



Tetsuto's Quest

It was a modest Christmas present, but it changed a 10-year-old's life forever.

"My parents already knew that I was interested in dinosaurs," says Tetsuto Miyashita BSc (Hons) 2009, recalling the morning when he unwrapped that gift, a book written by a certain famous Alberta paleontologist.

"That was the first time I learned the name Philip Currie. In that book he talked about all these discoveries he made—page after page of personal accounts of finding dinosaurs, and digging up dinosaurs, and studying them."

From that moment on, Miyashita was no longer just a dinosaur-loving boy. "That book set me on a quest," he says simply. "I decided that I wanted to move to Canada eventually, and to work with this person.

By the time he was fifteen, Miyashita had learned enough English—and gathered enough courage—to write a letter to his distant idol. "I woke up every morning at 4:00, and looked up every word in the dictionary."

The two struck up a correspondence, and Miyashita eventually confided his dream. "I asked him, should I move to Canada after university, or after high school?" To his surprise, Currie suggested something even more drastic. "He said, 'There's a high school in Drumheller. If you really want to work on dinosaurs, you could move here right away and work at the museum as a volunteer every day after school.'

"I thought that would be such a cool arrangement," says Miyashita. "I could get closer to all those dinosaurs!"



Tetsuto Miyashita working on a dig site in Southern Alberta.

time, but I couldn't do that in Canada."

Before long, though, the transition was complete. "As soon as I started working at the museum, and working on all these dinosaur fossils, something switched on. I knew that this was what I wanted to do all the time."

Around the time Miyashita finished high school, Currie accepted a teaching post at the University of Alberta. Miyashita enrolled in the BSc program, and moved in with Currie and his wife Eva Koppelhus.

Even now, Miyashita marvels at his good fortune in forming a personal and professional bond with a scientist like Currie. "It's a very traditional way of training a person. In science,

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They're completing the excavation of a Daspletosaurus, a giant carnivore that resembles a T-Rex. "It's eight to ten metres in length, with these banana-sized teeth lined up in its jaws," enthuses Miyashita. In

it always used to be that way, an apprenticeship. A learned professor takes an assistant, and the assistant watches everything that he does. Then, that person inherits the legacy.

"Philip doesn't really use a lot of words to teach me something. I learn a lot just being close to him, watching how he does things."

The observation doesn't end when the two

go home. "Before I came to Canada, I didn't think a famous professor like Philip would spend his time cleaning bathrooms or doing yardwork," Miyashita smiles. "I learned how important it is to actually do these household things. When I actually started working with Philip, and living with him, he became more of a real person to me.

"But," he hastens to add, "he's also still a hero to me."

These days, the young apprentice often steps out from beneath his master's shadow. Miyashita is nearing the end of his Master's program, and this summer he's leading a team of students on a dig south of Medicine Hat.

short, it's one cool dinosaur.

Miyashita plans to eventually pursue a PhD—completing his apprenticeship—and to strike out on his own. When that day comes, he'll be ready. "As long as I can work on things that make me tick and make me happy, I can be anywhere. I don't care if it's China, or Russia, or wherever. I know I can do it."

The scheme blindsided Miyashita's parents. "They were a bit shocked. They said that they had no idea that just a book could cause their child to move away from home." To their credit, sensing the depth of their son's passion, they consented.

In the virtual blink of an eye, Miyashita found himself shivering on a dark and lonely Drumheller street corner. Clearly, young Tetsuto was not in Tokyo anymore. "It was January, late at night, and it was snowing," he laughs. "It looked almost like a ghost town."

It took some time for Miyashita to settle in. "The first couple of months, it was all about getting used to the situation, the climate, the language, and being away from my family. Back at home, I could argue with my parents all the



Tetsuto Miyashita with a mould of a miniature T Rex skull.