

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, August 2022

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

Summer Sacrifices

The novel *Hachigatsu no Haha* depicts various mothers' stories with brutal frankness. How parents can twist and sometimes even destroy their own children. "I was inspired by a dreadful incident that occurred in Ehime. Ehime has an outdated conservative atmosphere that encourages people to compromise their life goals," the writer states.

I have lived in Ehime too long to observe the locals objectively. Knowing the darkness in your own hometown is uncomfortable, still I think we should not look away from uncomfortable reality because we are a part of that society. Michiko, one of the characters in Hayami Kazumasa's novel, wants to leave home, but her mother doesn't allow her. Her daughter, Erika fails to escape from her mother too. Erika always leaves her apartment door open to youngsters who have nowhere else to go. However, anger and jealousy ends up unleashing violence that leads to a deadly gang-bashing of an innocent girl.

My hometown somehow has an entrenched attitude against women. Single mothers are apt to be helpless and isolated. People turn a blind eye to issues but like to gossip behind each other's backs. Most mothers are under pressure from their families and society. Even I often tell myself to act like "a mother" rather than "a woman". Like it or not, once I began raising kids, I became in the eyes of the community, a mother, giving up what I wanted to do.

One of the characters states, "August is the time people go insane." Wrath, despair, grudges and a sense of stagnation, such negative feelings are exposed and explode into violence in August. Summer heat boils down and distills my own ambivalence.

What is an ideal mother? When my children don't do well, is it my fault? I feel guilty when I prioritize my stuff over their interests, but where does this feeling come from? This conflict sways these feelings in a more negative direction.

Why do adults worry about keeping up appearances? Why are men poor at communicating with their children particularly when they need to be listened to? Why do grandparents expect at least one of their children or grandchildren to stay close in the community and succeed their name? I confront these questions probably because I live in Ehime.

All parents to some degree manipulate or even depend on their children. Children abandon their dreams for the sake of their parents. Aside from whether it's right or wrong, our culture has this friction generation after generation. People are brittle. Families are fragile. In August 2014, a 17-year-old girl was beaten to death by the group of teenagers she was living with in Iyo city, an intolerable crime. The key culprit in the case is still in jail. The entire truth will probably remain hidden because people would prefer simply not to discuss it. That's why I hold to this novel in order to seek psychological clues. In the epilogue, Erika's daughter, Hinata finally breaks the vicious cycle that her great grandmother started. I regard the ending as hopeful for all Ehime women in spite of its fiction.

(Miwa N.)

“One number makes a villain, millions a hero.
Numbers sanctify, my good fellow.”
-Monsieur Verdoux

Even Charlie Chaplin forgot to mention the non-human beings killed in wars. Somehow, I can't just pass by monuments, especially ones that are new to me.

At the foot of the hill on which stands the archeological museum, you'll find the stone memorial tower dedicated to war animals. It's been there for 80 years. During WWII, more than 700,000 horses were requisitioned for military use. During the 20th century on every battlefield, horses, German Shepherds and Dobermans, even carrier pigeons were used as living weapons. After Japan's defeat, the military animals not killed by bullets were confiscated by the allied forces. Animals were not subject to repatriation and all were left behind. None of them returned home to Japan.

But, who really regarded uncountable cattle as war victims? Cows, pigs, sheep, goats, dogs, cats, and rabbits?

The cenotaph was built in 1944 by a lieutenant general of the Imperial Army. Due to a rice shortage, a patriotic campaign called on Japanese citizens to not only donate metal items for making weapons, but also their pets to be used as food for the soldiers. Till the end of the war, people were strictly forbidden to keep pets. In each neighborhood, people watched each other and reported those who violated that order. They also donated their farm animals for making soldiers' hats and winter coats. In those days, fur and leather were the best materials for protecting soldiers on the front lines against the intense cold of Korea, Manchuria and Northwest China. Photos of my father show him wearing such a uniform.

All kinds of souls here rest in peace.

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)