

# MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, May 2022

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

## May Spirit

The other day I made potato salad with *okara*. Potato salad is usually made with potatoes. I made it with *okara* instead of potatoes. Ingredients include raw *okara*, cucumber, carrots, ham, boiled egg and whatever else generally goes in potato salad. Seasonings are mayonnaise, vinegar, salt, pepper, yoghurt and mustard.

*Okara* salad is nice. But it is a little dry compared to potato salad. *Okara* is the residue left over when soy milk is squeezed out of soybeans in the process of producing tofu. In other words, *okara* is the lees of soy milk. It is also called "Unohana" (deutzia flower) because it is white, and "Kirazu" (no need to cut) because it can be eaten without cutting with a knife. It is a familiar food in Japan, China and Korea, high in nutritional value and dietary fiber and is often eaten warm.

It is also inexpensive. However, it goes bad rather quickly and can't be kept for long, so most of it is disposed of except that which is used for livestock feed or dehydrated to be added as an ingredient to other food products.

In recent years, *okara* has been used in cakes and cookies. Blending it with pancake mix gives breakfast a unique texture that is very popular. Why don't you give it a try? (Hiroko.T)

She called me just before Ramadan, the most sacred month for members of the Muslim faith, falling in April this year. I have many Muslim friends, especially those from ASEAN countries. They are all chatty, passionate, and easily moved to tears. No exception.

15 years ago, I was her neighbor, and I learned about her faith from her. She always maintained that the doctrines and teachings of Islam were very close to Christianity. I feel the same way.

Speaking of fasting, followers of the Jewish faith once observed fasts, and Catholics also fasted during Lent before Easter, at least until the 19th century. Perhaps, some Buddhist priests still fast today as part of their spiritual training. More than a billion people celebrate Ramadan during which the faithful refrain from eating and drinking during the daylight hours. But Ramadan is not simply a month of fasting. Muslims believe fasting opens the gate to paradise, is a way to practice self-restraint and self-reflection and to show empathy for those less fortunate than themselves.

It's a time for prayer, performing good deeds, giving up bad habits and helping people in need. I was at her place, and while she served tea for me, she never even touched one drop of water.

"Never mind," she said. Her smile healed me. That's what she wanted. To be with her sick neighbor.

Each day, Muslim women work so hard preparing both pre-dawn and sunset meals. And I remember right after Ramadan, she was stuck in the kitchen preparing for the "Eid al Fitr" festival, the breaking of the fast.

Across Ehime, starved young Muslim students pack small university apartments. They come together to celebrate the end of Ramadan with families and friends. And eat. Now, here is my chance to invite her over for tea. Yes, I'm all set. (Kazuyo Kajiwara)

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

I remember the first time in my life I spoke English to a foreigner. A long time ago, on my junior high's May school trip to Kyoto, I attempted to communicate with a Westerner at Kiyomizu temple. "Hello. W...where are you from?" My heart beat fast, as I found myself speaking English to a foreigner in person. Other friends of mine took steps backward, keeping their eyes on us. I even asked him to write out his name and address. I had an interest in English but never met foreigners in my neighborhood.

Back in English class, I showed my teacher his note. Mr. Mori never praised me for getting up the courage to speak out. On the contrary he said, "Eh! Kadena is the U.S. Air Force base in Okinawa. Scary! Be more careful whenever you go up to foreigners. One could be in the mafia or be a bad guy." Some of my classmates burst out laughing at his jokey tone. I was embarrassed.

Junior high English instruction has improved since I was a student. Today Japanese junior high school students are expected to build an English vocabulary of up to 1800 words and learn its basic grammar. But are their speaking skills also improving, at least when compared with my school days? Unfortunately, students' hesitation to speak English hasn't changed much in decades. They simply don't know how to start a conversation or are afraid of making grammatical mistakes. Why do they have such a fear of English and why do they stumble so in their studies? It is not because they are shy. As I mentioned in my essay in April, elementary schools have been trying to incorporate active learning in English classes.

However at junior high school, English education takes a different direction. Its system is geared to emphasize students' reading and grammar acquisition, and as a result, lessons distract or even traumatize students. Because teachers evaluate them mainly according to test scores and academic reports, students feel powerless after taking paper tests, which focus exclusively on reading and grammar, a little on listening and not at all on speaking.

Still, many Japanese want to be fluent speakers. I wonder how and when they can overcome this imbalance between grammatical knowledge and fear of speaking. Today's students have chances to listen to the native pronunciation of Assistant Language Teachers. I hope native speakers are able to energize their classes by teaching communicative English and are patient enough to encourage students to speak.

We should remember that a global community requires dialogs over borders, beyond different backgrounds, particularly in this era of turmoil. Hopefully, junior high school English instruction will promote the nurturing of youngsters' attitudes toward international understanding.

When my children had a school trip to Kyoto in May several years ago, their teachers told them to interact with foreign visitors. Inside, I pumped my fist! (Miwa N.)

One sunny spring day, my daughter and I drove down the Amakusa peninsula in Kumamoto to visit Sakitsu village. Sakitsu was added to the World Heritage List in 2018 as one of the Hidden Christian Sites. "Hidden Christian" is a term for members of the Catholic Church in Japan that went underground at the start of the Edo period in the early 17th century due to Christianity's repression by the Tokugawa shogunate.

Before visiting the village, we stopped at the city museum in Amakusa city. On display is a battle flag depicting bread and wine, the symbols of their faith. The bloodstained flag is a replica. Occasionally the real flag is exhibited, but it is conserved as an Important Cultural Property. The flag reveals just how fierce the Amakusa Shimabara Rebellion was, the biggest rebellion of the Edo

period in which 35,000 people died.

Exploring the exhibits, I learned that the last battle was fought at Hara castle in Shimabara, Nagasaki, where Hidden Christians led by Amakusa Shiro, barricaded themselves in the castle. I often stayed at an inn there during my summer vacations. According to a map on display, the residential areas of Arima and Arie, the same place from which my grandparents came, supplied all the rebellion's members. I wasn't aware that the area had once been a Hidden Christian stronghold. Perhaps my ancestors took part in a ritual called 'fumie' in which suspected Christians were required by religious authorities to step on a likeness of Jesus or Mary in order to demonstrate that they were not members of the outlawed religion. Otherwise they would be tortured or killed.

There is an island called Yushima between Amakusa and Shimabara. I used to be able to see the island from the ferryboat on the trip to Shimabara. It is said people in Amakusa and Shimabara planned the rebellion from the island. I'd never imagined the island held such a key place in history.

The Sakitsu church stands where fumie was once committed, on the spot where a missionary in those far off violent days had hoped to build a church. The church has tatami mats, not common flooring for a place of worship. Because of the long religious repression they suffered, people in Sakitsu have a custom of displaying shimenawa (Shinto New Year's decorations) all year, something they did in order not to arouse the suspicion of Tokugawa authorities.

The image of Virgin Mary was made to resemble a Buddhist goddess. Worshippers would chant "Anmenriyusu" instead of "Amen Deus". This was a unique practice among Hidden Christians. Village people thought of abalone or mussel shells as resembling icons of the Virgin Mary. Their continuous faith under religious persecution was inspiring.

Visiting Sakitsu village motivated me to visit another Hidden Christian Site in the Nagasaki area. My visit also sparked a desire to not only research more about the Hidden Christians, but search out more of my family history, as well.

(Seiko Gyotoku)