

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, April 2022

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

April Menu

“This borscht tastes good,” my father said. Almost 20 years ago, on the way back from Fukuoka after visiting a relative, he and I happened to stop a small restaurant. They had borscht on their menu and we ordered it. I was surprised that he knew how borscht tasted. It wasn't a very common dish in Japan.

Another time he murmured, “The Russian people I know were kind, though.” A newscaster was speaking about the dispute between Japan and Russia over the Northern Territories.

When he was six years old, my father and his family immigrated to Manchuria, north-eastern part of China. There many different peoples lived together — Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Korean.

In 1944 at the age of 19 he was drafted into the Japanese Imperial Army in Manchuria, but fortunately the war finished before he could be sent to the front.

He would have been taken prisoner by the advancing Russian army, but he somehow escaped and returned to Japan a year after the war ended. If he had been captured and sent to Siberia, how would he have felt about the Russian people?

I also remember his words, “I would have killed the enemy, if I had been in actual battle.”

I believe that soldiers that invade other countries don't want to kill people there. If they do so, it is because they are ordered to do so. The war forced them to do so.

I saw on a TV news program Russians and Ukrainians living in Japan joining in an anti-war demonstration. An editor on a Russian TV channel held up a sign on a live broadcast that said: “No War!” What we must do is oppose war, not slam people because of their nationalities.

I hope someday I can travel freely and safely and taste real borscht in the country where it was born. Let's say together, “Stop the war!” (March 21, Mt. Books)

Miei's got a brand-new pair of boots and a restyled "Code Blue" uniform now. Like the characters on that popular Japanese TV drama, she is part of a medical team dispatched to patients in a helicopter to provide medical care in the field.

Last month, at the conclusion of her two-year clinical training, she visited a school to demonstrate first aid procedures.

In my school days, we regularly practiced fire drills. But as a student in a Montessori pre-school in Minnesota, our girl participated in evacuation drills in case of devastating tornados. "Go down in the basement and protect your head!" was all she could recall from those lessons.

Today's school kids learn disaster prevention and emergency treatment as well.

One afternoon last March, she visited a public school as part of a team with a pilot, mechanic, paramedic, nurses, and flight doctors. In the schoolyard, all the 3rd year students of Okada junior high school waited to see the fire engine, an ambulance, and helicopter. In four groups, student trainees learned how to perform CPR, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation training. Using suture practice kits, one by one, they carefully stitched up pre-cut silicone "wounds" following Miei's instructions. Some of the girls who in the future wanted to be nurses, were pretty good. Perhaps they should set their sights on being doctors! Nurses don't get a chance to use those skills.

In the gymnasium, a girl expressed her thanks to the crew on behalf of the 3rd year students, declaring that as a nurse she would help victims in conflict zones around the world.

Miei, now a resident surgeon, remembered the earthquake and tsunami that hit northwest Japan in 2011. She was still in high school then. The catastrophe of 3.11 decided her future course in life and is what pushes her to continue pursue her goal still now. Miei strongly hopes this female student will reach her own goals, too.

Completing her clinical program amidst the Covid-19 pandemic was difficult, but from this month she starts her professional career at an ER Center. (Kazuyo Kajiwara)

Do you know *itadori* (Japanese knotweed)? It is now the season to enjoy picking and eating wild vegetables. Itadori grows wild all over Japan, from western Hokkaido southward. In spring, young shoots of itadori push out of the ground reminding one of bamboo shoots or asparagus. The young stalks begin to emerge after the cherry blossoms bloom and can be harvested from around April to May. The young stalks are shaped like asparagus, but inside they are hollow and knotty like bamboo. The leaf surface has red spots. It can be eaten raw, but has a strong sour taste. It contains oxalic acid, so it is safer to eat after removing the astringent taste.

In Japan, it is quite popular and eaten as *kinpira* (fried in soy sauce) or in miso soup. It is especially famous in Kochi Prefecture, where it is sold at vegetable stands every spring.

Sun-dried rhizome, also called creeping rootstalk, has long been used in folk medicine as a laxative. The young leaves are believed to have hemostatic and analgesic effects and are an ingredient in folk medicine. It is thought that the name "itadori" comes from its capacity to relieve pain.

The itadori is extremely prolific, and once established, chokes out other plants and trees. The plant has been designated as one of the "100 Worst Invasive Alien Species in the World". Philipp Franz Balthasar von Siebold, a German physician, botanist and traveler introduced the plant to Europe in the 19th century. It quickly became an invasive species threatening native vegetation due to its tendency to proliferate, its suitability to various habitats and absence of natural enemies. Its roots are strong enough to penetrate concrete and asphalt and the plant has caused damage to roads and sidewalks in North America.

In Japan, the plant's natural enemy, *madarakijirami*, prevents proliferation. This small insect has a cicada-like appearance. In England, it was adopted as a natural herbicide against itadori. I had no idea that itadori was considered a nuisance in England and North America. I hope that people will learn to savor it like the Japanese do. (Hiroko. T)

This is part 2 of a 3 part series on English education in Japan.

A new school year has started. In recent years, government has been making efforts toward improvements on the English education system. In April 2011, all elementary schools started English classes, this move receiving a lot of support from teachers of English-speaking countries.

If I could start over my school days, I think I would enjoy English classes. My generation missed out on the fun of learning another language. Come to think of it, I don't remember if I had even a moment of fun in my high school classes. I should have though.

These days, I teach English at home in a small classroom. Some mothers of students confess to me, "I studied English for years, but I cannot speak it at all. So I want my child to speak fluently!"

In my lessons we do “physical response” games. Students try to follow the teacher's or another learner's orders given in English such as "Touch your nose, turn around, walk backward", while holding a paper cup on their heads. If a player drops the cup, he/she loses the game. All have to concentrate on listening, carrying out orders carefully and even creating some instructions on their own. Children have fun with this sort of simple activity.

In my experience, English speaking skills are generally improved out of necessity. Most of my students quickly and naturally learn to ask questions like, "May I go to the bathroom?" "Can I drink tea?" Physiological desires enable them to speak out. With a few repetitions, these sort of phrases pop out of their mouths.

I would like to suggest school teachers make good use of such situations so as to encourage children's spontaneous talk. Babies unconsciously recognize new words, and earlier exposure to English learning would help even slightly older children to easily acquire more vocabulary and phrases. For example, school teachers could administrate in simple English during school lunch, cleaning time and recesses, so students can "experience" English words along with their daily routine.

Through comparison, students will also understand the unique concepts contained within the Japanese language as well. "Itadakimasu" said before eating school lunch for instance, carries a profound message. If I say "Let's eat" instead, I can't help feeling the meaning is something different. And that's the whole point of learning different languages. Interestingly, I reconsider Japanese, my native language, and our customs through speaking with foreigners.

Currently, third and fourth graders' English lessons occupy 45-minutes per week, which is obviously too short. The goals of English education in Japan are for students to acquire a global communication tool and better their future career prospects. They must gain real world skills, not only pass tests.

Thus, Content Language Integrated Learning, teaching subjects such as science, music and art using English as the language of instruction, is a practical method. On account of teacher's tight time schedule, I think this learning method would work efficiently.

I hope more teachers will try out more practical and fun lessons with their students in order to motivate them to acquire both Japanese and English while they are very young! (Miwa N.)