

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, January 2024

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

This coming autumn, JR Matsuyama Station will be elevating their train station, giving the neighborhood a more refined, modern atmosphere. This facelift has been over 30 long years in the planning, and now this project will finally be accomplished!

This will actually be the third station building on this spot. The first station was built in 1927 and was bombed right before the end of the war in 1945. The present station has been there since 1953.

People call the 71-year-old structure the last-to-be built JR station but also the poorest-looking station in all 46 prefectural capitals. (Naha in Okinawa has no train system. After WW II, during the 27-year US occupation, the demolished railroad network was never rebuilt.)

It's funny to remember now, looking back on our first arrival at Matsuyama Station terminal. Our girls and I were dazed, standing in shock, practically in tears, wondering, "Where are we?" My husband didn't seem to care about our apprehensions, but I can still recall that quiet, chilly night at the end of January 2007.

The official renderings of the new station show barrier-free entrances, better access to downtown, two open squares for the public and various shops/restaurants in the new station building, in addition to an adjacent JR Hotel. All this sounds good.

Yet, I somehow love the old "松山驛" kanji characters still visible at the entrance of the tiny white building, and maybe I will miss the station attendants who collected my tickets and ushered me through the gates whenever I returned to Matsuyama.

(Kay Kajiwara)

Wars outside the country, high domestic prices, a generally gloomy society, violent climate change....

Even if we live, we face an unsure future.

Personally, 2023 was a fulfilling year for me since I could luckily connect some dots. Dots represent every event that has ever occurred in my life and various thoughts I have about them.

Each unrelated point can link to another, and by chance this combination can bring about something new.

I was insecure and unsure of what I was doing until I was in my 30's or so. Negative thoughts sometimes interrupted my life. Still, these insignificant, wasteful, and traumatic events I have experienced could even have an impact on where I am now.

At any rate, I've moved forward, believing there's something I can do for other people.

I've kept telling myself to be positive. For example, by looking back at my own past, I can listen to other people more empathetically. Then, my experiences can have more meaning.

So you shouldn't disregard any events and situations you might have experienced because they make up your life.

The important thing is to be aware of yourself and grab any chances you have to grow as a person. Opportunities are everywhere. Getting older means gaining more experiences, so aging is a positive thing to accept.

I feel lucky that I'm able to know what I've been doing and why I've been doing it.

This year, I hope to be more supportive of my family and friends. I will continue to teach English communication to students.

As a volunteer guide, more often this year, I want to help foreigners get to know Japanese culture and the local area. These New Year's resolutions will bring about me new dots to connect. And whatever these dots may be, they will make a shape someday.

(Miwa N.)