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# McGill and Montreal Help Japanese Student Build a Strong Foundation

anding a professorship in your home country at the tail end of a PhD is cause for celebration. For Japan's Yosuke Tomita, it's also bittersweet. That's because starting that new job has meant saying goodbye to Montreal.

So, as Tomita settles into his new role at the Takasaki University of Health and Welfare (about two hours northwest of Tokyo), where he is building on his graduate research on motor control in neurorehabilitation, the mention of Montreal and McGill does make him wistful.

"Montreal is perfect for students," he says, of a city that he misses for its "people, diversity and freedom."

Foremost in his memory of McGill's School of Physical and Occupational Therapy (SPOT): a stimulating research environment, a diverse student population and a life-changing gift, which enabled him to start a family and launch his career.

Tomita and his wife Sanae had saved enough money for him to pursue his studies at McGill, but not for her to join him. When he began his doctorate in Rehabilitation Science in 2013, she stayed behind in Japan to work.

They would have only three visits over the next two years.

Tomita made the most of his time alone, concentrating on academics. His courses offered him a diverse set of fundamentals in occupational therapy not available, he says, in Japanese universities. He also enjoyed studying alongside other international students. "They were from France, India, Brazil, Singapore, China." They hailed from different backgrounds but found a common language in the practice of occupational therapy.

Tomita's life took a new turn in 2015, when he was awarded a \$35,000 Richard and Edith Strauss Doctoral Fellowship in Physical and Occupational Therapy from the Richard and Edith Strauss Canada Foundation, a longtime friend of the Faculty. Sanae was finally able to leave Japan and join him in Canada that summer.

Both work and home life flourished. In the winter, Sanae became pregnant. Meanwhile, Tomita progressed on his thesis. Under the supervision of Mindy Levin, BSc(PT)'76, PhD'90, he conducted experiments at the Jewish Rehabilitation Hospital, researching gait and posture in stroke patients.

The couple chose a baby name that spoke of their love of Montreal, Yuki, the Japanese word for snow. Their daughter arrived on November 20, 2016. The very next day saw that season's first snowfall. The timing was also significant in terms of Tomita's thesis: He had just completed his data collection five days earlier.

Two months later, Tomita received the job offer. "Without the fellowship, this would never have happened," he says, referring to an initial publication of his research in the *Journal of Neurophysiology* as well as the university appointment. "The quality of my research really depended on how much I could concentrate and devote myself."

Before moving home, Tomita organized a visit of Japanese students to SPOT, which has resulted in one of the participants applying to the program.

He hopes to organize another tour soon, to share with others the opportunities he found here, in the land of his daughter's birth. 🐣