

# MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, July 2022

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

## July Break

Nowadays, most Japanese homes have a toilet with many advanced functions, such as a bidet, auto cleaning, and a heated seat. Many other countries' people admire hygienic, hi-tech toilets manufactured in Japan. However, only two decades ago, lots of places in Japan didn't even have sewer lines for flush toilets constructed yet. All houses in my hometown had pit latrines. It goes without saying that bathrooms were unsanitary and very stinky. I particularly hated the toilet at my grandparents' house. I had to avoid seeing the waste down in the pit, and could hardly stop worrying about it. Crouching over the bowl, I was scared just thinking what would happen if I should drop down into the pit.

In my university days, 1990's Osaka, my boarding house also had a septic tank toilet. Several students shared it, but nobody would ever clean the filthy toilet. An old woman, the homeowner's wife, had to scrub the toilet bowl on her knees.

My father volunteered to work with the "Let's Install Flush Toilets Project" in the late 1990's. He visited a sewage facility in Kuma, Ehime prefecture where the project had already been a success. He then went about acquiring his neighbors' cooperation for the project. I hear it required some convincing because many farmers still had toilets located outside their houses. When the project was completed, I was surprised at the remarkable changes in our lifestyle. My mother even decorated our new bathroom wall with a wreath of sunflowers. And later, when my father suffered from colorectal cancer, he had to use paoa Colostomy bag and probably appreciated the convenience of a flush toilet.

I cannot talk about my short trip to Inner Mongolia without mentioning their very wild, primitive toilets. In July 1998, during my stay in Pao, I used a trench toilet without modesty-preserving walls or curtains. I unexpectedly had to watch one girl in front of me bending over the trench, while another girl behind me who had accompanied me on the tour did the same. Did it smell? I don't remember if the constant stench came from the ditch or goats and sheep around the Pao. But apart from such inconvenience, the great plain's summer was absolutely stunning. Toilets are an integral part of our lives.

The restroom environment and toilet functions keep developing super fast. Still, even the latest models become useless in the aftermath of a disaster. For example, I store some gel that solidifies liquid waste in case our toilet can't flush following an earthquake.

Occasionally, I think about my days in elementary school. Japanese students learn how to clean toilets as a part of their education. Perhaps that is why I still have guilty feelings about the cleaning my boarding house landlady had to do. I wish I could have had the courage and kindness to help her clean that toilet. (Miwa N.)

Yesterday I went to the Matsuyama City Archaeology Museum to see an ancient lotus flower. I read a newspaper article that noted they were in bloom again this year. The Archeology Museum grows the Dalian Ancient Lotus, a flower that was germinated from a 1,000-year-old seed from Dalian, China.

In 1996, when a tourist delegation from Dalian visited Matsuyama City, the seeds were presented to the museum. The sight of this large flower blooming in the water possesses a beauty that is truly separate from this mundane world. The origin of the lotus flower includes the notion that the flower bed contains seeds that resemble a beehive, which is why it was called "*hachi-su*" in ancient times, and eventually abbreviated to "*hasu*".

The lotus blooms at *Koukokan* from June to August. Buds bloom about 2 to 3 weeks after they rise to the surface of the water. Their color is pink. They bloom for three days. On the first day, the flowers open around 7 AM and close around noon. The next day, they bloom again in the morning and close in the afternoon. On the third day, the flowers open in the morning and drop off in the afternoon.

The color of the petals is darkest on the first day and gradually becomes lighter pink on the second and third days. Each shade has its own quaint beauty. I have never seen the petals fall on the third day, but I would love to see the petals fluttering down.

Because this ancient lotus, which awakened from a sleep of a **millennium** to flower, blooms for only three days, we love these flowers and they always seem to put us in a romantic mood.

Incidentally, last year, the flowers bloomed on June 9, and a total of 55 flowers were in bloom by August 18.

Now I am looking forward to seeing how many lotuses will bloom this year. (Hiroko.T)

Saturday night market, the fireworks display at Mitsuhamma and the Matsuyama Festival are all popular summer festivities in Matsuyama. For the first time in three years, these seasonal events are being held this summer.

It's nice to see crowds gradually returning to downtown shopping areas and restaurants. Due to Covid-19, many stores had gone out of business and the number of shuttered shops downtown were increasing. The closure notices posted on the shutters in the shopping arcade always got me down. Despite the pandemic, some shops stubbornly survived.

One Saturday afternoon, my husband and I came across a funky little place. C'est La Vie is a tiny café with a retro '80's feel. A sign boasts of their 'super-strong house-roasted coffee'.

It's a 10-minute walk from Shieki located just along the narrow side street past *Kotori* and *Asahi*, two well-known *Udon* noodle shops on the same block. Both are family-run restaurants that have been serving udon since the late '40s.

Hesitating in front of the small café, we argued over whether to go in or not. This happens quite often between us because Isao isn't interested in anywhere he's never been. Even if he is a big coffee lover. Eventually, though, he followed me inside the coffee shop. An old-fashioned roaster immediately grabbed our attention. Soon a young couple seated us.

Isao was excited to order the Guatemalan coffee from a selection of 20 varieties of house-roasted beans. I asked the owner, who wore an ironed white shirt with a bow tie, to choose a milder blend for me, and he selected Columbian.

C'est La Vie is a must-try café, brewing a varied menu of coffees served in local Tobe pottery. No disposable paper/plastic cups. ¥350. One size only, no Grande, nor Venti. But, you can get a second cup for only ¥200 more. (Kazuyo Kajiwara)