

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, October 2023

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

Foreign Fall

When I traveled to San Francisco last month, people on the streets didn't stare at me or treat me like a foreigner. Not at the beach, in the parks, or the restaurants. Wherever I was, people didn't ask me where I came from. Because I didn't stand out, it was easy for me to observe locals. Everyone seemed to have a unique personality and background.

I think surviving in a city means being confident and expressing one's self freely, and I think American people naturally know how to navigate a multiracial, multi-cultural city like San Francisco. At times, I felt as if I had stepped into a role in a Hollywood movie. In Union Square, a skinny black man hired by the city as a street cleaner was leisurely practicing a hip-hop dance step, all the while tidying up a water hose.

At an upmarket Mediterranean cuisine restaurant on Nob Hill, there was a good-looking waiter in a nice suit. He did only the bare minimum of waiting on tables, and he seemed to believe that avoiding personal conversations with customers was a good thing, as if he was playing the role of a waiter instead of being genuine.

At other times, I felt like I was walking through a full-blown documentary. A few blocks away from the hotel at which I was staying, in the Tenderloin district, I saw homeless people stretched out on the sidewalk, used hypodermic syringes littering the ground.

But I also encountered whites, Hispanics, blacks, young and old people with eye-catching hairstyles, colorful, eccentric clothes, and tattoos. They probably didn't care what other people thought about them. So soon, I stopped worrying about my own appearance.

On the Golden Gate Bridge, a clerk in a popular cafe raised his voice when taking customers' orders and managed to sound even more hostile than an immigration officer at the airport. But this was an exception, and in general, people were kind to visitors, working hard to rebuild the City's good reputation among the tourist trade.

I don't remember how many times I asked random passers-by for directions. They were all very nice to me. They took out their phones, pointed out where we were, and gave me the right directions and other useful information.

In this way, the impression of a foreign country is formed by one's encounters with people living there. The people of San Francisco aren't forced to fit into society like many Japanese people feel they are. Instead, they are aware that they are an irreplaceable part of the cultural makeup of the society.

(Miwa N.)

When did you last buy an album?

I am a radio listener. How do you enjoy listening to music?

Lately, our girls like Spotify, but my husband still loves his turntable. Though he tends to listen to CDs and records while at home, Isao's really into the Amazon Music app when he's driving his new car. It's a bit strange to hear him talking to his media player, "Hey, ALEXA!"

Alexa politely plays his requests, and Isao listens to whatever the Alexa plays.

My brother is a quiet guy. When we were growing up, we couldn't share too many interests because I was too young for him. But, he did turn me on to The Beatles. When he graduated from high school and departed for college, he left all his record albums at home.

There was a red vinyl LP record in his collection, 'Meet The Beatles!' (OR-7041), their first album to be sold in Japan. As the Beatles had already broken up by the time I got hold of this album, I had no idea who they were.

Despite the songs having English lyrics, and me having no idea of the Japanese translation, somehow I could sing almost all 14 songs before even beginning English education.

I just enjoyed the simple melodies and the sounds. In my junior high days, I used to listen to another album from my brother's collection. John Lennon's "Imagine" (STEREO AP-80370), on Apple Records. It became one of my treasures. The poster-sized lyric sheet and a black and white poster of John playing the white grand piano were handled very carefully and never tacked up on the wall.

Today, only two Beatles are alive. In an interview on BBC Radio 4 last June, Paul McCartney stated that he and Ringo Starr had completed a final Beatles recording, and it would be released this year! AI technology was used to extricate John's voice from an old demo, and everyone is speculating the song will be Lennon's "Now and Then".

Sir Paul, thank you so much!

(Kazuyo Kajiwara)