

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, March 2022

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

The other day I read an article in the newspaper about marine adventurer Horie Kenichi. He is now 83 years old.

Sixty years ago, he left the port of Nishinomiya City, Hyogo Prefecture, on his 19-foot yacht, Mermaid. He arrived in San Francisco about 90 days later on August 11, 1962, having successfully crossed the Pacific Ocean without stopping at any port. The young man, who was 23 years old at the time, created a sensation.

After returning to Japan, he wrote "Alone on the Pacific" which became a bestseller and was made into a movie starring Ishihara Yujiro. Since then, he has embarked on various successful adventures. In March of this year, he will once again attempt a solo, port-free crossing of the Pacific Ocean, this time leaving from San Francisco and sailing to Nishinomiya City. He is scheduled to arrive in June, and if he succeeds, he will become the world's oldest person to do so.

When I read this article, I was transported back 50 years or so. I remember it was early summer. I was a freshman in high school, and visited the school library for the first time to check out a book. Luckily, I found a book I had been wanting to read, "Alone on the Pacific". I picked it up and flipped through the book. At the back of the book, there was a "borrowing card". At the school library, when we wanted to borrow a book, we had to write our name on the borrowing card. Then I found the name on the card. It was the name of a senior high school student that I had a crush on. He had also read this book! I was excited about that. The time I spent reading that book made me feel so happy, a nostalgic, sweet and sour memory of unrequited love. I'm now reading "Alone on the Pacific" again. It is an old book, but I was able to find it at my local library. When I turned over the page of the book, I was very surprised to again find a "borrowing card" on the back cover. But this time, his name was not written there.

(Hiroko.T)

This is part 1 of a 3 part series on English education in Japan.

March is high school graduation time. That's when most Japanese students say good-bye to English education. Japanese people see English as an important school subject but not as a communicative tool. English learning goals should be not only for students to gain proficiency in grammar and vocabulary skills, but to be able to think and speak globally. I believe understanding a foreign language allows one to see life and the world from different angles. It provides you with a perspective you've never had before. It is a beautiful experience.

However by the time students have the chance to express themselves in English, they must instead struggle with grammar worksheets. Unfortunately, English education in Japan cannot guarantee improvement in speaking skills.

The Ministry of Education supposedly has been working on this focal issue. They

stipulated that all high school English teachers teach classes in the target language. I had a lot of expectations for this new measure when it was announced. Contrary to my expectations, this goal is hard to achieve. Because of the unequal distribution of testing centers able to administer oral tests, the Kyotsuu Test, the new university entrance exam, once more requires no speaking test of examinees. I don't understand why they can't get this organized. High school English classes don't provide active learning such as role-playing, interactive games, presentations or discussions often enough. English teachers give lessons in Japanese and teach to textbooks translating instructions into Japanese, because it's easier for them. Learning grammar and vocabulary is important, but students are unable to apply these skills in speaking exercises. Skipping this crucial process, teachers administer them writing quizzes anyway. Then something strange happens. Students can't pronounce vocabulary words, but they can spell them correctly and know their meanings in Japanese. This isn't right. It's important for learners to feel their speaking skills are improving.

To help build students' confidence, teachers should acknowledge students' efforts to speak out. The way in which students communicate ideas should be given priority over their use of grammar. Even when it is grammatically inept, English oral communication should take precedence over perfect paper test scores. To learn something in order to simply pass entrance exams is superficial. What they learn in classes should be useful and apply to real-life situations. Their ability should not be evaluated only through scores on tricky and unnecessary paper tests. Above all, English education must not humiliate and discourage learners.

Long ago as I said goodbye to the trauma high school classes, I looked forward to a new environment where I could learn practical English. English education in Japan as it stands is a sad irony. After graduating high school, students should be able to handle basic English communication. If students spend six hours a week learning English, why can't they speak?

(Miwa N.)

We are able to celebrate Chinese New Year celebration right, because we receive a package of special teas from Taiwan. Every Chinese New Year season, a girl who stayed with us for two summers remembers her host family with tea. Thanks to Sherry, we enjoy the taste of unique flavors of Chinese tea.

Originally, I am a tea person. Coffee is okay now, but before I didn't drink it at all. My sense of taste changed drastically during the long chemotherapy. For years, my palate refused the flavor of green tea. Even water was difficult to get down.

A pharmacist recommended I take about 2 liters (0.5 US gallons) of hydration daily, and I discovered Coke and coffee were both easier for me to drink.

One afternoon, our neighbor, an Indian lady, knocked on our door and invited me over in my pajamas for a cup of tea. I learned how to make chai, and her conversation was the best kind of therapy. This kind Muslim woman was the first friend I ever made in Ehime, and she is still so special to me.

Long ago in March covered in snow that never seemed to melt in Minnesota, I told our neighbor April over the phone that I was spending all day in the bathroom because

of morning sickness. The next day, hanging on our doorknob, my husband found a bag of tea with a note left there by April. It was new to me, but both Native American and European women have used raspberry tea when they were expecting for almost 2000 years. This warm, organic, minty tea with raspberry leaves certainly worked for me.

Lately, I'm careful to never run out of decaffeinated coffee and tea for our oldest girl to drink, since she cares about its diuretic effect. She is a resident surgeon and is going to be an ER/flight doctor from next month. Which do you like to drink? Tea or Coffee?

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)