to be out of shape. . . . Anyway, having no knowledge, I was dependent on hospitals at that time. My throat hospital was the one the voice actors would go to, and I tried out particular hospitals the company showed me and various other ones.

Because of that, I always carried like a bundle of cards from various hospitals, and during that time, I came to be asked by the other members about hospitals.

Member "Where is there a good hospital?"

Koharu "The one over there is good for the throat, and if you're getting medicine, that one, and—and? What kind of symptoms do you have?"

I had conversations like that.

Member "I went to the hospital~"

Koharu "Ehh? Where? What kind of medicine were you given? Ah~ this is a painkiller. It's pretty strong, so leave 6 hours in between the times you take it, OK?"

I had conversations like that. With a feeling of "Ah, I know this medicine too; ah, and this medicine too," I was starting to have like a medicine and hospital mania.

I constantly carried an inhaler, and at home, I wore a mask, and besides that, I had a humidifier on; before going to sleep, I'd put the humidifier on plus, beside my bed even, and then sleep.

After a meal, I'd take my medicine; I carried herpes medicine and even nasal inflammation medicine, for whenever I got mouth ulcers and nasal inflammation;

I carried mouthwash so I could rinse my mouth frequently; I brought alcohol gel for the purpose of eliminating bacteria on my hands before eating a meal; and the inside of Koharu's bag was always getting full of these kinds of goods.

Even with supplements, hopeless extreme anemia

Buying vitamin pills at the convenience store, and taking iron supplements recommended by those around me, I came to start taking supplements. The impetus was Koharu's Mom. At first, I had a headache, and from that day on, she changed her cooking, aiming for healthy, and for anemic Koharu's sake, she cooked various things using spinach, and so on. Yet my physical condition didn't get much better. It was probably because I'd used hospital medications too much that my immunity and resilience and so on weakened, I think. I was taking a lot of medicine, wasn't I. . . . If you take that much, that's what happens, right? My body was getting really weak. So even Mom started buying things like "health drinks" and "supplements". Mom, whenever I was taking medicine, would come over saying, "You're taking that much medicine? It's not good, you know. If that's the case, wouldn't it be better to still take supplements or something?" I too would say, "Yeah," and nod, but I didn't have any free time to buy them, and since my head was stuffed full of work matters, I didn't even have room to think about what kinds of supplements to buy or anything, so when I left it at that, Mom asked the pharmacist at the pharmacy and came back with several supplements for me. From then on, I started taking supplements.

The things I was taking were "multi-vitamins", with "iron content". In addition, I also took the "blueberry" supplements my manager bought for me once in a while at work.

But with my anemia not getting any better at all, I went to the hospital. Then I was told it was "extreme anemia" and was given some pretty strong iron medications.

Doctor "It's anemia, isn't it? I'll go ahead and give you some iron preparations to give you a little strength, OK?"

Koharu "Eh? But I'm already taking these over-the-counter iron supplements."

Doctor "These kinds of things, they're not effective for your anemia. Starting today, take this medication, and after the exam results say you've returned to normal, you can go back to taking supplements."

Was Koharu's anemia that terrible . . . ?

According to the doctor, I apparently had a chronic oxygen deficiency. Moreover, for Koharu and the others, the lives and dances, etc., require a lot of frequent flapping leg movements, so it seems my oxygen gets depleted rapidly, and my blood keeps breaking down more than anyone. At this time, my physical condition was terrible to the max: I easily got shortness of breath, it was bad to wake

up in the morning, etc., etc.—various symptoms would appear. Anyway, it was the worst physical shape I'd been in in my life. I'd even catch a cold once every month.

I started taking this medicine, and three months later. . . . My physical condition got better.

I was totally a captive of these iron preparations. For about a year, I continued to take them. Then the next thing was, I was afflicted by constipation.

When I went to the hospital: "This medication is awfully strong, so it's easy to get constipation. I'll give you some very effective laxatives in advance, so before you go to sleep, dribble 3 drops in water and drink it, OK? It's quite effective."

After returning home, I tried it out.

But for Koharu, it wasn't effective. I think I'd probably developed suitably chronic constipation.

Apparently everybody ends up like this after taking strong iron preparations for three months. To the extent that laxatives are given out together with iron preparations. I wonder if maybe it was because I was taking too much, plus various other medications on top of that, that my gastrointestinal digestive abilities got weak, and as a result it wasn't effective.

Relying on neither supplements nor medicine

I tried out various supplements and medications, but it was hard to acquire the healthy body I wished for, and I felt it was a temporary measure.

Let's not rely entirely on medicine and hospitals, but produce a healthy body from the inside! I thought.

While completing my busy work, I started looking to see if there was anything I could do by myself. With the personality I've had since around infancy, I looked up stuff about my own symptoms, about the medications, from the Internet and books, etc., generally from one end to the other, as a consequence of it being a rule that I'd investigate thoroughly everything I was concerned about.

"Each and every thing they say is different, isn't it! With A's method, they say doing it this way is better, but what? For B, A's method is no good. Well then, which one should I believe?" I thought. Because of that, more and more I started looking up the meaning of every single word in minute detail, and so on, and from one end to the other kept trying things out myself.

I got to be more careful about my physical condition, and started to carry bentos by myself, put tea in a thermos bottle and carried it with me, and started to eat black soybeans, kombu, and hoshiimo¹¹⁷ when I was hungry.

¹¹⁷Dried sweet potato.

Chapter 5

A Career Change at 17

[[Worried days as an idol]]

Life in Tokyo more difficult than I thought

When I was 12, I passed the audition, and out of the Niigata countryside, I started living in the Tokyo of my dreams. I felt that life had changed a great deal. Even from a faraway place separated from Tokyo by 250 kilometers, it's the world I'd always seen on TV and in magazines. Koharu suddenly dives into that world. I appear as an idol in front of everyone.

With my heart full of hopes, I moved to Tokyo. But my new life was not at all as fun as I'd imagined. For several weeks before my debut, I had to complete a mountain's worth of tasks. Voice lessons, dance lessons—even as I memorize this, memorize that, one after another, the tasks keep growing. In addition, city life was full of things I hadn't gotten used to.

I even had a hard time thinking about how to get to a designated place. I didn't even know where in the world I had to go to get hold of the clothes and underwear I needed to get ready. In the country, wherever you're going, there's just one way to get there, and where you go shopping is also fixed. For anything and everything, it was my first time. Even the time I had for eating meals was sparing, and I single-mindedly finished each day. I didn't have anything at all like time to enjoy living in Tokyo.

As Morning Musume^o, as Kirari Tsukishima, and then as Koharu Kusumi

In my 2nd year after debuting as an idol, at the age of 13, I got a job doing post-recording as Kirari Tsukishima, the main character of the anime *Kirarin Revolution*, and I started doing it at the same time as my Morning Musume^o work.

1 year of frantically following behind the other members. My solo work after that made me very happy. With my solo work, as hard as I worked, just as much rebounded back to me. That was well worth doing and fun. I put in great effort, and generally worked hard. Even the first time I was praised was after I had started my solo work. I felt I'd been praised for my hard work, and I was truly happy.

My second year after beginning that kind of Kirari Tsukishima. I had a worried period. The other members had time off—only Koharu had work, and my work as Kirari Tsukishima was building up. Despite living inside the city, there were times when I slept for only a few hours in a city hotel, and then went like that to a different job; honestly, it was hard on my body, but since my work was fun, I could do it. With my hard work, and thanks to all of my fans who had come to support me, my Kirari Tsukishima work steadily kept growing, and at concerts and such, I got to be allowed to sing several songs solo.

However, I didn't think this kind of situation would last a long time. My work as Kirari Tsukishima was for a one-year contract at first, but thankfully I was allowed to continue for a second year, and when I thought, "A third year is impossible, isn't it. Cuz Kirari Tsukishima is 14, but Koharu's gonna turn 16, and my face has gotten older, and it'll soon be hard to wear pigtails, won't it?" it turned out Kirari Tsukishima was still going on. I was so terribly happy. I even thought, let it be forever~

For the Koharu at this time who couldn't have confidence in herself being a member of Morning Musume_o, Kirari Tsukishima was Koharu's support.

Group and solo coexistence

In my 3rd year since I started doing both Kirari Tsukishima work and Morning Musume_o work at the same time (my 4th year since debuting), I hit my own barrier.

Morning Musume_o are supported as a group by all their fans. Because of that, everyone has to keep aiming in the same direction. On the other hand, for my Kirari Tsukishima solo activities, I had to find my own special way and express it. With the coexistence of group activities and solo activities, it came to be a pain to find a balance within myself.

On the days when I had to do both, day by day, I steadily got worried about how I myself should be, and I even felt like I was turning into someone other than myself. But Koharu wants to be Koharu. . . .

I wanted to convey Koharu's feelings to everyone in my own way, and furthermore, I wanted to get excited together with the Morning Musume_o members and staff. But I became unable to communicate that well in either actions or words, and my worried days continued.

My Manager B-san at that time always took me seriously and was always someone I could trust, so I always reported the things I was concerned about honestly. I was worried about the difference between group activities and solo activities, I thought.

“Might it be better for Koharu to quit Morning Musume?”

I discussed these worries with the people at the office too, but no solution came up right away.

My body in bad shape

With Tokyo living that I hadn't gotten used to, and moreover, busy work taken to an extreme, and starting from around my 2nd year after debuting, headaches, stomachaches, anemia, throat pain, all at the same time, one after another, I came to feel that my body was getting into quite a bad shape.

When I was living in the country, running around barefoot in the summer, going to play at friends' houses and taking nearly 1 hour by bike, and so on, I was so healthy I rarely caught even a cold, so I didn't think I'd ever have to worry about something like my own body being in bad shape.

I've written about it in detail in the previous chapter, for example, but I began inquiring about hospitals, and investigating medicine ingredients too, and trying out all sorts of supplements. Medicine and supplements were the very best way of getting over that situation, but I kept coming around to thinking I wanted to be healthy from the source, in both mind and body. Even during all my busy days, I acquired information from the Net and bookstores, and started to try out various things to find the method that best fit me.

While I worried about the balance between mind and body, every day my work continued.

Just when I realized it, time had passed in the blink of an eye, and Kirari Tsukishima's graduation on 2009 May 4 was approaching.

I'm quitting Morning Musume!

The Kirari Tsukishima job I loved came to an end. Before I knew it, Koharu's worries were known even to the other staff and members. Everyone was concerned for me, but that concern made me feel unnecessarily uneasy.

After quitting Morning Musume, what is it that Koharu will want to do?

What could it be that I want to do myself?

In the country, I dreamed of being an idol, and I came out to Tokyo. I didn't have a single big dream. I appeared both on television and in magazines, and I got to stand on a big stage. All of my fans' support also made me happy. Being too busy, and having various things to do every day, I didn't even have time to think freely about my future, and the days kept passing by.

Again, I thought deeply.

Thoughts came to mind of the time when I was little, in the country, wearing a lot of Western-style clothes and putting on a fashion show, and having fun cutting cloth with scissors. What I'd been interested in since I was little. The dreams I'd been vaguely longing for.

Should I try being a model? But from idol to model? Isn't it like out of order?

I consulted Sis.

Koharu "What do you think of me becoming a model now?"

Sister "You should do what you love, shouldn't you?"

Koharu "Mmm~~~~"

Sister "Koharu, you can do both a cool model-like face and a cute-looking idol face, so since you can do either, you're almighty at everything. Clothes from whatever line will fit you. If you do what you love~~"

Of course, Koharu! I wanna be a model!!

Then I went to consult the people at the office once again.

"I want to quit Morning Musume_o and become a model!"

The response was a severe one.

"Do you know what kind of work modeling is? By yourself, you'd have to enter auditions for several tens of magazine companies and events and shows before you finally get a job. To maintain your figure, you'd have to exert yourself to death every day, every day, and even with that, there are loads of models whose names remain unknown. If you're just saying this as only an aspiration, you should really think about it. Do you fully understand how hard everyone works? Your thinking is naive since you joined Morning Musume_o suddenly and the fans all welcomed you."

I thought about it often. Every day, every day I thought about it.

I wanna be a model. It's not half-baked; I wanna make full-fledged modeling my main job and set myself on the modeling road!

I went to consult with them once more.

"If that's the case, go ask for once what it means to be a model"—and with that, I was introduced to some companies.

The model barrier

I heard from a modeling agency.

But . . . when I heard the story, I found that it was harder than I thought.

First of all, Koharu's height was insufficient. 166 centimeters. Even if I stretch and go in, it's on the short side for the modeling world. For aiming to be a top model, there are many people at 170 centimeters and higher.

For a model's job, the main thing is clothes. More than how you look, you have to think about how well the clothes can sell. What kind of hairstyle and what kind of makeup the clothes would look cute with. It was a big difference from having talent as to how to present yourself.

To become a model, you have to polish yourself, not just for outward appearances, but also internally. To be a beautiful woman, for example, you have to be able to write pretty characters, etc. You have to maintain a posture polished out of basic principles like that. In addition, I found out about correcting a bent body, or teeth, etc., and many things of various sorts that a model has to fix.

Individuality. What Koharu values the most. Because of that, I couldn't react honestly. But it was because I kept thinking, I've wanted to be a model from when I was little, so I want to be one someday!

The people at the office continued to tell me about various agencies too, and I heard about modeling jobs.

Being a model, being an actress, being a talent—various things I could do are very strict. First, there's having to start from getting a contract with a magazine. For that, they get various auditions from thousands, tens of thousands of people, and even then, it's only a few names who could get a contract.

People who are active as models now have entered auditions tens, hundreds of times, and have frantically worked hard to improve themselves.

Although I had a strong will, my knowledge was lacking, and once I tried asking, there were very many things I had to learn from scratch, and finding it different from the world I'd imagined, I started to get lost.

Now is it a good thing to challenge myself to be a new model? I thought, and even I myself began to not know what I should do.

I talked about that with my family.

"If that's the case, even if you don't become a model, you do have something else, don't you?" I was told.

At first, I'd gotten desperate—"I'll do everything just as I'm told already!"—but when I was stopped by my family, I was able to calm myself down and think once

again.

And then, this one time. Together with Sis, I talked with the people at the office.

I spoke honestly about having aspirations for modeling, but in reality, after going to see people at modeling agencies, finding the pro world stricter than I'd thought, and losing confidence in myself.

Company "If you want to make the best use of your individuality, you'd have to have some strong point, wouldn't you?"

Koharu "Do I have something? I don't, do I?"

Sister "What could it be?"

A while later. . . .

Sister "A health otaku¹¹⁸ (HAHA)."

Company "Eh? What? That's the first time I've ever heard of such a thing!"

Koharu "Sis! What are you talking about?! No, it's just a hobby. It's embarrassing."

For Koharu, being a health otaku was embarrassing, and I'd hidden it from everyone.

Sister "If it's health-related, anything I ask her about, she'll answer for me."

Company "Really? Nobody knows that Kusumi has such a special skill in her or anything?"

Koharu "I was embarrassed and couldn't tell the members or staff." "Backstage at concerts and such, I'd investigate things stealthily, and keep hoshiimo and so on hidden in my bag."

Sister "At home she has books as bulky as an encyclopedia, and books with no pictures, written in tiny characters squeezed together, are just lying around, and I only have to open them to get dizzy, but Koharu's always reading those, and even in the bath and the hallway, she keeps reading so much it's astounding. And still, they keep on steadily growing."

Koharu "They're not a hindrance, though. They're really interesting, so read them!"

I talked about health.

Koharu's considerable otaku style totally made everyone surprised.

Company "Amazing, isn't it. This isn't hobby-level! If you've gone that far, you can make it your career, probably. That's an individual characteristic, a special skill no one else has, isn't it!"

Koharu "Ehh? I love health stuff, but it's a hobby . . . as a career, though. . . ."

¹¹⁸The term *otaku* refers to people with obsessive interests in a subject, most often applied to fans of anime, manga, or video games.

I had an interest in health, and for that, I could forgo even my sleeping time. But could it become my job? Is it good as a business?

It's a hobby, though. . . .

Company “Kusumi, you haven't said anything like that until now, have you?”

Sister “No, even I was just saying that as it came to mind. . . . When I saw her having that much interest . . . (HAHA).”

Just like with that one word from Sis, taking advantage of my debut, again with one word from Sis, I felt a premonition that my life would turn around completely.

[[Being able to turn into health otaku Koharu]]

Could I turn being a health otaku into a career?

Perhaps it might be possible for my own interests to turn into a job, little by little! But I've only done it as a hobby up until now. . . . It was me trying things out and looking up stuff because I liked it and was interested in it.

Being a TV kid since I was little, I would buy TV magazines to check the programs I wanted to see. For Koharu, dramas and variety shows were a given, but I loved health shows too. I'd often watch 2-hour specials on illnesses and programs related to health, etc. I also bought fashion magazines, but I just read the diet corner sections from those, from top to bottom. Anyway, I was interested in health.

More than orange juice, I loved tea, and I also got addicted to the kuromame-cha¹¹⁹ that Mom ordered. At first, I started with a glass, but not being satisfied with that, I went up to a pot. The result of that was that on those days, the toilet totally got closer (HAHA).

During my Morning Musume_o period, my physical condition had broken down more and more, so I'd come to look up things in my spare time, and moreover I started to take care of myself. I took boiled broccoli with me, and carried tofu and soy sauce, and so on. But the thing was, no matter what, the provisions we got after we had lives were delicious, so I totally ate up the sweets. When I was developing anemia, I'd have nothing but prunes, spinach ohitashi,¹²⁰ liver, etc.

Anyway, I was the type who, whenever I was worried, absolutely had to do things thoroughly, and look stuff up, and when I had something I would think, Why? Why? about, I'd ask Sis. Asking someone was the only way I understood, and I thought there was no other way besides looking something up in the Japanese dictionary.

¹¹⁹Black soybean tea.

¹²⁰Lightly boiled greens marinated in bonito-flavored soy sauce.

One day, I made Sis mad.

- Sister** “Why don’t you look things up by yourself already! Every few minutes you come by with another question!”
- Koharu** “But it’s something I’m worried about though.”
- Sister** “How about looking it up on your cell phone? With a phone, you could look things up elsewhere, can’t you?”

To Koharu, who’d only used a cell phone for phone calls and email, what she was saying didn’t make any sense.

- Sister** “I’m sending you a search site, OK?”
- Koharu** “Coo—I. You can search on your phone—”

At that time, I’d been sent the Yahoo! site.

To Koharu, Yahoo! was magic. From that day on, when I’d learned about search, no matter what it was, I would search and search. On the Internet, there’s a heap of information that I want to know. By searching just one word, new bits of information catching my interest come up, one after another. During that time, I discovered blogs on food and health that interested me. Amazing!

There are people in the world who are this knowledgeable about eating and health. Moreover, it’s not that everyone says the same thing, but that one by one, everyone’s eating lifestyle and way of maintaining health is different. Interesting! My interest gradually came surging up. After that, I started to look at quite a lot of people’s blogs.

Most of my free time was spent reading blogs, reading books, etc. I’ll write about it in detail in the next chapter, but Koharu, who had the interest but mostly didn’t have the knowledge, gradually got to be a health otaku through books and the Internet. I myself wasn’t aware of it, but for my family and the people around me, it seemed I had gone beyond the limits of just “liking” (HAHA).

By the way, I tried asking Mom and Sis what about Koharu qualified as being a health otaku. Then I wrote it down just the way they’d said it (HAHA).

- Koharu is always reading health books. Even when she’s going from the 2nd floor to the 1st floor, as though something pops into her head, she’ll start reading a book, right in the middle of the staircase.
- Being short on time, she’ll be checking a health blog on the phone while looking at a health blog on the computer.
- Suddenly, at 6 in the morning, she’ll start taking a bath.
- The wooden pillow that was suddenly delivered. At first I kept thinking it was a health device for stimulating the soles of the feet, but when I thought I’d put my feet down on it, I got stopped by Koharu: “That’s my pillow——” But no matter how I look at it, it isn’t a pillow.

- Suddenly, she started laying out sheets directly on the wooden floor, and when I thought, “What in the world are you doing?” she started sleeping there. With the main futon folded up next to her. I wondered whether she’d finally gone crazy, but now, I’ve gotten used to Koharu’s behavior, so I’m no longer worried. It’s a feeling of “Ah~ it started again.”
- A cardboard box full of cashew nuts gets delivered. Cashew nuts of such a big size I hadn’t ever seen before. I wondered whether we’d won 10 years’ worth of cashew nuts as a prize or something, but the culprit was Koharu.
- When we’d gone to eat, we must not have ordered beverages yet, but Koharu had what looked like tea in front of her, and when I asked, “Huh? Did you order already?” she said, “I put aojiru powder in my water,” and when I advised her, “That kind of thing isn’t allowed, is it? Like bringing a beverage into a restaurant and drinking it?” she said, “Eh? It’s not OK? If that’s the case, then this is medicine! What’s not OK about taking medicine before eating?” and gave me a self-satisfied look.

That’s what they felt. The way I saw it, I was just doing what I wanted to do. This isn’t strange at all, so what makes you so surprised? I felt. But the way my family saw it, these things looked otaku-like.

Until now, I’d thought health was just a hobby. But when I sensed a job from the responses around me, I thought, maybe this was Koharu’s specialty. Of course, I also had a feeling of, Will this really become my job? . . . but as long as there’s a possibility, I thought, I want to challenge myself.

Cooking, it’s fun!

Since I was little, I’ve liked making things. I liked making candy too. I’d make it stylish, cute, and sparkly. I wanna make cute things! From that kind of feeling, I wanted to make candy, so I got molds and tools and so on from when I went to the supermarket together with Mom, and steadily, my candy-making tools kept growing. On days when I had a break from school, it wasn’t that I wanted to eat it myself, but that I wanted to make “candy”, and I made it looking at a book. Since Mom basically wasn’t at work on Saturdays, the Kusumis always had to make lunch ourselves. Koharu’s routine was Chinese-style fried rice and zōsui,¹²¹ but there were many times when I made candy after eating lunch.

After my graduation from Morning Musume had been decided, I got to have a little time, so I started to learn how to cook. Of course, there were many things I wanted to cook by myself, but that was because I thought, while I steadily kept on

¹²¹A Japanese rice soup with vegetables.

looking things up, it would be better if I could cook by myself. Eventually, I think I'd like to acquire chef certifications.¹²²

Originally, I'd cook by myself, and it wasn't that I couldn't cook, but long ago, I cut my hand with a kitchen knife, and really, I wasn't good with knives. But I was taught the safe way to hold one, and kitchen knives became not at all frightening. Since until now I'd just look at a book and make things with the amounts indicated, even when the taste got a bit salty, I didn't know how I should fix it, but after I began to learn how to cook, I came to understand what I should add when I make a mistake, and I could cook things in the right sequence, with flexibility.

What I was taught, I would try doing at home too, just like that, and I also cooked things I'd arranged a bit. Trying honey instead of sugar, using little oil to lower the calories, and so on. If I'm being health-conscious, even with cookies, I'd try out okara¹²³ and soymilk cookies. I enjoy arranging things. For the sake of dieting, even without restraining myself from the things I like, in my own way I take in what's good for my body and manage my health. Those kinds of things I feel I learned from taking a cooking class.

My first time at a natural food restaurant

Seeing various people's blogs, I got very interested in NATURAL FOOD stores. I had an enormous feeling of, I want to go try one! but since I hadn't ever been to such a store, I didn't understand how I should go. The prices are high, and I don't really know what kind of people might be going. . . . And also Koharu's a "Morning Musume". Could I go there just as I pleased? Would I make the company angry? I wondered, and so I didn't go for a long time.

One day, when I was glancing at blogs and could only think, "I wanna go try some~" I made an impulsive decision and tried going to a raw food restaurant!

I was embarrassed, more or less, so I wore a hat and went to a raw food restaurant I'd kept on being anxious about. I should have gone and made a reservation, but since I went spontaneously, lunch there was super packed.

"Would you like coffee or anything?" I was asked by the employees, and since I was nervous, in any case, I replied, "Yes, please," right away. After that, the place I was directed to was, even though it was winter, a terrace seat, of all things (HAHA)! Super super cold! And on top of that, what I ordered was the «cold enzyme juice». With so much coldness around, as you'd expect, I had it wrapped up partway through to take home.

¹²²Maybe this will happen someday. I would love to eat at a Koharu Kusumi restaurant.

¹²³The pulp remaining from the production of soymilk, used as an ingredient in various dishes.

With natural and organic food stores, there are many places that are privately managed, and it seems they have many irregular days off. I regretted not having investigated properly, and I decided that next time, I'd make a proper reservation before going to have lunch and then go. That was Koharu's first time at a natural food restaurant.

The next time, I looked up the menu beforehand, and was determined to have lunch at the same store again. There were many people there older than Koharu, and I wondered whether I'd make them think, like, "This kid, what is she doing here?" so once again I was feeling nervous while experiencing lunch by myself. But after I went a few times, I got used to the ingredients and the menu, and my horizons broadened further.

The books and leaflets and so on that the store had began to grab my interest, and I quickly wanted to go try other stores.

In 2009, from around autumn to winter, it seemed like every day I was going to eat at raw food stores and so on by myself.

I enter a reservation a few days before, and read only the health books I like in a store, and on the way home, when I go around to a few natural food supermarkets then return home, in the blink of an eye, it's nighttime.

One day, after I'd continued doing that sort of thing, I thought I'd just go out like always, when. . . .

Sister "Wait a minute! Where is it you go every single day?"
Koharu "Lunch!"
Sister "With who?"
Koharu "By myself!"
Sister "If you were going with a friend, I'd understand, but what are you doing going out each and every day by yourself just to eat!"
Koharu "But it's stuff I can't eat at home!"
Sister "How about if you invite someone?"
Koharu "They're maniac places, so I can only go with people who understand that. And I like just reading books by myself at my own pace too!"
Sister "The prices aren't too high for lunch portions?"
Koharu "That's the way it is!"
Sister "This damn money-wasting girl!"
Koharu "But there are days when I only get the enzyme juice though♡."

As always, I put in a reservation → while having lunch at the raw food store, I read health books there → I change locations and go to another café, and with enzyme

juice in one hand, I read books at that store → I move to a bookstore and search for books I want. By this time, I've gotten lost for 2 hours, so I soon decide on a book I want → finally, I go to a natural food supermarket and buy ingredients then go home. Already, in the blink of an eye, it's nighttime. → Then I arrive home, and while taking a bath, for relaxation I read those books I'd bought.

Sis suddenly opened the bathroom door like she's confused.

Sister "Wait a minute! You're still in the bath? You were quiet, and you hadn't come out in forever, so I wondered if you'd sunk!"

Koharu "I'm totally alive though."

Sister "Then it's OK, but don't frighten me!"

After that, I stayed in the bath for a long time, while screaming out a survival confirmation—"Koharu's alive——!"—every 15 minutes.

Then I overheard a conversation.

Sister "But that brat's reading a dictionary in the bath. It's not dangerous?"

Mother "(HAHA) Leave her alone!"

.....

Koharu "It's not a dictionary though——" I yelled from the bathroom!

.....

Sister "She's alive-ish."

Mother "Come out of the bath quick!"

Koharu "It's a book, not a dictionary."

Sister "No, at that thickness, it's probably a dictionary! Are you looking up words now~?"

Koharu "It's not a dictionary; it's a book I bought today. Read it! Cuz it's good for you!"

Sister "Whoa! What is that herd of tiny characters!"

That is to say, every day I'd be reading a book in the bath, and also when I got out of the bath, I'd be reading a book, and even while moving from place to place, I'd be reading a book, so I'd constantly be carrying around a book and reading it.

Books that we hadn't had at home at all piled up in the blink of an eye, and I bought something like a bookcase for the first time. Then I assembled a bookcase for the first time. When I'd put it together following the instructions, I don't know where I'd gone wrong, but the finished bookcase was tilted and bent. . . .

The natural produce stores and restaurants I'm anxious about, I investigate in advance before going to. As for why, there are many people who run a place privately or else as a pastime, so since a store's operations are irregular, it could be that even

if you go, it might not be running. And then, many such stores are hole-in-the-wall places, and they're far from the station, so if you mistake the time or something, there's nowhere to kill time, and you can't even backtrack. One time, in the summer, I had to stand by for an hour in a nearby park (HAHA). So I think everyone should always investigate in preparation. To put it in detail, it's good to make a confirmation call before going.

In Koharu's case, with this and that, I've gotten completely used to killing time, or perhaps I should say, it might even have totally become one of my hobbies (HAHA).

I tried participating in a raw food seminar!

I steadily kept getting addicted to food. But there were things I couldn't do. So I attended a seminar. I had a lot of worries that I couldn't do it being a "Morning Musume^o". It wasn't that there was such a particular rule like that, but as long as I had group activities, I thought I couldn't behave however I felt like by myself and cause an annoyance. If I'd participated in a seminar or something, that would have turned into gossip, and I might totally have been a bother to the other members, so I couldn't behave however I felt like.

Moreover, at health-type seminars and so on, there are almost no young kids like Koharu. So while I wanted to participate, I thought, I'd get strange looks from everyone around, wouldn't I, so at first I was embarrassed and couldn't go. But after I graduated from Morning Musume^o, it was good if I took responsibility for myself as Koharu Kusumi, and the things I'd researched, I wanted to share with other people, not just keep to myself. Since I wanted to hear other people's opinions, I drew forth some courage and decided to participate in a seminar.

My chance was the blog of a person running a wine shop in the city. They said they go to a raw food cooking club at night at irregular intervals, so I boldly made contact and participated. There were around 8 participants. There were regular attendees too among them, and at first I didn't know which seat I should take. First was the self-introduction. Even though I said, "I'm Koharu Kusumi," the people around me were mainly adult women. There wasn't a person who knew about Koharu, so I could open up somewhat honestly. We shared the same interests, so it was fun. I thoroughly got to know and talk to people who could sympathize with me, or people who had more knowledge than me. Of course, even more than from books and so on, getting to hear those kinds of things from real voices was the best part about the seminar.

There were many in their 40s and 50s around me, and every time, I'd get told, "You're the youngest participant we've ever had."

After I started to go once, I got addicted to that marvelousness, so I just went

and participated at various places by myself. I couldn't help but find it fun to exchange information with everyone on the inside.

When I go to a seminar or something, I'll go in an adult-like manner. The reason is because I want to be treated as an equal. It's only at this time that age becomes a hindrance. Even if I put on an extreme adult-like appearance, when I get asked my age afterward, I can't lie, so I'll go with a safe & age-unknown appearance.

A circle extending out from seminars

Various seminars are held. At one seminar, I was taught about germination enzymes. Healthy food is from enzymes. When I tried asking about it (more details in the next chapter), I was told that there's something called a Seedmeister certification.¹²⁴ With that as a start, I came to want to know more about enzymes in detail, so I thought I'd get a Seedmeister certification.

When I participated in seminars, they taught me new firsthand information that I hadn't gotten to know from just books and the Net.

For pesticide-free vegetables, for example, I started to get to know how it'd be bad if those varieties weren't free of pesticides. Then I made friends with fellow health lovers, and came across people who naturally grow vegetables from seeds in the ground, completely pesticide-free.

Now I have pesticide-free seeds distributed to me, and while I'm studying, I'm growing completely pesticide-free vegetables. Another name is **ULTIMATE VEGETABLES**. Apparently there aren't any vegetables above these.

For farmland, since one has to choose land that doesn't have pesticides in it, it apparently takes around another 3 years to tame the soil.

I was interested in food and health, but I didn't know anything at all about agriculture. But the ingredients are seeds, soil, sunlight, water, air. All of nature has an effect. I hadn't been able to see such an obvious thing until now. Real agriculture, it's so difficult and its interior is deep, isn't it~, I thought anew. Planting seeds and going to see how my own plants are doing is a lot of fun! Of course, since it's a faraway place, I can't go see them but only once in a while, but my own interests expanded this much, and now a new world has steadily opened up—it's quite enriching.

¹²⁴There are a number of "meister" courses and certifications offered by various organizations in Japan to recognize expertise in a particular subject.



[[A career change at 17]]

Toward a new road

Born in the country, a 12-year-old girl not knowing anything like the common sense of the city suddenly becomes an idol, and at 17 years of age, is trying to change careers toward a new road.

My one big dream of trying to become an idol was fulfilled, and I was able to experience the city life I'd yearned for. But the present was more severe than I'd thought, and every day, I was working while maintaining a life with all my might, even to the extent of forgetting the joy of the time my dream had come true.

With my aspirations toward becoming a model as well, the reality, when I heard about it, was that the pro world was strict. Between what I could do and what I wanted to do, dreams and reality, I ran into various barriers, and I thought about it many, many times. What is it I should aim toward—for a long time, I couldn't find the answer.

But with the chance to do a bit, I feel that the road I want to follow has come to be just a little more visible.

The things I had an interest in have steadily opened up to me this much.

Getting my hobbies recognized, getting them praised, my embarrassments disappearing, I began to be able to take an active part in things like raw food groups. Thanks to them, I could get raw food and Seedmeister certifications, and my interests expanded to even agriculture.

I've come to keep making not just raw food, but a big theme of "food and health", my job, and despite being fickle Koharu, maybe since it's stuff I like, I've had fun doing it without being fickle. Cooking is fun, and moreover, with my book's publication having been decided, somehow things have advanced gently, but I've decided to make what was just a hobby advance now to a new path. Where the impetus was, I don't know.

Everyone is like that, I think, but from the moment my dream was fulfilled, I've kept walking again toward a new dream.

I feel that now I've been able to find the entryway to a road where Koharu can truly be at home.





There were too many different things to do every day, and with me not having even a moment to think freely about my future, the days kept passing by, but now that I think about it, I think it was because I was able to experience various things that the present Koharu Kusumi exists. There were a lot of fun things too, but it was because my physical condition went down and I had painful times, worrying a lot in my own way, that I got more and more interested in health, thanks to that.

At first, I didn't expect to be able to make "food · health" into a job or anything like that. But out of one of Koharu's hobbies, it's kept on expanding up to here.

I don't know whether this job will still be a success, and I don't know whether I'll have something I like as a job 5 years from now, 10 years from now, but I want to keep working hard my own way.

That said, it doesn't mean I've thrown out my dreams of modeling. I want to be a model too sometime!! Because that's been my dream since I was little. But now, while leveraging what I like and my own special skills for a career, I honestly think I want to challenge myself with a career in entertainment too.

People reading this book too, I wish you'll treat your feelings with care and make your dreams come true.

Koharu still continues to work hard.

Getting to do what I want to do as a career isn't an easy thing, and moreover, not getting to have my dreams come true so easily, one after another, is what the present is like. Even if I got a job, I don't know whether I'd be successful. But I think, as long as there's a possibility, I want to keep treating my own "feelings" with care, right?

This is both a message to everybody and a message to the present Koharu herself.

I'm still quite inexperienced, but if you, reading this book, read about Koharu's experiences and think even a little bit about facing forward and doing your best, I'd be happy.

Koharu's dream is still going on.



Chapter 6

Koharu Talks About Food and Health

[[Until finally arriving at raw food]]

Huge excitement! Huge excitement! Huge excitement! So awesome! ~A new chance~

One time, I went to a chiropractic clinic near home. I got to talking about sensitivity to cold with the massage therapist.

Therapist “It seems that ginger black tea has become rather popular lately~ Did you know that?”

Koharu “I didn’t know that.”

Therapist “Are you reading about it? I have those books at home, so if you like, please keep reading them.”

Koharu read. It was like every single term in there that I had an interest in was flying around. “Sensitivity to cold, low blood pressure, constipation, headache”: there were many applicable things. From here, I kept getting addicted to health books.

The massage ended, and on the way back home, I found a small store. Thinking, “What’s this?? Here??” I went in and looked.

That place was like a natural produce store, something I’d been anxious about. They were selling lots of things. Candy, nattō,¹²⁵ cheese, yogurt, vegetables, fruit, seasoning, cosmetics.

Excited, I called Sis! I was so excited it jumbled my fluency in speaking!

Koharu “Hey hey! This is a big deal! I found a natural produce store! You need anything?”

Sister “Nothing,” she said, just one quick word.

¹²⁵Fermented soybeans, a popular breakfast food.

- Koharu** “Eh? There’s a lot, though. Ask Mom if she needs anything.”
Sister “I already said we don’t need anything! Don’t go buying unnecessary stuff! Don’t add any more than this to our home!”

What was that, *whoo—sh*. Not open to anything at all. And she thought I was some kind of brat that just buys weird stuff and brings it home.

- Sister** “Do they have chocolate?”
Koharu “If it’s organic they do! It says it’s sugar-free!”
Sister “Whoa! Sounds gross~~ Don’t need it.”

—Several minutes later—

I bought stuff I needed and returned home, like I was supposed to (HAHA).
 When I got back home, Sis was there.

- Sister** “What did you buy? I’m checking if you bought things we don’t need! (HAHA).”
Koharu “Huh? It’s stuff I need! It might not be stuff *you* need, but it’s necessary for Koharu, you know~~~w.”
Sister “What? What are these eggs? We already have eggs at home, so why did you buy these~”
Koharu “These are domestically produced!! It’s different cuz they’re eggs Farmer —— produced! They’re good though; they’re good~ I’m not going to let Sis eat any, you know——w! Go frigging eat the shells or something!”
Sister “So! How much was all of this?”
Koharu “It was ¥——!!”
Sister “Ehh? You’re kidding. Huh? Cuz it’s seriously impossible. Quit going already, please~~se.”
Koharu “???”
Sister “The price is twice as much as the supermarket! And you should have bought the chocolate, not this!”

Sis was saying those things, but since I’d hardly ever gone to the supermarket until now, I didn’t know vegetable prices that well. So I’d totally bought a whole lot! I was thinking, Is this the usual price, I wonder?

After that, I started looking on the Net for natural produce stores!! Searching on the computer was my forte!

Then various natural produce stores in the city, organic vegetables you can buy on the Net, etc., and health-related things came up, one li~~ne after another.

A lot of words I was focused on, things I had on my mind, were mentioned.

“Organic”, “additive-free”, “pesticide-free”, “organic vegetables”, “natural produce”: these were words I’d heard somewhere before, but what were they? All at once, my interest surged!! From there, I started to investigate in thorough detail the words I was concerned about, one after another.

Then I went to a bookstore. When I went to the bookstore, there were too many books on my mind, so it was a huge excitement.

Until now, I hadn't gone to bookstores very often, but with this as my chance, I got addicted to bookstores. Kinokuniya,¹²⁶ TSUTAYA,¹²⁷ *banzai*.¹²⁸

With lots of health books in my arms, I headed to the register.

On the way there! I got caught by Sis! "Why do you think you're buying that much! Full of books you don't need! I'll look through these for you!"

Then lots of them were put back! Pff——! Only three books remained.

I returned home and read them! I read them from corner to corner. I got to know about various things starting with vegetable preservation methods, from ways of warming the body onward.

The difference among additive-free · pesticide-free · organic

Additive-free, pesticide-free, organic. After researching various things, I came to understand the diagram of health = eating lifestyle.

- * Additive-free . . . means not having any additives put in.

Ordinarily, there are notices labeled additive-free, but in the case of vegetables, since pesticides are used and such, people who are concerned should investigate properly before buying. Because of that, one shouldn't think that something being additive-free means that it's entirely safe.

- * Pesticide-free . . . means pesticides are not used.

If you go to natural produce stores and so on, there are labels saying "reduced pesticides" and "70% pesticide use", etc., but these are considered "specially cultivated". Ideally, it's good to use no pesticides at all, but with vegetables, there are also those that are difficult to grow without pesticides.

- * Organic (*yūki*) . . . means food cultivated without using either chemosynthesized pesticides or chemical fertilizers; to put it in detail, in Japan there is a national system governing organic produce—"the JAS¹²⁹ standard for organic agricultural products and organic agricultural produce processed foods"—and only produce that follows that and receives an "organic certification" can be sold as "organic" or "yūki" produce. Crops cultivated through production methods determined in accordance with the organic JAS standard,

¹²⁶The largest bookstore chain in Japan, founded in 1927, with its main branch in Shinjuku, Tokyo.

¹²⁷A nationwide bookstore and rental shop chain.

¹²⁸I believe this is meant as an interjection, though it is odd without an exclamation point. If *Banzai* is referring to a third bookstore, I have been unable to substantiate the existence of any bookstore so named.

¹²⁹The Japanese Agricultural Standards, a set of industrial standards for the agriculture industry issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

on agricultural land certified as organic cultivated land by the “Organic JAS Registered Certifying Agency” registered by Japan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, can be labeled “organic agricultural produce”.

What they call organic cultivation. During cultivation, the use of chemosynthesized pesticides and chemical fertilizers is prohibited. (However, the use of designated natural fertilizers is approved.) It’s not that they can’t be used just during that year in which the cultivation goes on. The condition is that they not be used for at least two years before planting seeds and getting seedlings, in the case of crops other than perennial types of rice and vegetables, etc., or at least three years, in the case of perennial crops. In Japan, products with the “Organic JAS” certification mark¹³⁰ indicate this.

★Trivia★

You might think that vegetables that use pesticides or fertilizers and so on are OK if you peel them, but in reality, they permeate all the way through to the interior. I think there are people with various concerns about pesticides and such being used, so naturally if it’s organic, you can have relief from having to have those kinds of concerns.

For organic produce, since the less pesticides and so on are used, the sooner vegetables and such go bad if you don’t eat them, there aren’t any vegetables from too many days before, and they’re sold in quite a fresh condition.

Even the nutritional value, “vitamins”, “minerals”, etc., are higher than other vegetables.

The taste is delicious too. Especially daikon and such are sweet even without being soaked. And the taste is strong. You might think, Do vegetables have strong flavors? but it’s strong, and even without any seasoning, you can enjoy the taste of vegetables just as they are, raw. Besides, vegetables are tasty even though they’re healthy, and if you plant them yourself, producing them to be organic without buying them is too awesome. I want to recommend it to everyone.

At the point when I’d attained basic knowledge, when I tried questioning further, I got to know that there are a lot of people in the world who have an interest in health. I discovered books at bookstores and natural produce stores, and so on, and making a memo of their titles, I went home and looked them up on the Net. I checked various people’s blogs and sought people who could sympathize and



people who had the same feelings and such, and I saw an appreciation for those books. Since usually people interested in health are almost all adults older than Koharu, they've had a lot more experience than Koharu, and they regularly go to stores as well.

From that, I got concerned about something called macrobiotics, so I tried finding out. The word "macrobi" came up on various people's blogs. Macrobi, what might that be?

What macrobiotic means ~I tried macrobiotics~

Macrobiotics is a way of cooking centered around a brown rice vegetable diet, and animal products are not used. Ingredients and so on use standard heating.

"Whole food" means eating something in its entirety; brown rice and vegetables and so on are, as much as possible, organic vegetables, and although normally vegetable peels and leaves would get thrown away, they're used since they're healthy, and it's environmentally friendly and such. If you look it up, it was Japanese people who originally advocated this way of cooking, so it's in the style of traditional Japanese cuisine, with brown rice as the main dish and vegetables and tsukemono¹³¹ and so on as side dishes. In the years following, it's been famous for having even American celebrities and Madonna and so on practicing it, they say, and being highly supported in America and elsewhere, it's apparently experienced a boom being reimported into Japan.

Koharu too is taking in the good parts of macrobi. But not completely. Because I think there are several aspects about doing it completely that aren't so good.

It might be tough for people who until now have eaten junk food and such! Since the flavor is slight, people who like the taste of vegetables as they are might like it. It might be all right for Grandma and Grandpa. People who until now have regularly eaten junk food and such will change dramatically after just switching to macro, I think.

I kept finding out more about macrobiotics, and understood the influence your "way of eating" has on your health. Out of several ways of eating that various people have practiced, I attempted to make a Koharu-specific one. I read natural food stores' books and so on, and while seeking information, I came across books by people advocating raw food.

¹³¹Pickled vegetables of various kinds, such as daikon, cucumber, and Chinese cabbage.

What raw food is ~Enzyme nutrition~

Raw food is a way of eating by taking in the most out of uncooked, raw ingredients (mostly organically cultivated).

Raw food places a high level of importance on food enzymes.

Enzymes include ① potential enzymes, and ② food enzymes; ① potential enzymes are enzymes inside the human body, and specifically, they can be divided into 2 kinds: “digestive enzymes” used for digestion of food, and “metabolic enzymes” necessary for life activities like cell repair and so on.¹³²

Between those, raw food stresses the taking in of ② food enzymes. A human’s lifelong enzyme quantity is limited, and it keeps going down with various activities like stress, excess eating and drinking, exercise, etc. Given that, it’s the idea that by taking in raw vegetables and fruits containing a lot of food enzymes, one would save on the expenditure of “metabolic enzymes” and “digestive enzymes”, and moreover, preserve the enzymes. It’s also that the more enzymes one preserves, the easier it gets to have a thin body through maintaining health and upping metabolism by means of turning enzymes over to skin regeneration and the metabolic processes of the body and so on. It’s good for your health too. Raw food is a way of eating healthy that focuses on those kinds of “enzymes”.

When you heat food enzymes, they get completely destroyed. So the body takes in enzymes that are no longer effective. With raw food, it’s OK to use heat up to at most 48 degrees. But to put it exactly, it’s 38 degrees.

Speaking of what to eat, mainly one eats fruits and vegetables, sprouts, seaweed, nuts, dry fruit, sashimi, raw meat, etc.

After that, fermented foods like nattō and miso, nukazuke,¹³³ vinegar, etc., are full of enzymes, so these too are included in raw food menus.

Using fresh nuts and dry fruit and so on, you can also make sweets that are kind to the raw food body.

There are people who say that if it’s raw, there’s not much variation in cooking with

¹³²Kusumi’s understanding of the nature of enzymes appears to be largely derived from Edward Howell’s enzyme nutrition theory from 1946, many aspects of which have been superseded by more recent scientific discoveries. In particular, there is no limited supply of enzymes that decreases over a person’s lifetime: people continue to produce enzymes and other proteins out of amino acids throughout their lifetimes. Unfortunately, this theory continues to circulate among raw food advocates. While there may indeed be enzyme-related health benefits to a raw food diet, this particular characterization of enzymes has no scientific basis.

¹³³Vegetables pickled in rice bran.

only salad and fruit, and one would totally get tired of it, but there is a wealth of variation in raw food cooking, and even recipe books and such have been released for sale.

Since fire is basically not used, even children can prepare it safely.

You can make it in a short amount of time, and besides, it's simple. Since you can also make it in advance and so on, even busy people can easily take in raw food.

Dramatically changed after encountering raw food

After I encountered raw food and tried it out, a lot changed. I got healthy, making the time I'd kept being in bad shape look like a lie.

- Physical strength arrived
- Waking up in the morning got better
- I don't have smooth skin by nature, but my troubles no longer appeared at all
- Herpes that used to show up about 2 times in 1 month went away.
- My cause-unknown headaches and stomachaches disappeared.
- My body temperature went up
- It got to be fine for me not to eat sweets like chocolate and such.
(Previously, when I didn't eat them, I was irritated and couldn't control myself, but I got to be able to endure it naturally.)
- I developed a constitution where it's hard to gain weight and easy to lose it.

The books that became my first chance at getting to know about raw food were *FIT FOR LIFE* and *Natural Hygiene for Ladies*. *FIT FOR LIFE* is a book that was popular overseas and suddenly got popular in Japan too. Mamiko Matsuda-san, who is Japanese, has translated it. Mamiko Matsuda-san is "President of the Japan Natural Hygiene Network" and is a wonderful person it would not be an exaggeration to call the number-one promulgator of raw food, and also natural hygiene, in Japan. Now living overseas, she engages in research and guidance on healthy bodybuilding. Besides these two books, she has published *A Super Health Revolution Defying Common Sense*, *What Should Children Eat?*, *Super Health Revolution for Over 50's*, *Furu Moni*, *Natural Hygiene Q&A Book*, and others.

Raw food I found in Hawaii

Raw food is still relatively unknown in Japan, but it's popular in America, and I even discovered raw food corners in supermarkets! There are a lot of organic-only supermarkets too.

I could buy raw food candy and low GI¹³⁴ (GI being low. It restrains the rise of blood sugar level) foods, agave nectar (sweetness made from vegetation) and raw cacao powder, raw nuts and dry fruit, sold by weight, and so on, and it was hugely exciting. There were also salad bars and such inside supermarkets, and plenty of varieties too. Furthermore, salad bars in the basements of department stores and so on in Japan are expensive in units of 100 grams, but Hawaii was reasonable.

Another surprise was eating broccoli and such raw in Hawaii. This is raw food, isn't it! I thought. Of course it's more popular here, isn't it~?

The climate is warm throughout the year, too, and the circumstances are easy for starting raw food.

It looks like there are also raw food catering, take-out shops, restaurants, etc.

Acquiring Seedmeister & raw food certifications

As I've also written about in the previous chapter, I don't just acquire knowledge and try it out by myself, but want to share these feelings with everyone! I want to try talking to bloggers! I came to think. After boldly participating in a seminar for the first time, both my interest and breadth kept expanding steadily. My eating habits truly have a deep core.

At one seminar, I received pamphlets for a "Seedmeister" course. While studying organic vegetables, I got to know that the essence of a vegetable starts from its "seed". No matter how pesticide-free, pesticide-reduced vegetables are, if those foundational "seeds" aren't pesticide-free, you can't say that the vegetables are completely safe. That there's an effect from seeds! It was a surprise.

The course was three days long. Since I was interested, I tried taking it.

Naturally, it's ideal to grow vegetables in successive years from seeds cultivated in the same land and the same climate, and produce using pure varieties that are not genetically modified, cultivated for at least 10 years in the same land, are called "native species". As the status quo in contemporary Japan, it seems there aren't many farmers who use "native species" in this way, and all across Japan, no matter what kind of land or climate conditions, "crossbreeds" grown in the same way are largely used, apparently. In contrast to vegetables getting to be grown regardless of season or location, by means of selective breeding of varieties, the seeds of "native species" from long ago have steadily gotten fewer, I hear. Most of the seeds following the principle of being brought up with pesticides and chemical fertilizers in this way are apparently imported from abroad.

I hadn't even thought about seeds.

¹³⁴*Glycemic index*, an estimate of how much consumed carbohydrates contribute to raising blood glucose level, measured relative to glucose, which is defined to have a GI of 100.

At the seminar, we had a field trip, going to fields where they really cultivate produce from “native species” seeds.

I try eating the vegetables. And—no taste of pesticides! The vegetables are sweet! The vegetables have a strong flavor!

I was surprised that it could really be this different. When I had Mom eat them, she’d say they had the flavor of carrots from long ago. Of course there was a lot of this kind long ago, wasn’t there~ I thought.

The seminar’s teacher, just taking a bite of the vegetables, apparently even got to feel with their own tongue whether pig manure was used or whether cattle manure was used and such.

If I clearly understand the difference up to this point, I want to try it myself too. Once again my interest came surging up.

At the same time, I found out that there are certifications even in the world of raw food. If I have such a painstaking interest in raw food, wouldn’t it be good to get certified while enjoying it—with that kind of feeling, I tried to earn them. I attended a cooking class meeting 1 time a week, concurrently with my career in entertainment.

Outside of basic knowledge, I thought about raw food recipes, and made them, and presented them and so on. Studying was difficult too, but it was something I was interested in, so I worked hard. And then, in 2010 September, I was able to acquire my certifications.

An interest in agriculture

From when I lived in Niigata, I’d run up against fields and nature, and I was familiar with it, but with ordinary living, that didn’t weigh on my mind, and moreover, I didn’t have an interest in it.

While encountering raw food, studying “food”, and actually going on a field trip to fields, and so on, I got to thinking I wanted to try producing vegetables myself too.

Now, I’m being guided by the number-one experts who farm with precious “native species” seeds. At first, at like raw food seminars, I would go putting on an adult-like appearance as much as possible so I wouldn’t be recognized as being Koharu, and so on, but I heard that getting those “native species” seeds distributed to me was considerably difficult. If it’s like this, it’s only hugely appealing! Naturally, I went to those people’s places and introduced myself. We talked about how long I’d studied and been interested.

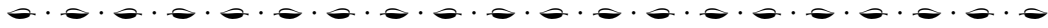
Then somehow they shared some precious “native species” seeds with me, and on top of that, they decided to loan me a 60 tsubo¹³⁵ field!

To grow pesticide-free vegetables, one has to grow them in soil that doesn't contain pesticides. They say that soil takes around ten years to get so that vegetables can be grown in it. They'd decided to loan me such important land. Starting immediately in 2010 September, I've plowed the field and planted seeds, and am bringing them up. I haven't harvested them yet, but from now, I really look forward to when I can eat pesticide-free vegetables I've produced myself.

In today's world, there are many foods, and if there are safe things, there are also things you can't say that about. So I have to see, confirm, and choose things myself. At times like that, growing organic vegetables by my own hand really gives a sense of security. Since organic vegetables are delicious, after eating them once, you no longer feel that other vegetables are tasty. I think if you use seasoning and such, ordinary vegetables too are tasty, but what's simply tasty as is when eaten raw is the organic stuff, I think.

So I want everyone to eat self-grown vegetables!

¹³⁵One tsubo is $\frac{400}{121} \approx 3.306$ square meters. 60 tsubo would be roughly 20 square meters.



[[It's an important thing for the sake of being healthy]]

It's an important thing for the sake of being healthy.

That is, the 3-way balance of food, mind, and exercise.

If you're able to have a well-regulated life, of course that's a wonderful thing, but it doesn't mean that everyone is able to live in a well-regulated way. Even I, beyond keeping my job going, totally fall into disordered living.

But when I investigate food and health topics, by doing a little of the everyday, without overdoing mind and body, I come to understand being able to live with a healthy body.

Just by being food-conscious, the body changes!

Just by being a little conscious of what "food" is, out of habit, the body changes.

For example, if I think, I ate too much, didn't I~, I'll try fasting for half a day the next day. When you hear of fasting, there's an exaggerated painful image, but it's very simple, and healthy too. It's just putting 18 hours between dinner and the next day's meal. It's said that if you do that, your stomach gets rested and becomes clean.

When I stayed at hotels for work, there were times when I would first pile up fruit at the morning buffet and eat it. I eat fruits not after a meal, but while my stomach is empty. Since fruit takes 15~20 minutes to pass through the stomach, if there's other food there, it'll get completely fermented. Though fruits are alkaline raw produce, if they get completely fermented, they'll totally get more acidic. If the body is more in the acidic direction, it gets easier to become sick, but if on the other hand the body is more in the alkaline direction, it becomes healthy, it's said. Uncooked things are all alkaline.¹³⁶

¹³⁶Alas, this paragraph requires an even longer footnote to refute it. Kusumi's claims stem from a controversial view advocated by various dietary programs that health is strongly dependent on the acid-base composition of consumed food. In some cases, proponents of these diets make incorrect claims about the nature of digestion and about the acidity or alkalinity of specific foods. In particular, fermentation does not generally take place in the stomach because the acidic environment there is hostile to bacteria. Most fruits are acidic in content, and uncooked foods may be acidic or alkaline. Without getting into further details about the validity of the diet, I will simply advise the reader to take Kusumi's advice on acidity and alkalinity with a grain of salt (pun intended).





I try to buy JAS organic vegetables as much as possible. Even when eaten raw as a salad, they have a different tastiness. I aim to look at wheat flour and butter and cheese and such and use domestic products as much as I can. It's not that imported things are indisputably bad, but I try to choose things without additives.

When I have time, I try to look at raw food recipes and cook them at home.

Being busy and continuing to eat out every day, the time I have for cooking has become a breather. I've loved "cooking food" from the start, but more than for Koharu's sake, I have a strong feeling of wanting to prepare stuff for Dad, Mom, Sis, and Bro, and everyone telling me "It's delicious!" makes me happy.

In my bag, I always put in some kaki-cha¹³⁷ in a water bottle. Kaki-cha includes an abundance of vitamin C. And it's natural too. It's said that if you take a lot of synthesized vitamin C, you get "oxalate of lime".¹³⁸ But natural vitamin C doesn't become oxalic acid.¹³⁹ Kaki-cha doesn't have any peculiarity to its taste at all, they say, and its being easy to drink is also a good point. You can get it easily at the pharmacy. It's still better if you have a kaki tree at home. 100 grams of kaki leaf broth contains 600~800 mg of vitamin C.

Now I drink aojiru every day. I put aojiru in fine powder form into a little bottle and even carry it around.

Every day, I don't worry at all about having a quota of "I have to eat this" or "I can't eat this", so I only take care a little when I feel like it. Nevertheless, just by being concerned out of habit, both my skin and physical shape are really good!

Care of the mind

It was after I debuted that I thought, "mind" and "body" are one. The mind being in equilibrium is a very important thing for the sake of being healthy.

I've let my feelings out through having Sis listen to my discontent and grumbling, and watching the *Crayon Shin-chan* anime¹⁴⁰ I loved, and so on. Another was my

¹³⁷Kaki (Japanese persimmon) tea.

¹³⁸Calcium oxalate, a common constituent of kidney stones.

¹³⁹Synthesized and natural vitamin C are chemically identical and either may be converted into oxalic acid by the human body.

¹⁴⁰An anime series starting in 1992, based on the manga series of the same title by Yoshito Usui.





having positivity by nature, not giving up at anything. That became my power, I think.

When I seem to get a little pessimistic, Sis always said, “Koharu can do it.” “Even I can do it!”—that gave me confidence. For my career change this time, at times when things for a long time don’t go as I’d like, once in a while it might be good to try getting those around me to spill their opinions. While having confidence in myself and asking the opinions of various people, it would be good, wouldn’t it, to be able to keep advancing in a direction where I could live with a relaxed attitude in my own way from now on, I think.

So not overdoing it, this too is a key to health, I think.

Move the body

I’ve been surprised at my figure, which I would stretch if only I had free time. It’s not that my body is on the flexible side by any means. Rather, out of the Morning Musume members, I’m maybe more on the stiff side, but I got to be able to do a 180-degree split. I got to be able to do this unconsciously while continuing with dance lessons and stretches. Before I know it, I’ve gotten accustomed to it, and when I’m aware of it, I’ve done stretches naturally.

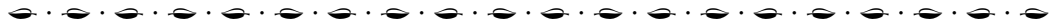
I also go to the gym and such. It’s not for the sake of over-exerting my muscles or slimming down or anything, but with sweat flowing, my metabolism goes up, and moderately exerting my muscles is good. It becomes a change of pace too.

For example, I often stroll around a bit in shopping districts in search of raw food and natural produce. Doing that, there are times when, before I know it, I’ve walked about 1 train station’s worth. In a block, there are many of Koharu’s interests scattered around. I walk in search of stores introduced in magazines and on blogs. This too unconsciously becomes an act of exercise, perhaps (HAHA).

Since it’s what I like, it’s not a pain at all. Instead, it’s fun!

Food, mind, exercise—these, now and from now on, even when I become a grandma, will keep being important things, won’t they?





Koharu's health theory

“Health! Health!” I’ve come here saying, but I don’t think health is everything.

“Healthy for what?” “What’s the point you end up at?” I too thought for a time.

But as for that, I think when your body’s condition gets better, the things you can do also come to increase.

Because of that, I want everyone to become healthy and really happy, and to seize a lot of happiness. Health is my message for that reason, I think.

Now I’m saying “raw food” is good, but this is not everything. Each and every human is different, and in physical condition and lifestyle and so on, everyone is respectively different. Therefore, I think that it’s no good for everyone to follow the same health method. I almost certainly have what fits me. That doesn’t mean that it’ll still continue my whole life, so it’s all right for it to keep changing, I think. While I look at my own physical condition, I keep changing it. Therefore, it might be that even “raw food” will have vanished for Koharu in a few years. . . . Since information keeps getting updated, I don’t know.

The world is overflowing with lots of health methods. In my case, I try out the ones I’m concerned about. That’s because they’re on my mind, because I’m interested in them. If I don’t practice them myself, I can’t have any confidence in them. Therefore, from now on, I’m going to practice various things myself (HAHA). Doing so, I can make new discoveries, and get to know various health methods too, so at that point, I carefully select those that would fit me, and make them into a made-to-order health method. After all, it’s because I feel that that’s good for my own body.



[[Koharu's recommendations]]

The Koharu-style umeboshi pickling method

★Honey ume★

Things to prepare → 1 kilogram green ume, 1 kilogram honey, a sterilized bottle
(Please always sterilize it. Because I think there's a possibility it might spoil.)

- ① First wash the green ume well.
- ② Keep the ume in water for 2~3 hours for “astringent taste removal”. To firmly cut down the moisture of the ume, wipe them with a towel or dry them out.
- ③ Extract the ume stems with a bamboo skewer or something.¹⁴¹
- ⑤ To make it easier for the flavor to soak into the ume, cut holes with a kitchen knife. (Put notches in about two places. Or adding cuts in several places with a fork or something is OK too.)
- ⑥ Put the ume in a bottle, and pour honey over them.

They can be eaten after about a month, but the more days elapse, the more flavor will have soaked into them. Generally, it's said that about six months is good for eating.

★Point★

· Put in honey and ume in a 1-to-1 ratio. This is for every 1 kilogram, but doing it every 2 kilograms is OK too!

This is also roughly the same as honey pickling.

Use ume, vinegar, rock sugar, in a 1-to-1-to-1 ratio.

[[Other pickling methods]]

Ume mixed pickling → what I pickled the other day and was the tastiest—fruit sugar, brown cane sugar, honey, and so on, something you have at home containing sweetness that's good for the body: quickly put them in adequately, and cover the remaining portion with rock sugar.

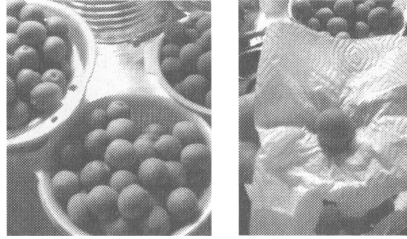
Ume rock sugar pickling → with the same ratio as with ordinary honey pickling, keep piling up ume and rock sugar in alternation.

When it's good to eat, etc., is all the same.

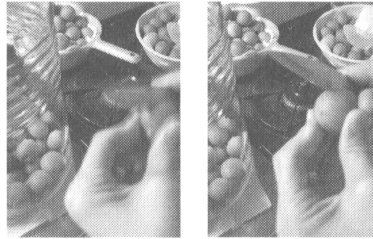
If you dilute this pickled juice with water and put it into water or something and drink it, it becomes ume enzyme juice. Being unheated and fermented, it contains

¹⁴¹There is no step ④. If this is unintentional, perhaps the editors should have used \LaTeX for their typesetting needs.

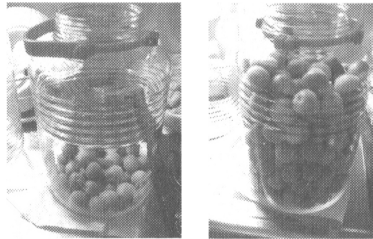
Wipe away the moisture completely



Make "x"-shaped cuts



Pack them tightly into a bottle



Put in rock sugar



Put in apple vinegar



quite a lot of enzymes. But since it's sweet, take care not to over-drink. Let's have it in moderation. That said though, even Koharu loves it and has totally drunk too much a few times (HAHA).

Koharu's recommended restaurants

Up until now, I've gone to quite a lot of shops—organic shops and raw food shops and so on. Out of those, I'll introduce only the shops that Koharu thought were delicious.¹⁴²

- MANNA

Daikanyama Plaza 24-7, Sarugakuchō, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo-to
 Business hours: 11:00~17:00 (L.O.¹⁴³ 16:30) Regular closing day/Monday
 (Tuesday in case Monday is a national holiday)
<http://www.mannafest.jp/>

There's so much flavor, and the taste is so close to ordinary eating you'll totally have doubts: "Is it really raw food?" When I went the first time, my image of raw food was overturned. Out of all that's there, what Koharu likes are the "enzyme juice" and the "raw norimaki".¹⁴⁴ It's apparently also Sugitasan's¹⁴⁵ favorite.

The green smoothies and so on are also smooth and quite tasty.

Basically, for raw food, prices are just a little bit high. Therefore, people who want to try eating it, please first try eating at a raw food store somewhere once. If you start to get more interested, when you learn at a "one-day experience" or a cooking class, etc., and get to learn how to cook, being able to make it yourself is economical.

- RAINBOW · RAW FOOD CAFE & BAR

Tange Building 1F 11-2, Hamamatsuchō 2-chōme, Minato-ku, Tokyo-to
 Business hours: 7:30~23:00 Regular closing day/Sunday
<http://www.rainbowrawfood.com/>

A store I can say is delicious from the bottom of my heart. For everything including lunch, reservations are recommended, but the prices are reasonable. It's interesting that the menu theme changes every month. The "ethnic-style?" lunch I ate the other day was so tasty.

It's quite a favorite of mine, and really, this is a store I didn't want to tell anyone about.

¹⁴²Particular information like opening hours may have changed since this book's original publication. Please confirm these details if you wish to visit a restaurant or store.

¹⁴³*Last order.*

¹⁴⁴A sushi roll.

¹⁴⁵Most likely Tomokazu Sugita (1980—), a voice actor.

● J's KITCHEN

5-15-22, Minami-Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo-to

Business hours: (Mon~Sat) 11:00~21:00, (Sun · holiday) 11:00~17:00 No closing days

http://www.js-kitchen.com/jp_index.html

It's macrobi, and Koharu's number-one favorite store.

The store has a good atmosphere, to say the least. The people working at the store are nice, and out of the macrobi cooking I've eaten until now, I like it the most. In particular, the brown-rice meals are the best. I'm also happy that take-out is possible.

● NO NO BUDŌ LALAPORT YOKOHAMA STORE

Inside LaLaport Yokohama 4035-1, Ikonobechō, Tsuzuki-ku, Yokohama-shi, Kanagawa-ken

Business hours: (Mon~Fri) 11:00~16:30 (O.S.¹⁴⁶ 15:00), 18:00~23:00 (O.S. 21:00) (Sat · Sun · holiday) 11:00~23:00 (O.S. 21:00) No closing days

<http://www.nonobudou.com/>

It's not related to raw food, but it's a café in the natural tradition that I personally go to often.

You can eat a lot of vegetables, and there are many varieties too. A reasonable all-you-can-eat!

It's a chain store and has various locations.

● PURE CAFE

5-5-21, Minami-Aoyama, Minato-ku, Tokyo-to

Business hours: 8:00~22:30 (L.O. 22:00) No closing days

<http://pure-cafe.com>

The Yoga Cookie is my favorite.

● CRAYONHOUSE

3-8-15, Kita-Aoyama, Minato-ku, Tokyo-to

Business hours: 1~3F 11:00~19:00, B1 restaurant HIROBA 11:00~23:00 (L.O. 22:00), B1 vegetable market 10:00~20:00 No closing days

<http://www.crayonhouse.co.jp>

The 1st basement organic restaurant HIROBA's "carrot salad" was delicious. Lunch is done buffet-style. The cookies sold at the cake shop CAKE OBASAN next to the restaurant are also delicious.

From the 3rd floor to the 1st basement, there's a full set of various things like cosmetics, books, and natural produce. There are many things related to children.

¹⁴⁶Order stop, the same as L.O.

● KANBUTSU CAFÉ

Amity Yoyogi-Uehara 2F 3-4-3, Nishihara, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo-to

Business hours: (Mon~Sat) 11:00~22:00 (Sun · holiday) 11:00~20:00 No closing days

<http://www.kanbutsucafe.jp/>

The daily special side dishes were delicious. The eating locations are on the 3rd floor, except for the counter, and there are books and such there related to natural food. Just right for solo café-going.

● CHAYA MACROBIOTICS HIBIYA CHANTER STORE

Toho Hibiya Building B2F 1-2-2, Yūrakuchō, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo-to

Business hours: 11:00~22:00 (L.O. 21:00) No regular holidays

<http://www.chayam.co.jp>

The organic drinks were delicious.

You can buy macrobi drinks and sweets and so on. Take-out for cake is also possible.

● BIOCAFE

Patio I 16-14, Udagawachō, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo-to

Business hours: 11:00~23:00 (L.O. 22:00) No closing days

<http://www.biocafe.jp>

Take-out for pastries and desserts is possible. The bagels are delicious. What's put in is indicated, so it's safe for people with allergies and children too.

It's in Spain-zaka,¹⁴⁷ so compared to other restaurants, it's in a place that's relatively easy to figure out.

¹⁴⁷*Spain Hill*, a nickname for the sloped street in Udagawachō, Shibuya.

Koharu's recommended natural food stores

- NATURAL MART HIROO STORE

Hiroo Flower Home 102 5-19-5, Hiroo, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo-to
 Business hours: 11:00~20:00 No closing days
<http://naturalmart.jp>

Raw food ingredients and so on are abundant, and there are many instances where there's something rare that other natural produce stores don't have. The store people also show you the newly arrived products of the day. It's interesting how it varies what things are placed there according to the new arrivals at that time, so the products inside the store change depending on the day you go.

- GRUPPE KICHIJŌJI STORE

1-25-24, Kichijōji-Higashichō, Musashino-shi, Tokyo-to
 Business hours: (Mon~Sat) 10:00~19:30, (Sun) 11:00~19:00 No closing days
<http://www.gruppe-inc.com/>

With an at-home atmosphere, the store is snug, and as for fruits and vegetables, it's also interesting that it varies what the complete set for the day is.

There's produce of course, and also organic publications and daily necessities like shampoo and so on, too.

《Other stores I go to》

- ORGANIC MARKET · MOTHER'S SHOGAKUKAN SUZURAN-DŌRI BUILDING STORE

Shogakukan Suzuran-dōri Building 1F 1-15-2, Kanda-Jinbōchō, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo-to
 Business hours: (Mon~Sat) 10:00~21:00, (Sun) 11:00~19:00 No closing days
<http://www.mothers-net.co.jp/>

- F&F JIYŪGAOKA STORE

1-31-11, Jiyūgaoka, Meguro-ku, Tokyo-to
 Business hours: 10:00~21:45 No closing days
<http://www.shizensyoku-ff.com/>

- GAIA OCHANOMIZU STORE

3-3-13, Kanda-Surugadai, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo-to
 Business hours: (Mon~Sat) 11:00~20:00, (Sun · holiday) 12:00~19:00 No closing days
<http://www.gaia-ochanomizu.co.jp>

- LIMA HIGASHI-KITAZAWA STORE
11-5, Ōyamachō, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo-to
Business hours: 10:00~19:00 No closing days
<http://www.lima.co.jp>

- BONRASPAIL MISHUKU STORE
1-3-23, Mishuku, Setagaya-ku, Tokyo-to
Business hours: 10:00~21:00 No closing days
<http://www.isefw.co.jp>

- KODAWARI ICHIBA ISP STORE
Ikebukuro Shopping Park B1 1-29-1, Minami-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku,
Tokyo-to
Business hours: (Mon~Sat) 10:00~20:30, (Sun · holiday) 10:00~20:00 No
closing days
<http://www.kodawariichiba.com/>

Koharu's bookshelf¹⁴⁸

- *Real Organic Life*¹⁴⁹ Akiko Sunaga · author Graphsha · publisher
- *Natural Foods Shopping BOOK*¹⁵⁰ Marble Books · author Marbletron · publisher
- *More: An Encyclopedia Full of Nutrient-Rich Vegetables*¹⁵¹ Sanae Shiratori, Toshitaka Itagi · editors Takahashi Shoten · publisher
- *Tokyo Vegetarian Restaurant Careful Selection Guide*¹⁵² Vegetarian Food Gourmet Research Group · compiler Kawade Shobo · publisher
- *Tokyo Beautiful Person Eateries: 100 Delicious Stores Where You Can Become Beautiful*¹⁵³ Beautiful Person Eatery Authorization Committee · compiler Tokyo Shoseki · publisher
- *Beauty Ageing: Premium*¹⁵⁴ Sayuri Katsuta · author Wani Books · publisher
- *The Diet Bible for Becoming the World's Most Beautiful Woman*¹⁵⁵ Erica Angyal · author Gentosha · publisher
- *The Diet for Becoming the World's Most Beautiful Woman*¹⁵⁶ Erica Angyal · author Gentosha · publisher
- *Meridian Lympha Massage: Self-Care BOOK*¹⁵⁷ Keiko Watanabe · author Seitosha · publisher
- *Inspiring Exercise: Skeletal Remedies*¹⁵⁸ Micaco · author SDP · publisher
- *Get Rid of Your Cellulite, Slim Down, Firm Up Your Bottom and Legs Easily!*¹⁵⁹ Natasha Starffin · author PHP Institute · publisher
- *Diet by the Rhythm of the Moon*¹⁶⁰ Kenji Okabe · author Izumi Shobo¹⁶¹ · publisher

¹⁴⁸Official English titles are given where available. If these differ in meaning from the original Japanese titles, a literal translation is also noted.

¹⁴⁹ISBN 978-4-7662-1183-2.

¹⁵⁰ISBN 978-4-12-390219-9.

¹⁵¹ISBN 978-4-471-03383-5. Literally *More: A Convenience Guide to Delicious Vegetables for the Body*.

¹⁵²ISBN 978-4-309-28194-0.

¹⁵³ISBN 978-4-487-80431-3.

¹⁵⁴ISBN 978-4-8470-1860-2. Literally *The Anti-Aging Demon: Premium*.

¹⁵⁵ISBN 978-4-344-01770-2.

¹⁵⁶ISBN 978-4-344-01664-4.

¹⁵⁷ISBN 978-4-7916-1628-2.

¹⁵⁸ISBN 978-4-903620-04-6.

¹⁵⁹ISBN 978-4-569-64890-3.

¹⁶⁰ISBN 978-4-7631-9867-9.

¹⁶¹This is an error. The book is actually published by Sunmark Publishing.

- *Skinny Bitch: A No-Nonsense Tough-Love Guide for Savvy Girls Who Want to Stop Eating Crap and Start Looking Fabulous!*¹⁶² Rory Freedman/Kim Barnouin · authors Miyuki Weir · translator Discover 21 · publisher
- *Green for Life*¹⁶³ Victoria Boutenko · author Choko Yamaguchi · translator Takagi Shobō · publisher
- *Not Gaining Weight Despite Eating: The World's Most Beautiful Weight Loss Diet*¹⁶⁴ Isei Oh · author Mikasa Shobo · publisher
- *How to Live by Warming the Body and Not Getting Sick*¹⁶⁵ Yumi Ishihara · author Nagaoka Shoten · publisher
- *Starting Macrobiotics Easily*¹⁶⁶ Michio Kushi · author Seiko Shobo · publisher
- *This Book Is Best to Begin Macrobiotics*¹⁶⁷ Kiyomi Kikuchi · editor EI Publishing · publisher
- *After 23:00, "Medicinal Cooking"¹⁶⁸ Late Meals: Simple "Food Hygiene" with Ingredients from Supermarkets, Convenience Stores*¹⁶⁹ Miyu Kyonin · author Shodensha · publisher
- *Fit for Life ~There Was an "Immortal Principle" to Health Longevity!*¹⁷⁰ Harvey Diamond, Marilyn Diamond · authors Mamiko Matsuda · translator, appendix Gsco Publishing · publisher
- *Natural Hygiene for Ladies ~"Women's Troubles" All Eliminated, from Menstrual Pain to Breast Cancer · Menopausal Disorders!*¹⁷¹ Mamiko Matsuda · author Gsco Publishing · publisher
- *Natural Hygiene Q&A Book*¹⁷² Mamiko Matsuda · respondent Gsco Publishing¹⁷³ · publisher
- *Everyone 100% Slim! A Super Health Revolution Defying Common Sense*¹⁷⁴ Mamiko Matsuda · author Gsco Publishing · publisher

¹⁶²ISBN 978-4-88759-646-7. The Japanese title is literally *Skinny Bitch: The World's Newest and Strongest! Organic Diet*.

¹⁶³ISBN 978-4-88471-418-5.

¹⁶⁴ISBN 978-4-8379-2331-2.

¹⁶⁵ISBN 978-4-522-42406-3.

¹⁶⁶ISBN 978-4-88086-175-3.

¹⁶⁷ISBN 978-4-7779-1253-7. Literally *A Book for Starting Macrobiotics*.

¹⁶⁸Chinese food therapy, a practice of healing through natural foods rather than medication.

¹⁶⁹ISBN 978-4-396-61364-8.

¹⁷⁰ISBN 978-4-901423-10-6.

¹⁷¹ISBN 978-4-901423-11-3.

¹⁷²No ISBN.

¹⁷³This is an error. The book, in two volumes, is published by the Japan Natural Hygiene Network.

¹⁷⁴ISBN 978-4-901423-02-1.

- *Furu Moni! ~Fruit Morning: A Super Health Diet Proclamation~*¹⁷⁵ Mamiko Matsuda · editor Japan Natural Hygiene Network · compiler Gsco Publishing · publisher
- *A Raw Food Diet by Slimming Down with Enzymes*¹⁷⁶ Akemi Sasou · author Aspect · publisher
- *Raw Food ~The Secret to Inner and Outer Beauty~*¹⁷⁷ Tomo Ishizuka · author Gsco Publishing · publisher
- *Raw Foods for Busy People*¹⁷⁸ Jordan Maerin · author Tomo Ishizuka · translator Raw Beauty Japan · publisher
- *Raw Food Recipes for Eating Raw and Getting Beautiful* (magazine) KIRASINNE · publisher
- *The Fasting Expert's "Nishi Health System" Manual*¹⁷⁹ Mitsuo Koda · editor Sakura Support Center for Light-Eating Healthy Living · author
- *Understanding the Nishi-Style Koda Remedy Through Manga: The Easiest to Understand Practice Manual*¹⁸¹ Mitsuo Koda · author Kyoko Akaike · author Makino Shuppan · publisher
- *If You Want to Have a Long Life, Skip Breakfast*¹⁸² Shigeyoshi Higashi · author Mitsuo Koda · editor Kawade Shobo · publisher
- *I Got This Way When I Skipped Breakfast*¹⁸³ Mitsuo Koda · author Shunjusha · publisher
- *Dialogues on How to Eat*¹⁸⁴ Mitsuo Koda vs Sunplaza Nakano dialogue collection Makino Shuppan · publisher
- *Nonfattening Sweets This Tasty Even Without Butter, Oil*¹⁸⁵ Kumiko Ibaraki · author Bunka Publishing Bureau · publisher

¹⁷⁵ISBN 978-4-901423-09-0.

¹⁷⁶ISBN 978-4-7572-1513-9.

¹⁷⁷ISBN 978-4-901423-57-1. Literally *Raw Food: Mystery Food That Made Me Beautiful*.

¹⁷⁸ISBN 978-4-9904779-0-5.

¹⁷⁹A health therapy system developed in 1927 by Katsuzō Nishi.

¹⁸⁰ISBN 978-4-88320-406-9. Published by Sangokan.

¹⁸¹ISBN 978-4-8376-7091-9.

¹⁸²ISBN 978-4-309-50252-6.

¹⁸³ISBN 978-4-393-71350-1.

¹⁸⁴ISBN 978-4-8376-7031-5.

¹⁸⁵ISBN 978-4-579-20935-4.

Afterword

How was it, everyone?? Did you get to know about Koharu?

When I was writing this book, there were many times when I was worried—Is it all right to even write about these kinds of things?—but I decided to write honestly in this book.

I think there were some hard-to-read places, but thank you for reading it.

Also, it was because I had the cooperation of Sis and the office staff and others at the time I was writing the book that it was possible to complete it up to here, based on Koharu's ideas up until the end.

Everyone who had anything to do with this book, thank you so much. And I'd like to say thanks to everyone who bought this book too.

Reading various books, meeting various people, having various experiences, I too have gotten to know a lot, and I've learned a lot. Everything was of benefit, and I had good experiences, I think.

There are a lot of different people in the world! There are many nice people too. I think it would be good if I could keep meeting such people, absorbing a lot, and connecting many people to my own growth to model myself after, wouldn't it~

Someday, if I could become such a person myself~ I'd think, and on top of that, I'd be happy if everyone develops such feelings too. For your own sake.

From now on, Koharu Kusumi will do her best.

For everyone's dreams to fully, fully come true too☆☆☆

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The entire Kusumi family
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PROFILE

久住小春 (Koharu Kusumi)

Birthday: 1992 July 15

Blood type: A

Origin: Niigata Prefecture

Height: 166 cm

In 2005 May, she joined Morning Musume^o as the 7th generation member, and debuted with the single “Iroppoi Jirettai”.

Besides her activities with Morning Musume^o, she was in charge of voice acting for Kirari Tsukishima · main character of the TV Tokyo anime series *Kirarin☆Revolution* from 2006 April~2009 March.

In addition, under the name Kirari Tsukishima, she released both singles and albums, etc., and in one bound, became the object of adoration for little girls.

Starting 2009 May, she has made regular appearances on TV Tokyo’s *Oha Suta*, and with that charming character, has gathered the attention of children.

In 2009 December, she graduated from Morning Musume^o.

After her graduation, she has challenged herself with themes of “food and health” which she has been interested in since early childhood, and with cooking, farming, etc.

MEDIA

Yamazaki Baking Funwari Bread CM performances

TV Tokyo *Oha Suta* (every Tuesday 6:45~)

TV Tokyo *Oha Koro* (every Saturday 8:30~)

OFFICIAL BLOG

Koharun Land ~Free Admission~ Koharu Kusumi Official Blog

<http://ameblo.jp/kusumikoharu-blog/>

KOHARU KUSUMI OFFICIAL WEB SITE (J.P ROOM)

KOHARU KUSUMI

<http://www.jp-r.co.jp/kusumikoharu.html>

M-LINE CLUB OFFICIAL FAN CLUB WEB SITE

<http://www.up-fc.jp/m-line/>

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