Title	Finding pleasant things and doing my best whether in research or pleasure : Listening to what Associate Professor Yasue Mitsukura has to say
Sub Title	
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Publisher	Faculty of Science and Technology, Keio University
Publication year	2012
Jtitle	New Kyurizukai No.11 (2012. 9) ,p.4- 5
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	Interview
Genre	Article
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=KO50001003-00000011-0004

Finding pleasant things and doing my best whether in research or pleasure

Dr. Mitsukura is tackling the development of innovative systems based on signal processing technology. She is a short sleeper, but never cuts corners whether it is research or pleasure. The source of her restless energy seems to come from her forward-looking attitude of finding pleasant things and thoroughly pursuing them.

You were born in Nara Prefecture, and then moved to Matsue City in Shimane Prefecture where you entered a scientific high school. Is that right?

That's correct. Although I had moved from one workplace to another to date, I have at last found a place in which I can settle in peace. I chose the scientific course as a high school student presumably because I was raised in a family where my father is a man of science and mother from the medical field. In fact, bookshelves at my home were filled with books on mathematics, physics and medicine – no picture books and the like for children. Even now the scene of my father studiously reading such books on holidays is printed on my memory. I still remember the day when I dropped and broke a piece of glassware. At the time my father explained to his small daughter earnestly and in detail about "why it can be broken." His explanation was so interesting that I broke various other things merely for the sake of interest – my mother scolded me. Raised in such a family atmosphere, it was natural that I chose a scientific high school and then specialized in electric/electronic studies at a university.

I moved from one place to another to study – at Okayama Prefectural University until I completed my master's course, earned a doctor's degree at Tokushima University, studied at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Medicine, worked at Okayama University and Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, and finally moved to Keio University in 2011.

When did you make up your mind to choose a researcher career?

When I was a senior, I had an opportunity to participate in an international academic conference on telecommunications, where I won the best paper prize and the best presentation prize. In relation to the paper I would read at the conference, I had run into a great wall (though it's not too serious a problem as I look back at it today) and had to sit up sleepless for several days in a row. However, the moment I won the prizes, all the hardships I had experienced were blown away and replaced with utmost delight, which I still remember vividly. Through this experience, I learned the importance of dedicated effort and willpower necessary for solutions when I come face to face with a problem.

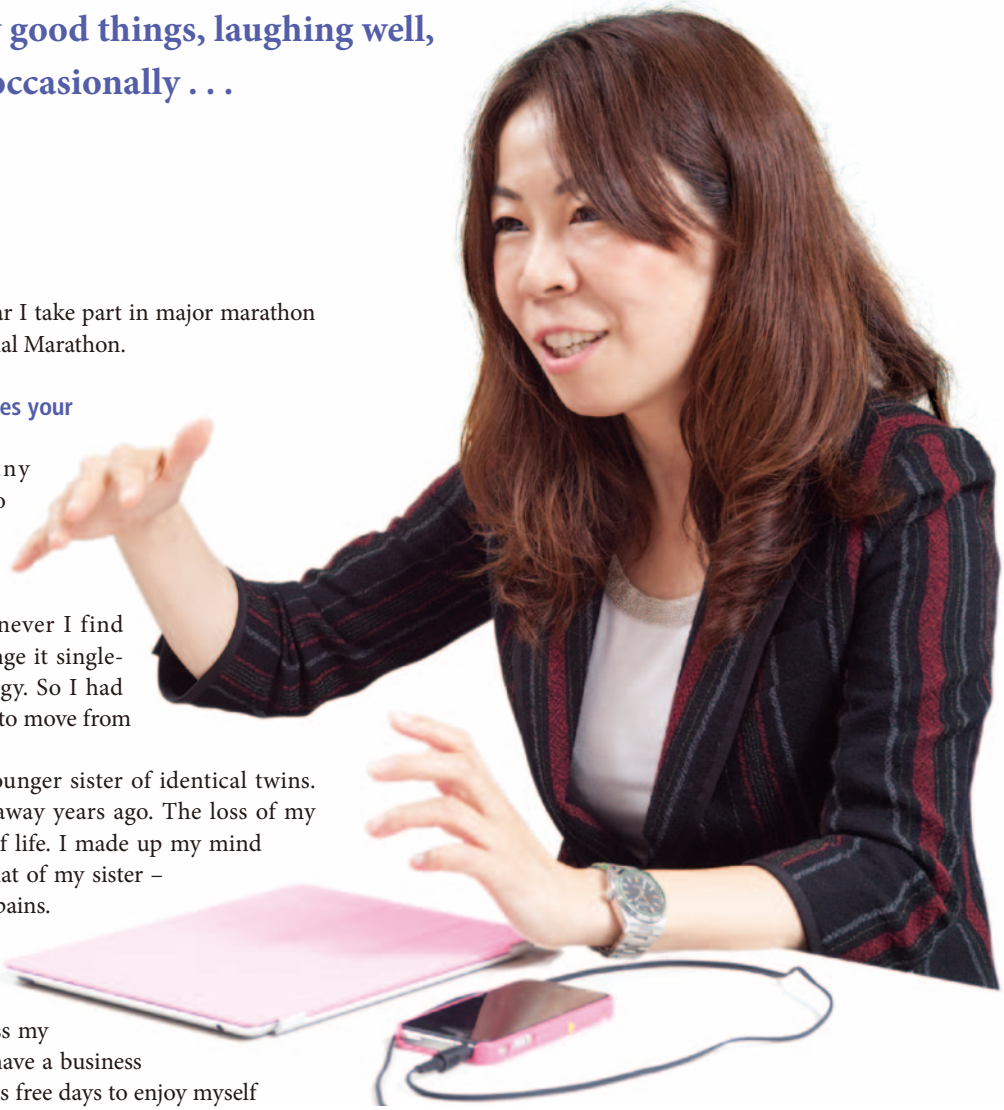
Later, an encounter with Professor Norio Akamatsu during my service with Tokushima University marked an important turning point for my career as a researcher. When we were bothered with noise from a nearby construction site, I spoke to Dr. Akamatsu, saying, "If we produce sound of opposite phase, the noise outside disappears, doesn't it?" This is nothing special, but Dr. Akamatsu praised me as being always conscious of my own research in relation to daily matters. He even guaranteed that by maintaining such an attitude I would be able to grow into a full-fledged researcher. This word of encouragement has supported me as a researcher ever since. As I continued the work of converting sounds and visual images into frequencies and formulating them day after day, I found myself capable of connecting various phenomena with frequencies, and by merely hearing sounds or seeing images I naturally became able to make out what frequency components are contained there. Now everything around me appears as a frequency or a formula – almost an occupational hazard you might say.

Thanks to the advice given by Dr. Akamatsu, I came to engage in research into brain waves. Back in those days, I was totally absorbed in matters related to frequencies. In my doctor's course, I focused on research into frequency analysis of facial visual images. This project aimed to distinguish individuals by formulating visual images of faces. Individual faces can be distinguished by comparing formulas . . . Don't you think it's interesting? After all, I was able to earn a doctor's degree in a year and a half.

What was your life as a researcher like?

Day after day, I went to the lab and devoted myself to research work until 2:00 a.m. As a short sleeper by nature, I could refresh myself after five hours of sleep, so such a lifestyle was not hard at all. What's more, it was my daily routine to enjoy jogging with Dr. Akamatsu in the early evening. Thanks to that habit, I enjoy

Eating well, learning well, playing well, being moved well by good things, laughing well, and shedding tears occasionally . . .



marathons even today. Every year I take part in major marathon races like the Shonan International Marathon.

You are very powerful. What does your energy come from?

When I have to make any decision, I make it a rule to judge by likes/dislikes. Of course I choose what I like, so there is no room for stress to accumulate, I believe. Whenever I find something interesting, I challenge it single-mindedly and with all my energy. So I had no anxiety at all when I decided to move from Okayama to Tokyo.

To tell the truth, I am the younger sister of identical twins. My elder sister, Hiroe, passed away years ago. The loss of my sister largely changed my way of life. I made up my mind to live a double life including that of my sister – appreciating both pleasures and pains.

Therefore, it is my rule to do research work with all my might and enjoy pleasures with all my might as well. Unless my work schedule is too tight or I have a business trip to take, I set aside Sundays as free days to enjoy myself to the fullest.

For example, my holiday schedule for this month is already full (*laughter*). No matter how much I may enjoy a holiday, I never carry fatigue to the following day. It's my principle.

Enjoying a lot of delicious food is another pleasure although I specialize in eating (*laughter*). Eating well, learning well, playing well, being moved well by good things, laughing well, and shedding tears occasionally . . . This is my lifestyle.

But we are afraid that going at such a breakneck speed might make you tired. What do you think?

Maybe running keeps me in good shape. I'm confident in my stamina. On Sundays, I try to run as much as I can. Whenever I take official overseas trips, I bring my jogging shoes with me and run around town so that I can feel the atmosphere of the town firsthand. Running erases the fatigue of journey from Japan to that country. I often invite my students to join in running while also advising them to learn well and play well like myself.

How do you like your research life at Keio University?

The atmosphere of Keio University is truly unrestricted and there are many researchers of colorful characters, so I feel at home here and am enjoying an unrestricted research life. It's also wonderful that Keio has a culture of caring for each and every student attentively. This is why I like Keio. In years ahead as in the past, I'd like to continue to give full play to my creative imagination – based on signal processing technology – and energetically pursue research themes that will benefit society.

Yasue Mitsukura

Ms. Mitsukura pursues research related to multimedia signal processing and Bio-Signal analysis, using Bio-Signal processing, brain wave (electroencephalogram:EEG) analysis, visual image processing, semantic analysis of visual images and impression analysis as keywords. In 1999, she became a research assistant for Tokushima University Department of Information Science and Intelligent Systems; in 2002, she became a full-time lecturer for Okayama University Information Education Course; in 2005, she became an associate professor for Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology in 2007; and in 2011 she moved to Keio University assuming the current position as an associate professor for the Faculty of Science and Technology.

◎ Just a word from a student ◎

● Dr. Mitsukura is very stoic when it comes to research. But even when I come out with an unexpected idea, she generously allows me to go ahead, saying, "Why don't you try it?" And she is kind enough to follow up my endeavor with proper advice, which is very nice. All of us at the lab are following Dr. Mitsukura's example – tackling both research work and pleasure with all our might.

(Reporter & text writer: Madoka Tainaka)

For the full text of this interview
http://www.st.keio.ac.jp/kyurizukai