

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, February 2023

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

February Chocolate

I've been managing a small English class in my home for 15 years. In order to recruit new learners, around this time of the year, I distribute hundreds of flyers in my neighborhood. On the flyers, a description of the courses, the time table and lesson fees are listed.

The other night, I got a phone call. "Hey, didn't you look at the sign, 'No flyers'? How dare you put your flyer in my mailbox!" The shouting, raspy voice coming through the line frightened me, and I quickly apologized. "I'm sorry. It won't happen again, so if you don't want it, please just throw it away." Although I apologized to him, he wasn't going to let it go. "Shut up! Come to my house and get it!" He warned that in case I didn't turn up, he would report me to the police.

I got into a panic not knowing how to deal with this sudden harassment, and I hesitated to pick up when the second phone call came. I decided not to. Because my cellphone number was listed on the flyer, he started calling over and over and over. He went ballistic, as if he would force me to come over and retrieve the brochure whatever it took. As he knew my name and address, I thought I shouldn't ignore him. I was unable to bear his persistence, so I decided I'd better face up to him.

My husband was concerned for my safety and accompanied me to the house.

To my surprise, in the freezing cold, a man in his 70s waited at the gate, looking toward the direction from which we were coming. To avoid any argument, my husband asked his forgiveness and I bowed deeply. Still he continued bellowing while pointing to a tiny sticker on his mailbox.

"No flyers". Moreover, he ordered me to write a letter of apology and return to his house and deliver it to him. I flinched from his relentless manner and could hardly tolerate his obstinacy. However, I also felt there was no better way to soothe his anger except by apologizing, so kept humbly begging his pardon. Finally with a surly shove he passed me the flyer.

On the way home I wondered why he'd acted that way. Perhaps his company compelled him to submit a letter of apology whenever he failed an assignment. His house looked impressive, but maybe he was stressed-out and lonely. I often see advertising flyers randomly stuffed in mail slots. Some apartments' boxes are overflowing with them, but I guess most people don't care.

I don't understand his way of spending energy, time, and telephone fees in order to get rid of a piece of paper. I feel bad that my carelessness led to trouble, but I also know that one flyer can inspire someone to take English lessons, and that can change a person's life.

At any rate human beings can lose their temper whatever the trigger may be, so we should always keep our wits about us. That is what I learned. (Miwa N.)

A new year has begun. On three days of warm weather, I visited six shrines and five temples for Hatsumode (New Year's visit).

I went to shrines and temples within walking distance of my house. Still, each pilgrimage took me around 3 to 4 hours a day.

I would like to tell you about two of the temples I visited. Gokurakuji-Temple and Jodoji-Temple are located in Takanoko-cho, Matsuyama City. On the second day, I visited Gokurakuji-Temple first. The precincts of the temple were very beautifully maintained. Then I walked along a rough mountain path, counting stone Buddhas placed in various spots on the hill behind the temple.

Next, I visited Jodoji-Temple. Jodoji is right next to Gokurakuji-Temple. This temple is very splendid, and is the 49th of the 88 Temple Pilgrimage on Shikoku Island. Many people come here for Hatsumode.

On the hill behind Jodoji-Temple, there is a sort of condensed 88 temple pilgrimage. Stones inscribed with the name of each temple from 1 to 88. It is said that if you walk along this path, you have visited all 88 temples. Of course, I was happy to do so, and I was able to complete this mini-pilgrimage in no time, but I am not sure if it was beneficial or not.

Notice the names of these two temples. If the names are combined, they form the word Gokuraku-jodo (Paradise). What a lucky name, don't you think?

I had a feeling that it would bring me good fortune.

(Hiroko.T)

The box of Neuhaus reads, "Halal, palm oil-free, alcohol-free, all ingredients of natural origin, made in Belgium."

I enjoyed the authentic taste. Bringing this special chocolate, she visited us on holiday. If I'm correct, her name means 'Garden in Heaven' in Arabic. It was exciting to see her again and finally meet her Polish husband. She is a young diplomat, a stunning, brilliant lady with such confidence.

Long ago one February, we moved from Nara, the ancient capital of Japan, and started a new life in the suburbs of Matsuyama. At the family dorm on the medical school campus, we met an incredibly kind Indian-Bangladesh family. This true hearted Indian woman is the most compassionate person I've ever met.

Every afternoon, I saw their pretty high-school girl coming home on the train. Year later, the family journeyed to Tokyo to join their girl who had gone there to study. This girl had a clear idea of her future career and decided early on to obtain Japanese citizenship. Japanese citizenship is required for any person who wants to be a public servant

She spent two years training at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For another two years, she studied for an MA at Oxford. While at school, a romance bloomed between her and the right guy, a Polish diplomat! As a young official, she served at the Japanese Embassies in both Tanzania and Ethiopia. Her latest location, since last August, had been the European Union in Brussels where she is stationed with her husband.

During the Olympic Games, I would have never predicted Russia would invade the Ukraine, or that war would still be waging a year later.

Remembering conversations with that couple, and especially their dedication to their jobs, I genuinely expect more diplomacy among nations.

Fewer arms, more chocolates.

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)