

As I write this message I am riding along an interstate highway up to Raton Pass in Southern Colorado just north of the New Mexico border in the western part of the United States. Being in motion is appropriate because I have been thinking about the kind of journey that books and stories take you on, whether in the reading of them — as we follow along with, say, the marvelous, mad-cap adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza — or in the writing of them — think of Matsuo Basho and the journey required to write his *Narrow Road to the Deep North*. *Writing Your Own Stories* is the culmination of a journey that began in Kumagaya in the summer of 1990, where I taught English at Aeon and began writing fiction at my kotatsu table in my spare time, and that led, with many small side trips, to Koriyama and the Drifting Classroom in the autumn of 2015. There I was in company with extraordinary writers and thinkers like the founder, Hideo Furukawa, Mieko Kawakami, Moto Shibata, who is here in front of you now, and so many others. It was, fittingly, in a classroom — where such great journeys of the mind take place — that the idea for the book really took shape. It was in the back and forth between all of us in the room that day, including the wonderful Kenkyusha editor, Yasushi Kaneko, who subsequently proposed that a book like this one might be possible, that a journey of lively exchange and listening and writing and thinking and reading was embarked on. I wish I could be with you in person to discuss it further but you couldn't be in better hands. He won't say it himself, I'm quite sure, but this book would simply not have been possible without Moto Shibata — I take this opportunity to thank him as well as all of you for your interest. Most importantly, I encourage you to try, yourselves, to write your own stories. I imagine the journeys you set out on in your writing will be grand.

