

The Path to Ambition

# Mrs Hiromi Tazaki

Always choosing the path that ignites her passion and excitement

## A Girl Full of Curiosity, Eager to Explore Her Neighbourhood

Picture the scene: a quiet Kyoto street, framed by the white walls of Eikando, an old temple in the Higashiyama area of Kyoto. Here, you can see a group of boys running about, waving toy swords. At the head of the pack runs one strikingly energetic little girl, carrying toy swords in both of her hands. Not even the boys can compete with this dual-wielding young swordswoman. The boisterous young girl in this scene grew up to be none other than Mrs Hiromi Tazaki, who now serves as the Co-Founder, Executive Director, Chairman & CEO of JAC Group.

Hiromi was born in 1950, in the Kyoto neighbourhood of Eikandocho, on 23 December. Her elementary school days were a time when a black-and-white TV, washing machine and refrigerator were known as “the Three Sacred Treasures”. Even children were becoming obsessed with the historical dramas that were being broadcast on the cathode-ray TVs in use at the

time, and sword-fighting was all the rage in their games. At other times, kids would make camps in the woods and play at being Tarzan. In those days, the usual games for girls typically involved “playing house” with dolls, but Hiromi was always playing with the neighbourhood boys in tow, jumping around with them.

One aspect of Hiromi’s childhood that tells us a great deal about what she was like as a child involves her extra-curricular activities. Hiromi always took part in a lot of these activities, from as far back as she can remember: drawing, calligraphy, Japanese dance, abacus, English, kimono-making, tea ceremony, flower arrangement... Hiromi would take up whatever took her fancy, no matter what it was. As she was quick learner, it never took her very long to master a new skill. And as soon as she had become good enough to win praise from the adults around her, she would swiftly move on to the next thing. After that, she would move on to the next activity, further widening her range. What drove her forwards was her sense of curiosity: she always wanted to experience the next new thing.

What was interesting about Hiromi is that whenever she thought “I’d like to try that”, she would head off to the extra-



Hiromi in her high school days (second from the top)

curricular school by herself, without talking to her mother first. She would start the activity first, and then let her mother know after the fact, when the requests for the monthly fees came home. For Hiromi, this just seemed like the common-sense thing to do. From her early childhood, Hiromi was evidently the kind of child who would think for herself and take action based on her own decisions. Perhaps the way things were at home had led her to develop this trait. Hiromi’s father had left the family many years ago, and her mother was busy at work, meaning that the house was empty much of the time. An only child, Hiromi spent a great deal of time with her grandmother. She was unable to rely on her parents, which may be why it felt natural to her to act on her own initiative after thinking independently about what to do.

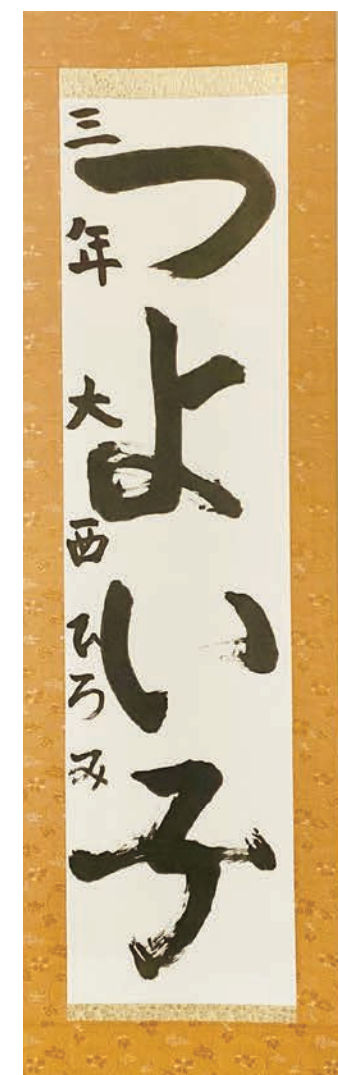
## More Joy Creating Something New

As Hiromi grew into a junior high school and high school student, this tendency of hers to take action proactively no matter what it was became increasingly pronounced. After entering her public junior high school, she discovered creative writing such as writing poems and novels. She had loved reading from childhood but found it difficult to come up with her own stories; working at this process drew her attention to many new things. She started to explore topics such as “What does ‘life’ mean?” and “Who are we?” more deeply. Compared to her classmates in the same grade, Hiromi must have seemed rather mature and even a little overly logical for her age.

After junior high, she entered St. Agnes’ High School, a Christian school. There, she learned to exercise leadership as well as creativity, and played an active role in school events and club activities. If, say, her class was to set up a stall serving tea at the school festival, Hiromi was sure to be at the centre of the action. To get hold of the most delicious tea and cake, she would go by herself to negotiate with a bakery that she had connections with and would practice and perform the folk songs that were popular at the time, to make the stall more enjoyable for the customers. She would come up with all kinds of ideas to make the customers happy and create the best possible tea stall, and her enthusiasm would fire up her classmates as well. There is even an anecdote that this achieved the first-ever sales at the high school festival. When she took on the role of compiling an

anthology of her fellow students’ school graduation essays, she was at the centre of all aspects of the task, including the editing, the design and ordering the printing. She mapped out teacher interviews, held polls on questions like “Person who is the best at studying”, “Most entertaining person in the class”, and she also incorporated ideas that allowed all students in her class to become stars. As someone who could never accept anything less than perfection, Hiromi not only laid out the pages with care but also made frequent visits to the printing company to assist with the task until the binding process was complete. She was also affiliated with the English Speaking Society (ESS). Though she was not a particularly strong English speaker at this time, she helped drive the group forwards as chairperson of the Kyoto English Speaking Schools Alliance (ESSA), which comprised five Christian schools in Kyoto.

As she came to learn of the joy that comes from creating something never seen before by continuously and proactively working on her own initiative, and of the pleasure of seeing her efforts praised by others, Hiromi won the respect of the adults around her. Yet, even as she led a fulfilling and vibrant life day by day, as she grew up, Hiromi was beginning to think about what kind of direction her life should take in the broader sense: what was the purpose of her life, and what kind of life should she lead?



A writing practice exercise by Hiromi in her elementary school days. Although the characters are supposed to be written as *yoi ko* (good child), Hiromi added an extra character to turn it into *tsuyoi ko* (strong child), showing what kind of girl she was.





She also took trips overseas to appear as a model



## Looking for the Principles to Live by

From the time Hiromi was a student in her late teens, the student movement became more active around her. This was a period of passionate activism among young people, who would gather all over Japan to loudly denounce what they thought of as unfair aspects of the social structure. Hiromi herself did not become involved in these gatherings, but the passionate opinions being expressed by others naturally made her more interested in the question of what kind of society would be ideal going forwards. As hippie culture spread throughout the United States around this time, the pacifism and free-living values of the hippie movement also struck a chord powerfully with the young people of Japan. Living through this period of massive social change perhaps gave Hiromi the strong impression that new ideas which overturn the established norms are always to be brought from overseas. New ideas not to be found in Japan can be discovered in other countries, she thought. If one goes abroad, in other words, one is sure to find what one is searching for. These were the expectations that began to grow within Hiromi.

When Hiromi was 23, a chance to travel overseas appeared out of nowhere. Asked to accompany an overseas publicity tour for *nishijin-ori*, a type of traditional Japanese silk brocade, she travelled to France and Italy with acquaintances. She even worked as a runway model while she was there. Everything felt fresh and new to her as she stepped on foreign land for the first time. After coming back to Japan, the vague aspirations she had previously had about studying overseas now crystalised into a concrete goal.

After thinking about where she should study, Hiromi finally opted for the United Kingdom. As a developed nation with the sense of dignity that came from having been the leader of world development for many years, the UK offered the chance to gain many things that could not be found in Japan, she felt. She also felt that this was an opportunity to make use of the English she

had learned in her ESS club activities and elsewhere. So, at last, aged 24, Hiromi started her language studies in the UK. Soon after arriving there, she became enthralled by the British streetscapes with their depth of history and aesthetic appeal, and by a way of life that seemed somehow more advanced than that of Japan; as time went on, and as she gradually improved her English speaking abilities to the point where she could converse freely with her local friends, she began to be captivated by the British way of thinking as well.

Seeing a homeless person on the street Hiromi once said to her friends “Why is that person living off the money they get from other people, rather than working themselves? It doesn’t seem fair”. To her, this view seemed quite obvious, but her British friends disagreed with her. “Hiromi, in the real world, some people just aren’t able to do the things they want to do. Some people have mental health issues as well. You need to think about those kinds of people too”. British people thought it was obvious that those with the power to help others should bear the burden of those who needed help. For the British, it was this kind of burden-sharing that made a society fair. From these interactions with British people, Hiromi found herself feeling rather shocked to think how far the Japanese way of thinking, and even her own attitudes, lagged behind those of the British, and came to have great respect for the country.

She also found that British attitudes towards pets were quite different to those found in Japan. It was true that the Japanese also kept animals as much-loved companions. But Hiromi learned that some pet-keeping practices in Japan that the Japanese were used to and accepted as normal (including guard dogs kept on chains and pets whose owners did not take them for walks as it was not convenient to them) were considered animal cruelty among the British. In the UK, the human-pet relationship really seemed more like that of family members. One by one, these kinds of ideas, only to be found in a country which was truly mature, made deep impressions on Hiromi. Before she knew it, the UK—a country which started off as a foreign and unfamiliar land to her—had acquired a very special place in her heart.

## The Excitement of Taking the Uncharted Route

Having developed this strong attachment to the UK and made the decision to continue living there, Hiromi now made the decision to start work in the UK as well. Her first job, which she was introduced to via an acquaintance, was a part-time position at Sumitomo Trust and Banking which had expanded into the UK. At first, she studied in the mornings and worked part-time in the afternoons. She later became a full-time company employee, following the retirement of a Japanese female employee at the company. Over three years, she worked in general affairs and accounting. Given her natural tendency to throw herself into her tasks and do whatever was necessary to bring her work to perfection, Hiromi won acclaim for the way she did her job from those around her. She tackled her work with gusto, insisting on taking care of even the most detailed tasks herself rather than leaving things to other people.

However, the tasks she was given to do were largely routine work, and Hiromi began to feel unsatisfied by what she was doing. She was happy to win praise for her hard work in her job, but inside her, her enthusiasm was beginning to ebb, and taking her work seriously began to feel harder. Suppressing these feelings, she ended up completely exhausted, both mentally and physically. She began to wonder if she could continue working in her current workplace.

It was then that Hiromi was asked by someone she knew if she would be interested in getting involved in the recruitment business. She began to wonder what kind of work it involved. Indeed, this was an age when even the phrase “recruitment industry” did not really exist. She did not even know what people in this line of work actually did. Despite this, Hiromi began to feel intrigued by the mysterious appeal of this job. She could be a pioneer in a line of work that nobody had really done before her. In doing so, she could carve out a new pathway. Just thinking about this made her feel excited. And so, Hiromi made the

decision to transfer to this new job.

The day she started off her new company—the first day she arrived at her new company’s office—is still fresh in Hiromi’s memory. The office was on the second floor of a supermarket. The only things in the office were a ratty set of desks and chairs, and a telephone. It was far from being a satisfactory place to do business. Even so, Hiromi’s heart was singing. Because it was a completely new kind of job, nobody could say exactly how it was supposed to be done. She was excited about how interesting the work would be.



Working as a secretary in Kyoto Momoyama Lions Club

### ■ Profile: Hiromi Tazaki

Mrs Hiromi Tazaki was born in Kyoto. After graduating from St. Agnes’ High School, she worked as a secretary at Kyoto Momoyama Lions Club, before going to the United Kingdom, where she started work at the London branch of Sumitomo Trust and Banking in 1977. In 1981, she joined Tazaki Group to work as recruitment consultancy startup manager; in this role, she carved out a new business independently. Having won acclaim for her outstanding management abilities while leading this new business towards success, Hiromi was appointed as Managing Director and CEO of Tazaki Group in 1991. Since then, first as Managing Director and CEO of Tazaki Group and now as Co-Founder, Executive Director, Chairman & CEO of JAC Recruitment, Hiromi has been responsible for overall management of JAC Group and driven forwards its success.

In 2014, she won the Hall of Fame award, which recognises the achievements of those individuals who have made the greatest contributions to the development of the human resource industry, as part of “The Recruitment International

Asia Awards 2014”, an awards ceremony held by *Recruitment International*, a recruitment industry trade publication based in the UK. She has won great acclaim for her achievements as a pioneer in the human resource industry over many years, not only for her contributions to the growth of her own company and the industry in Japan, but also for promoting the growth of the business worldwide, including in the UK and various parts of Asia. She has also been greatly commended at the global level, including her being selected for the fourth consecutive year from 2015 onwards to be part of “Global Power 100 - Women in Staffing”, announced by *Staffing Industry Analysts*, a US-based recruitment market media outlet.

In March 2022, Hiromi founded the JAC Environmental & Animal Protection Foundation, based on a vision that she has held over many years. She has also put efforts into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and social contribution activities through her assistance to groups which engage in animal protection and protection of the natural environment in line with this.