

# MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, June 2023

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

## June Lessons

Recently I had a chance to talk with the British mother of high-school-age-children. She was surprised at my children's busy high school routines. They used to attend club activities then cram school until around 10 p.m. every day. She remarked, "That sounds tough! My sons come home around 3:30 and spend time on their own."

Also, a Japanese friend of mine living in California has said, "My 16-year-old-boy got his driver's license and borrows my car to go to his part time job at the GAP." "On weekends he hangs out at beach bonfires with other teenagers until late." She adds, "Recently I feel my son is growing incredibly fast! I can't catch up with how he acts."

According to her, American students don't need to take so-called "entrance exams" to enroll in universities. So why do so many Japanese teens go to cram schools after regular school instead of pursuing something unrelated to study?

High school general courses cannot individually deal with each student's university entrance exam requirements, but cram schools provide students with an effective curriculum including techniques and strategies for students to score well on paper tests. Students and their parents believe that attending highly ranked universities will eventually lead to good careers. They send their children to cram school as they think going to one is the first step toward success in life.

But as a result of this concentration on exam preparation, Japanese students tend to lack life skills. I hear from Japanese mothers that some university students are too childish in navigating social interactions and completing everyday tasks such as housework.

According to JASSO (Japan Student Services Organization), about 40% of Japanese university freshmen live away from home.

My 18-year-old-son became one of these students this spring and discovered that his surroundings and lifestyle had suddenly changed. Urban life has brought him both excitement and challenges. Soon after he moved, he caught a cold and felt helpless because he'd never had to explain his condition to a nurse. He didn't know how to make a bank transfer for paying his apartment rent and electric fee. He must be finding out how little he knows about himself and society. Living alone, he is more exposed to different values than before.

Even though they have great memorization abilities or can solve difficult exam problems, they are too lazy to sort garbage and take it out for pickup at the appropriate time.

One mother mentioned her son enrolled in a prestigious university. He had already dropped a school credit in the first month. He stayed up late playing online games, overslept, and often skipped morning classes because his mother wasn't around to wake him up in the mornings anymore.

I wonder if high schools could help students with preparing for their social lives as well as school subjects, so that they can acquire life skills to take care of themselves. For instance before graduating, if there were "Lifestyle Guidance and Practice" classes, I bet many parents would send their kids to such seminars.

But in the end, parents themselves should take responsibility for raising children. This should include talking about their future together and sharing thoughts at home and most importantly, encouraging them to be independent. This would be the first step toward a child's future success.

Daily rhythm, healthy diet, direct communication with people and street smarts are as important as studying at a desk. All Japanese mothers I talked with recently nodded in sympathetic agreement!

(Miwa N.)

Before the pandemic spread, Dawn flew from Toronto to Matsuyama with her two teenage children to do ohaka mairi, that is to visit their family graves and pay their respects.

She is third generation Japanese-Canadian.

On a steamy summer day in 2019, we met up with her relatives at Joshin-ji, a temple in the Dogo area.

This is a well-known temple of the Tendai sect built to protect the community from evil spirits in hope of ensuring peace in our castle town.

Joshin-ji is also the family temple of the Matsudaira clan, a family that supplied Matsuyama with lords beginning in 1635, but the temple was originally built in the late 7th century.

The Japanese feudal government banned Christianity in 1612, and for about 260 years, forced people to adhere to the Buddhist faith. Whole families were expected to register with temples.

Although I can't tell you exactly the difference in teachings between Buddhist sects, I do know my mother's family have long been members of the Zen sect, and my father's side are Shingon sect parishioners.

At this serene temple, Dawn's family performed all the traditional rituals, offering flowers, incense, pouring water on the graves with a dipper, praying at one headstone after another.

A couple of weeks ago, Dawn texted me and asked if I was available for hire to interpret for her relatives on a jaunt around Matsuyama.

Her family is multi-ethnic, and neither Dawn's cousin nor his daughter speaks Japanese. His kid has never been to Japan, and his child identifies as Wasian, White and Asian, ethnicity.

She hopes to learn more about Japanese culture during their trip. Early this June, they are traveling from Canada to Matsuyama to pay respects at the gravesite of their grandparents and other relatives.

Well, I am no specialist when it comes to visiting graves, but I answered Dawn's request right away, "Why not? Count on ME!"

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)