

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, June 2022

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar— Changing Seasons, Changing Clothes

June is a month for changing clothes. Students change their school uniform from spring clothes to summer clothes. I have a memory regarding school uniforms. I transferred to another school when I was in my third grade of junior high school. My mother had to buy me a new school uniform I would only wear for one year, so the school administration allowed me to use the vest that I had worn at my previous school.

One day after classes, I was walking home alone, when I realized some second grade girls were following me. I was a little nervous because they were famous for being the school's "bad girls". I was already halfway home, when the girls finally made me stop. One girl said "Give me your vest." I was worried they would try to take my vest right then and there. Then she said "When you graduate school, you won't need your uniform anymore, right? So can I have your vest after graduation?" I was a little confused, but relieved because they were not as scary as I thought they'd be. So I quickly answered, "No" and hurried home. My new school's vest had a side zip, but mine buttoned up the front, so it looked more like a high school vest, so I guess the girl wanted to wear it because it was different from the one she wore.

During the 1980's, altering school uniforms was popular among rebellious boys and girls in Japan. Of course doing this was a violation of school regulations, but still they shortened their jackets or skirts, or wore their skirts very long. And a "Gakuran" bad boys' stand-up collar jacket had beautiful embroidery inside. However, I rarely see such restyled school uniforms recently. Maybe it's just not popular anymore, or students have more interesting things to do like following social media. (Chiharu. I)

During Golden Week holidays last month, I finally unstitched an old kimono from my mom's collection. It's a shame that I didn't share her taste in Kimono, or appreciate how much she loved them until she passed away. Mom enjoyed sewing, especially Oshima-tsumugi, hand-woven silk fabric pieces with mud-dyed thread.

Even though kimonos are completely hand-sewn, it was a lot of work for me to take the kimono apart. That would all cost ¥3,000," a saleslady of Takashimaya department store told me. Now I see that their price is actually pretty reasonable. I spent two days, morning till night pulling out all the stitching and two more days hand-washing the kimono, drying it in the shade, and ironing it. An economic analyst estimates that in a chest of drawers an ordinary Japanese family stores kimono and obi sashes about equal in value to a Mercedes' Benz. I'm skeptical about this number. Maybe some families do, definitely not ours. Lately sales of used kimono are becoming more popular, and that makes me a bit sad. Many people easily throw away their family inheritance, selling kimono by weight, and for very little money. From this month, I'm going to remake an autumn coat from an antique Oshima-tsumugi. It will be exciting to make it by myself. That is, if I can figure out how. Fortunately, I met a great sewing coach last June. At Volunteer City Guide training. We met up every weekend, and I fell in love with the fancy dresses she made. She is not just an elegant dressmaker but incredibly patient with her students. I can hardly believe that I made a tunic with some scraps from my

mother's emerald-colored Mon-tsuki kimono marked with the family crest. Wish I could show it to my mom! Her Saturday lessons are great, and I hope to complete my project by the end of the summer. (Kazuyo Kajiwara)

In a hushed rock garden, many Japanese sit up straight quietly to focus on stilling the mind. They strive to sense the atmosphere and read the air so as to behave properly in public. For me, historical places sometimes feel too ceremonious to relax.

Koshin-an, Kurita Chodo's house built in 1800, allowed this famous haiku poet to enjoy his retreat from concerns and worries of everyday life. It is an Important Cultural Asset but also a place that makes visitors feel comfortable. Its garden, a small sanctuary located between Matsuyama townhouses, opens their gate to anyone for free. When I visited there with a friend last month, the garden had irises, azaleas and peonies in bloom. The wooden porch framed the two hundred-year-old mossy trunk of a wisteria. A cool breeze swayed the cascading purple flowers and floated into the room. No wonder locals, office workers, and even school children casually drop by the spot. And best of all, we laid on our backs in the cozy tatami room. We made ourselves at home for a few minutes, and the staffer didn't care at all. Soon one visitor stopped by and spoke to us. She was a university professor. She told us that her students had devoted themselves to preserving this site as a Cultural Property, presenting a petition to City Hall. Matsuyama city worked out a plan for restoring the teetering Edo-era thatched hut, piecing together parts of the pillars and ceiling boards and completing the house in 2003. It retains an antique look now.

Another visitor, an amateur photographer, taught me how to capture a perfect shot of the garden. I cast my imagination over the years. With my eyes closed, I could time travel to the poet's day. Chodo is looking at the courtyard and composing linked verse with a fellow poet. Will Chodo let me join in their poetic dialog? Yes. Indeed.

He hoped that locals would meet up, relax, and enhance their appreciation of culture at his house. Through Koshin-an, Chodo's will has been fulfilled for 222 years.

All my thoughts come through
The way I mean them to be
Swaying wisterias

(Miwa N.)

I have been growing an air plant for about 2 months now. Air plants are epiphytic plants that draw moisture from the air and absorb it into their leaves without the need for soil or roots.

They are fascinating plants because there are so many varieties, and the plants all look different. The plants themselves can be grown hanging from or rolled on a stand. Watering is basically done with a sprayer. It's hassle-free and can be handled in a clean and tidy manner.

Mine is a hanging plant. Its shape makes it look like a floating jellyfish. The head, which resembles an upside down bowl, is made of sea urchin shells. The plant is inserted in a hole underneath the bowl. I have it growing in front of a bright window in my kitchen. I have never seen a Martian, but I think my plant looks like a Martian dancing. So, I've named my plant "Martian". Air plants need more than air to grow. They also need to be watered.

Every night before I go to bed, I water "Martian" generously with a misting spray. When I water him, he spins around and does a dance, which is very cute. (Hiroko.T)