

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, March 2023

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

Yesterday and Brighter Tomorrows

Thank goodness, day by day I see more tourists in town. Slowly, we are getting back our everyday routines.

This month, two of my old friends from Tokyo and Nara are coming to see me.

Moto is a history buff and has also been a globetrotter since quitting her job. She also goes to see rakugo comic storytelling performances at vaudeville theaters in Tokyo whenever she can. Every year, she submits a story for the Rookie award for best new original rakugo script.

Until this visit, she'd never needed my suggestions on where to go because she always decided her itinerary in advance. However, this time Moto wrote asking if I would take her to an old style café. "No sweat!", I replied, "I know some downtown!"

Moto is the first ever Japanese Classificador, or certified "Masters in Coffee" in Brazil.

Long ago, she got a job as a researcher for a global foods firm departing for São Paulo alone with just one battered suitcase she'd borrowed from me. Before studying for qualifications at an academy, she took private Portuguese lessons for three months.

I'm sure she'll love Café C'est La Vie or Café BC.

Sumiyo is more energetic, taking the midnight bus and going exploring all around Ehime. When I lived in Nara, I didn't know she was so into composing haiku. Last year at the "Haiku Live" in Nara, her two pieces won some excellent prizes: discount tickets for Saka No Ue No Kumo Museum, Masaoka Shiki Museum, Asuka no Yu Hot spring Bath, and Matsuyama Castle.

These tickets will expire at the end of March. That made her decision to come to the sacred city of haiku easy. No doubt, Sumiyo will find inspiration for haiku throughout her tour.

(Kazuho Kajiwara)

The moment my mother started to tell me memories of her younger days, her monochrome photographs began to make a more vivid impression on me.

Japan's postwar reconstruction (1950-54) encouraged people to have the optimism to realize their dreams. The unprecedented high-economic growth during the "Jimmu" economy (1954-57) gave the people confidence. Even smaller communities provided women with vocational schools and jobs.

My mother's high school portrait shows her pride.

She performed well at school, so she was provided with a recommendation to Ehime University. However she was unable to attend because of her family's financial situation. She had two younger brothers, and her father chose to prioritize the boys' higher education over hers.

There was no scholarship system yet and less than 10% of female students could enroll in universities in 1955.

Iyo Bank Co., Ltd. annually employed top graduates from her high school. And with a letter of recommendation she was offered a position there. Unfortunately in February 1955 right before her graduation, the bank announced that they would not recruit new female workers in order to discourage women's first time participation in labor unions, a movement spreading nationwide.

At the last minute, she was hired as a bookkeeper at Marusan Industry Co., Ltd., a textile

manufacturer. Spinning thread out of raw cotton imported from India and the U.S. was a thriving industry in those days. Amidst the economic boom, the company required a huge workforce, and so she started working even before graduation. The day she practiced her valedictorian speech at graduation rehearsal, she had to leave work earlier than usual.

She commuted to Yawatahama, then one of the commercial hubs for commerce and industry in Ehime, on Japan National Railways. The three-car-locomotive was always jam-packed during rush hour. When it got crowded, she stood between cars, and the smoke puffing out from the exhaust stack annoyed her. When she found a seat, she got acquainted with the fish sausage and tomato ketchup factory workers. They would often chat over cross-word puzzles, inviting other commuters to help them fill out the spaces.

In her photo, she strikes a confident pose wearing a jaunty knee-length suit she tailored herself. Her smile is natural and spontaneous. At night, she attended a vocational school to learn knitting and dressmaking. She made sweaters and dresses for herself and her family.

She occasionally took business trips, and on the train she met a young man, my late father, and much later I was born.

The 1950s is a past I can only imagine. I compare it to early spring, the promising season when buds struggle out of icy soil and into the bright sky.

(Miwa)