

Deborah, or Ten Years Later...

I have a benefactor.

Deborah Martinsen, former president of the International Dostoevsky Society (IDS), is that person. Without her warm guidance, I would probably have remained depressed and still be suffering from a smoldering lack of self-esteem.

I met Deborah (as I like to call her) in the summer of 2011, in her office at Columbia University. About a month before that, I had just driven to the site of the Great East Japan Earthquake. I flew out of Narita, still reeling from the sad aftermath of the long trip of 1500 kilometers. My mind was made up early on. I would definitely visit New York in September 2011, ten years after the attacks, and I would definitely finish the translation of *Demons* before then. The reason was simple: I was in my early fifties, and the incident that led me to return to Dostoevsky was the 9/11 attacks, and it was the association with *Demons* that this 9/11 had created in me. However, circumstances forced me to leave a month earlier than planned, and in the end, I was unable to finish the translation of *Demons* by that date.

There was another major purpose for my visit to New York. It was to approach IDS. At the time, I had fallen into a state of neurosis due to criticism of my translation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and I was stuck in the delusion that I was being looked down upon by Dostoevsky researchers around the world.

Of course, I had some confidence in myself. I was supported by tens of thousands of readers of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Among the many letters of gratitude I received, I was particularly encouraged by a letter from a woman in her late seventies living in Abashiri, Hokkaido, who wrote in pencil, "I am so happy that I could read through *The Brothers Karamazov* at the end of my life".

In her office at the university, Deborah listened to me warmly, calmly, and respectfully. She invited me to dinner with her friends at an Italian restaurant, and to a study group at a café near the university. My friendship with Deborah continued unabated, and in the summer of 2015, when I gave a presentation at an international conference (ICCEES) in Makuhari, Chiba, I even asked her to check my manuscript. The title of my presentation was "Hidden Quotations in *The Brothers Karamazov*". Although the title was somewhat pompous, I was confident about the content. However, when Deborah returned the manuscript to me, it was covered with red lines everywhere, reminding me once again how high the level, (or barrier) to Dostoevsky studies was.

The next day, I stood beside Ground Zero. When I left the Sheraton Hotel on 52nd Street near Times Square and got off the subway at Franklin Street,

the ground was filled with a refreshing light. It was the result of the torrential rain that had hit New York two days earlier. At that stage, however, I realized that since my arrival in New York, I had been under a constant paranoid vision. As I walked through the skyscrapers, I would look up at the sky almost every five minutes and picture a scene of two airliners crossing the blue sky between the valleys of the buildings.

I could not receive any feeling of shock from Ground Zero, which was still undergoing construction. I realized that I had consumed all the wonders and shocks of the past decade through *Youtube* videos. Of course, the Great East Japan Earthquake must have had something to do with it. In any case, Dostoevsky was right. Man is a being that gets used to everything.

On my way to the subway station, frustrated with my inability to feel anything in front of Ground Zero, I passed by the Tribute WTC Visitor Center. Hungry for stimulation, I was sucked in and walked through the doors to stand in front of the reception counter. Among the many exhibits, I was particularly struck by a set of spoons with holes in them and forks that were fully opened like five fingers. Who would have thought that terrorism could result in such artistic behavior? The delicacy of making a hole in the dent of the spoon is nothing short of devilish. On the other hand, there were some exhibits that gave me a faint sense of relief. It was a note left by a woman named Sandra Hernandez, who was living in the Bronx at the time of the incident.

“I wanted to jump into the TV screen, grab the plane and stop it”.

This is it, I thought. The proof of a human being’s humanity lies in the strength of the urge to jump into the TV screen. And there were several moments when I realized that I myself had a slight edge over others in this impulse. I am sure that such a linear nature must have been what turned me towards Dostoevsky’s literature.

I remember that Deborah, who saw my true nature, once said a bit sarcastically, “You are, in essence, a mover”.

(from my recent book *59 travels with Dostoevsky*)

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