

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, February 2022

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

Portraits of February

A century ago, Earl Sadakoto Hisamatsu displayed two oil paintings in his French style villa. Allegedly, the paintings were intended to signify to Bansuiso's visitors how great was the Hisamatsu family's domain.

The other day, inspired by this framed scenery of the Matsuyama plain, instead of taking the bypass, my family made a small detour to Misaka Pass. A few hairpin turns finally led us to a spot where we could clearly view the landscape. I took a deep breath in the crisp mountain air and gazed over the stunning scenery.

I compared this long-distance panorama, viewed from 600 meters-high, to a photograph of one of the Earl's paintings I'd saved on my cellphone and discovered a little more hiking would be required to arrive at the same vantage point.

My father-in-law, usually so soft spoken, suddenly revealed himself to be an excellent guide. Even though I've lived in Matsuyama a total of twenty years, without his information, I couldn't have picked out anything except the Seto Inland Sea.

"Can you see the two green horizontal lines? The one on this side is the Shigenobu river, and the other one over there, the Ishite river. That wide ground on the left is Matsuyama Airport, and the tiny hill in the middle is Matsuyama Castle, so from that you can figure out where your house is, huh?" I took a picture and zoomed in as close as possible, but I could barely identify the pinprick in the photo as my neighborhood.

I like the moment when I realize myself a tiny existence amongst a vast nature. A spectacular view can easily make my worries inconsequential. I can give myself over to nature.

Perhaps I can appreciate this town more than Sadakoto, a descendant of Matsuyama's last castle lord, did in his day. Besides its amazing sights, Matsuyama has gentle people, day-to-day convenience, a good environment for young and old, and many delicious delicacies.

My ambition is to discover beautiful scenery and unique local culture with visitors. However, even if you are a local, you can always have a chance to experience your town like a newcomer.

If you have a curious eyes, you can see something ordinary as something better in better ways.

(Miwa N.)

The weather was fine on Saturday, January 22, so at 8:30 a.m., we set off for Kanbayashi Forest Park, the trailhead of Mt. Saragamine. My grandchildren, who live nearby, announced they were going to go sledding in the parking lot, so I decided to join them.

But my plan was to climb Mt. Saragamine.

There had been so much snow this winter that tire chains were necessary on the roads that day. I don't have chains, and, anyway, I don't know how to use them. That's why, during the snowy season, I can't drive on the mountain roads by myself.

Finally, we arrived at a large parking lot. There were already about ten cars there driven by people that must have been planning on climbing as well.

The snow cover was much more than I expected. My grandchildren immediately pulled on

boots and helmets, and started pulling their sled up a gentle slope. I waved to them, "Have fun playing with your sleigh!"

Then I put on my crampons and set off on my first snowy mountain climb of the season.

I was disappointed that there was no hoarfrost at all, which I had hoped for. However, the mountain path was covered with snow.

Making our way up the snow-covered mountain made me feel very happy. As we approached the summit, the amount of snow increased, and gradually there was a lot more snow on the mountain slopes.

When the sun shines on the snow, it glitters and is very beautiful. Just before reaching the top of Mt. Saragamine, there is a place where I could see Mt. Ishizuchi.

It was a beautiful day and the air was very clear, so I was able to see snow-capped Mt. Ishizuchi. I was overwhelmed by the wonderful view and grateful for a wonderful day!

(Hiroko T.)

Her wavering handwriting fixed my attention.

I'd received a postcard of the coldest season's greetings from Tokue, my aunt-in-law.

After my mother's brother passed away, she decided to admit herself to a nursing home in town. She has no children.

It was sad for me that she left the big house where my mother was born and raised, but she was one of the last residents in her mountain village, and if wild boar and deer move into the empty mansion, there's nothing one can really do about it.

During WW II, Auntie Tokue married my uncle right after her high-school graduation. This was NOT her choice but her father's. The marriage contract was easily arranged between the two wealthy families. In those days, my grandfather was the largest landowner in the village. Auntie worked hard throughout her life dedicated to my uncle, a freewheeling sort of guy, and his family.

After this pandemic finishes, I'll visit her again and listen to her stories, especially those about my great-grandpa. With his support, my mother was able to spend her teens in the dormitories of boarding schools and, afterwards, attend a women's college.

He definitely cared for both his relatives and his community, organizing harvest festivals ensuring Kagura sacred music and dancing were performed at the local shrine.

Day after day, he tried to persuade local farmers to install running water and a wireless communication network between all the houses in the village.

Moreover, because infants were often placed in baskets on the pathway between the rice paddies while their mothers labored in the fields, he decided to open a daycare center. A humble village councilor, not a go-getter, he generously gave away his goat's milk to the poor.

Perhaps, she knows more about who he was.

Auntie Tokue is a witness to our family history, and I can't wait to see her.

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)