



# The Doggy Dung Disaster

**HARUKA MARUNO**

Would you believe that a 12-year-old Japanese girl was named one of nine “Heroes for the Planet” by *Time* magazine for picking up dog poop? What’s even weirder is that this girl, like most people, *hated* picking up poop.

“It was gross,” Haruka Maruno told *Time* magazine in 2000. Every morning when Haruka walked her dog, Patrick, she grimaced when she had to scoop his poop with a plastic bag over her hand. It felt warm and mushy, like a handful of, well . . . dog poop. Yuck!

But it turned out that cleaning up after Patrick with a plastic bag was more than just gross—it was also harming the environment. Just like they keep your sandwich fresh for lunch, plastic bags also keep animal waste from decomposing—breaking down back into the earth. Instead of becoming fertilizer, the poop-bag combo just sat in the local landfill looking disgusting, smelling bad, and taking up space.

Japan has over 10 million dogs, which produce over 2 million pounds of waste daily. That’s a massive mountain of poop every day. Just imagine what the mountain might look like after a *month*! And because Japan is a small island, there isn’t a lot of extra space. As much as people would have liked to keep mountains and mountains of dog poop sitting around, there just wasn’t enough room. . . . Japan had a real doggy dung disaster.

Haruka Maruno decided to do something about it.

“What else could I use to scoop poop?” she thought. A shovel might work, but you couldn’t just throw the whole shovel away. People would have to wash it when they were done—not very convenient. Maybe a plastic cup, but it might get a little messy, and messy was the *last* thing she wanted. Finally Haruka found a way to cut and fold an empty paper milk carton into the ultimate poop scoop.





The best part—other than being much less gross—was that the paper scoop allowed air and microbes to get in. You could throw the scoop away, and after a while everything would be gone, decomposed back into the earth like ice cream melting in the sun. No more taking up space in a landfill.

Haruka entered her “paperscoop” in an invention contest, held in her city of Miyakonojo. Her poop scoop won first prize! But that was not enough for Haruka.

She thought about it: if only a few people knew about the paperscoop, it wouldn’t get used enough to make a big difference. Haruka needed more than just a paperscoop stand on the corner if she wanted to win the battle against gross, smelly dog poop. She knew this was where her dad, Isamu, might be able to help. He was a businessman and helped Haruka set up her own company, which they called “Haruka Family.”

Imagine what life is like for most seventh graders you know. Now imagine a seventh grader running a major company that sells environmentally friendly products. It wasn’t easy! At 12 years old, Haruka Maruno was not only an inventor, but a sharp businesswoman as well.

Every day, Haruka came home from school, grabbed a snack, and then got to work. She and her father had to find a factory that could turn recycled milk cartons

into “Haruka’s Paperscoops.” They had to hire employees and keep detailed records of exactly what they sold and where. They also had to convince stores all over Japan to put a product on their shelves that encouraged people to get up close and personal with dog poop.

All of this hard work paid off. The poop scoop was a hit in stores. And the government of Japan took notice of the paperscoop and asked Haruka to represent Japan at the Children’s Conference for the Environment in Africa. The conference, sponsored by the United Nations, gave Haruka the chance to talk about her special poop scoop with kids from many countries around the world. Her paperscoop was even used by the city of Miyakonojo as part of its Good Manners Project.

Today, Haruka Maruno has graduated from high school. She now gives lectures about intellectual property rights. Haruka continues to run her business online while working on inventions that help preserve the environment. You can be sure that the world will be a better place because of her work!

## GET INSPIRED!

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## Fast Facts

Tokyo and the surrounding region is the most densely populated metropolitan area in the world.