

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, January 2022

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar—

New Year's Plans

"Congratulations on becoming an adult!"

Many municipal offices in Japan hold Coming-of-Age ceremonies for those turning twenty years old in January.

As a precaution against the coronavirus, the ceremony was postponed in Matsuyama last year. Finally, about a year late, my son will be attending the event on December 30th.

My daughter, a year younger, is participating on January 9th. They are looking forward to having a reunion with their school friends. He, in his suit and tie, and she in a red kimono will look good on this day of celebration, marking a turning point in their lives. They may appear to be adults, but what about substance? How will they acknowledge the importance of finding their own way, aside from their public appearance?

I think Japanese youngsters have so many options in life. This society coddles young people and allows them to make arbitrary decisions. Yet, despite the lingering pandemic, they should learn to discipline themselves and use their time effectively.

Today Japan is a country where instant gratification is the rule. When you want something, it's there, which is good in many ways, but I worry that this deprives young people of opportunities to think and act by themselves. The Internet allows them to gain information instantly, so young people are less likely to expend energy or take risks.

However I believe that experience of the real world is precious. I want them to just step out of their cozy rooms to confront their lives with curiosity and communicate with people from different backgrounds, instead of simply watching videos or playing games.

Three decades ago, youths were ambitious and lively. The bubble economy years drove this energy, even fanaticism. Back then, I was an immature twenty-year-old, but I had the ambition to go to America so as to experience a different world than I was used to. It perplexed me, moved me, lifted me up sometimes, and gave me perspective particularly when it came to confronting hardship. My experience there gave me the fortitude to do anything new or difficult from then on. As a parent, I value my children's healthy growth more than anything. I also want them to make more of an effort to be independent, self-actualizing adults and work for a meaningful goal.

Best wishes all the new adults on this big milestone and in the future. (Miwa N.)

Finally, I found a treasure chest among the uncountable boxes stacked in our storage.

Glossy, finished *urushi*, Japanese lacquer bowls, wrapped with old newspaper and nestled in five wooden boxes. All the bowls were crafted during the *Taisho* era, more than 100 years ago.

A year ago, right after the first anniversary of our mom's death, my brother and I decided to have our parent's old, empty house demolished. It was a tough decision.

But after I stumbled across some tiny newborn kittens in a drawer under my mom's bed, I really couldn't see any other way. The house was bound to fall apart no matter what we did.

Until I decluttered the entire house, I had never seen or handled such authentic lacquerware. My mother never used these fancy dishes and bowls on any occasion, even New Years. My mother was a good cook but she was not interested in using old tableware. I know lacquerware is difficult to take care of, so she probably thought it wasn't worth the bother.

Each dish was wrapped with a local newspaper published more than a half-century ago, the year our grandpa passed away. So, since his funeral, the lacquerware had been in storage.

People used to provide meals to guests and relatives at home for all important celebrations, wedding receptions and funerals. I can imagine it was a lot of work for women to prepare meals without the catering or food service industries available these days.

My husband was excited as he carefully inspected each of the black and vermilion soup bowls, small plates, *kaiseki-zen* trays and *jubako* stacking boxes. We took them all home to Matsuyama, place settings for twenty guests. Now we enjoy *osechi*, special New Year dishes, with our antique lacquerware. I'm happy with this new family tradition!

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)

In former days, waking on New Year's Day, I would feel as if everything had turned fresh and new overnight.

The day was replete with the moods of both solemnity and euphoria. The ancient people referred to this as *shukuki* (淑気) or the auspicious atmosphere of New Year's. People paid their first visit of the year to a shrine, and the gate to each house was decorated with *kadomatsu* pine branches to welcome the New Year deity.

Children would play *karuta* cards at home. Girls in gorgeous kimono played *oibane*, Japanese badminton, while boys enjoyed spinning tops and flying kites.

Nowadays, most of the traditional New Year's activities are rarely seen. Adults and children turn to *sumaho* cellphone gadgets and games as their holiday pastime. The media celebrates New Year's with as much pomp and solemnity as ever. As for me, I don't feel the atmosphere of New Year's fresh and new as much as I used to. Is this due to my advanced age or the change of manners and customs of Japanese people?

On New Year's, we are supposed to make personal resolutions.

There are many crucial matters we are expected to tackle as citizens, such as alleviating the inverted population pyramid where the elderly far outnumber the young, as well as many other social and private problems. Come to think of it, I'm already in the twilight of my life. You could even say the late evening. For octogenarians, working on matters that call for steady planning with a long-term perspective is way beyond their means.

Our keenest interest is how to live towards the final stage. It's of pressing concern for us to make the most of this very moment, that is, to keep the flickering light as bright as possible.

I seek to relieve myself of secular worries as far as I can so as to be able to live my remaining days with the least amount of strain.

And living everyday to the fullest, sometimes reflecting on past experiences, but more often than not, with my eyes to the near future.

This is my way of life in its final stage. Overall, life is truly fantastic.

(H. Tarumi)