

# MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, September 2022

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

## Climb to Autumn

The Bubble Economy was like a long, giddy festival. And although it proved to be illusory, for better or for worse, it was a part of my life and has remained a large part of who I am today.

The Japanese economy boomed in 1985, and what is now known as the Bubble Era brought us unprecedented affluence until it collapsed in 1992. That year I started work at a local TV station. People in my new working environment excited and inspired me and undoubtedly added spice to my life. My bosses often treated us, the new recruits, to drinks and meals after work. Some single males set up "goukon," a group blind date. They were assertive in their relationships with women, compared with today's so-called herbivore men.

Our business clients invited us to go cruising on private yachts. I spent my paid holidays traveling abroad. So did some of my coworkers. One night, my coworker took me to Maharaja, a disco now symbolic of the Bubble Boom. She dragged me onto the long raised platform and handed me a feather fan. The girls danced frantically showing their white thighs under their body conscious dresses. They seemed so cool. The rallying cry of "Go! Go! Get whatever you want!" still whirled around us there in the eye of the tornado even after the Japanese economy's glory days had ended. The flamboyance of that period lingered in our industry a bit longer.

This summer, I went to a concert by the pop singer Matsutoya Yumi. Her stage embodied the Bubble Era's sparky atmosphere. Contrary to the stereotype of Japanese women as shy and obedient, her songs were about proactive women of the '80s and '90s playing games with love that distinguished between men to commit to and men to play with. For instance, a girl in one of her songs easily gives herself to boyfriends until she finds a favorite among them. In case she is about to be snubbed, she breaks up by herself, because she doesn't want to see herself as a loser. To love someone was somehow competitive.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Law passed in 1985. Women could both continue their careers and raise children, whereas my company still instilled in their employees, "Men work hard, women help" mentality. Many coworkers chose to get married, quit their jobs, and become full-time housewives. We didn't blame them for their decision to depend on their husbands' income, rather we were jealous that they managed to catch well-off, eligible bachelors. As a matter of course, their wedding receptions were all big and splashy.

But the Bubble Economy was long ago. This year, two former colleagues wrote me, "My children are grown up now. Recently I am studying to get certified." In retrospect, I made the most of being single. Such days have gone completely, yet something of those vivacious times still remains in me.

(Miwa N.)

Form DS-160 asked her questions about her last five visits to the United States and all the cities she'd visited while she was there. "Let's see, Minneapolis in 2002 and San Francisco, Anchorage, and Chicago in 2014. That's it!"

It occurred to me to double-check all my old passports to see the kind of paperwork she'd be up

against. To tackle the subject of applying for her J1 Visa and a lease for an apartment and buying some furniture, we got together for a midnight family LINE meeting last summer. This will be her third visit to the U.S., but the first one without ME. She is a big girl now. This fall quarter, the end of this month, Erior is doing an Internship at the virology lab of Arkansas State University.

Only 1,487 Japanese students studied at colleges or universities in foreign countries throughout the 2020-21 academic year. JASSO, Japan Student Services Organization reports a decrease of 98.6 % over the previous year due to the pandemic.

Last year when she was a sophomore, our daughter was thrilled to be able to enroll in a summer course at Adelaide University in Australia, but she ended up taking the class remotely from her apartment. She's among the first generation of COVID-19 university students and is now a junior in medicine. The dean of the medical school has determinedly kept med students out of both the classroom and the hospitals. Except for anatomy class, she had almost all of her classes online. Due to COVID-19 she missed out on group activities with her friends, field study tours, exchange programs, an international student conference and clinical training as well.

“Back to school, it's September!” This has always sounded so sweet and special to my ears, especially this year!

I am here as always and waiting to hear exciting stories about her new friends, challenges, and even her struggles in the “Natural State” of Arkansas. Go, Girl! (Kazuyo Kajiwara)

In early July I went to Hokkaido for two weeks of climbing in the mountains. There were eight of us in our party. Our first destination was Rebun Island. Rebun Island is the northernmost island in Japan where you can find alpine plants growing zero meters above sea level. From spring to summer, about 300 species of alpine flowers are in full bloom.

On the first day, we walked through the flower fields in the southern part of the island, viewing the west coast with its cliffs and blue sea. On the second day, we enjoyed visiting the capes in the northern area. On the third day we climbed Mt. Rebundake (490 m), the highest peak on the island. From the summit, we were able to see the entire island and a panoramic view of Rishiri Island floating on the sea in the distance besides. Mt. Rishiri (1,721m) with its snow covered ravines and peaks was very beautiful.

The next day, we moved on to our next destination, Asahikawa. We planned to stay for 5 days in a mountain lodge at the foot of Mt. Asahidake and go climbing in the Daisetsuzan mountains.

We had to cook our meals for ourselves, but we looked forward to enjoying a natural hot spring bath with free-flowing water. Our first climb was Mt. Asahidake (2290.9m), the highest mountain in Hokkaido. We woke up at 4:00 a.m. and prepared and ate breakfast at 5. After tidying up the kitchen, we left the mountain lodge at 6:00 a.m. with the packed lunch we'd made the night before.

We took the ropeway at Asahidake Sanroku Station and got off at Sugatami Station. There was almost no wind, and the weather was sunny and hazy. From there, we climbed up the mountain, viewing white vapor rising from Jigokudani's (Hell Valley), beautiful snow-covered valleys and ponds. Between Sugatami station (1590m) and Ishimuro (1660m), many alpine plants were in bloom. I enjoyed rhododendrons, ezokozakura, chinguruma, tsugazakura decorating the mountain slopes.

Mt. Asahidake is the highest mountain in Hokkaido, and I tried my best while climbing, so we arrived at the summit earlier than we expected. I was relieved and happy to have reached the top

and see the ridge line with a snow ravine in the distance and a field of clouds. Another exciting thing happened to me at the summit as well. I got to meet Kenjiro Ishimaru, a commentator on my favorite radio program, NHK Yama Cafe. It was truly a once in a lifetime experience and great to meet one of my favorite personalities at the top of Mt. Asahidake in Hokkaido, far from Matsuyama!

From the next day to the last day, the weather was reasonably good, and our whole party was able to climb all of the mountains on our itinerary.

The 2-week trip in the mountain was full of wonderful sights of both the ocean and the mountains. We were very happy to see so many alpine plants. Really, the only hard part was cooking for ourselves over a total of 10 days on Rebun Island, at Asahikawa lodge and Uryu lodge. We were all extremely tired from shopping for all our food, waking up early in the morning making all our meals and cleaning up after ourselves. It was a repetitive routine.

I thought that this year would be the last time I would go on such a hard mountain climb. However, if a similar climb is planned for next year, maybe I'll join. [\(Hiroko.T\)](#)