

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, December 2024

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

Weather, Business and Sports

"Which subject should I take in high school? Physics or Biology?"

"How many hours did you have to study everyday to get into medical school?"

In a helicopter hangar at Matsuyama Airport, she took many questions from high-school-aged girls and their moms.

Miei, our daughter, is the youngest crew member of the ER.

On a national holiday last month, the Medical Service Division of Ehime Prefecture hosted their annual 'Dr. Heli' event opened to families and high-school students who won a lottery for tickets to attend this event.

Until last year, the event focused on family groups, but this year the prefecture invited high schoolers for a career guidance session in which the flight doctor shared information about the crew's various jobs with audience members for the first time.

For her presentation, MieI stayed up late editing informational film clips and quizzes for both younger kids and high schoolers.

Her booth had a long queue of mostly young women waiting to ask questions.

One motivated girl, torn between pursuing a career in ER/flight doctor or as an internist, asked MieI more technical questions.

"Why do doctors get on board the helicopter with the flight nurses? Why don't the doctors just wait for the patients to arrive at the hospital?"

Her answer was that under Japanese law, even during flights, nurses are not allowed to treat patients without a doctor's supervision.

Nurses, doctors, a pilot and a co-pilot are all members of a coordinated team whose job it is to save people's lives.

There were so many questions from interested participants, that the session ran over by 80 minutes.

Our short autumn's gone now, and in January, the young people who attended this event will sit for the National Standardized Test or Common Exam.

I'm thinking of all the young candidates preparing for their university entrance exams. Especially, anyone with the ambition to become a future, female Hippocrates.

I hope they can get away from the hustle-bustle of this world and work harder to reach their goals. Stay warm and avoid colds!

(Kay)

Sumo.

An expression of traditional Japanese culture that is steeped in both ceremony and good sportsmanship, or a couple of fat men with wedgies trying to push each other out of a sandbox.

I honestly can't say, but I do consider myself a fan.

The sumo wrestlers themselves are huge men, the hippos of the sport's world, but the referees, the *gyoiji*, are generally small and delicate looking, like ruffled parakeets clad in elaborate, colorful kimono. Their shrill cries are those of someone who has just spilled something very hot in his lap.

The *gyooji* prances around the ring behaving as if the sport is all about him and not the two behemoths trying to push each other's faces in.

The highest rank that a sumo wrestler can achieve is *yokozuna*. Unfortunately, most of those spots are currently occupied by Mongolian and Eastern European wrestlers.

A fine, strapping Mongolian lad, faced with the choice of remaining in his own country and pursuing a rewarding career in sheep herding, or coming to Japan and getting paid to slap around people smaller than he is, is probably more motivated than your average Japanese youth.

Most youngsters here dream of being YouTube influencers or dancers lip syncing in boy bands rather than someone who has to book three airplane seats whenever he wants to fly somewhere.

There's a lot more variation among sumo audiences than in, say, baseball fans. Sumo fans don't chant or clap in unison or bang plastic megaphones together. But they do read newspapers, eat their lunch, drink beer and nap fitfully.

When one of the wrestlers does something exciting like throw rice, slap his mawashi loincloth or wipe his face with a hand towel, the audience applauds appreciatively.

Incidentally, it doesn't happen often, but if a wrestler's mawashi falls off during a tournament bout, he is automatically disqualified. And is no doubt very embarrassed.

Watching today's tournament on TV, I spotted two kabuki actors dressed as women in the audience, two geisha, one old, one young, a Yakuza and a foreigner seated in the third row who looked distressingly like John Wilkes Booth.

A lot has been made of a certain middle-aged woman perched directly behind where the *gyooji* is positioned in the sumo ring.

She's been attending all the bouts this year wearing a different kimono each time and has been dubbed by the media, "Kimono Beauty".

If truth be told, she's kind of average looking, and if you spotted her in a local supermarket, you'd probably think of her as "lady in sweatpants blocking the aisle with her shopping cart."

But if you find yourself in Japan during sumo season, I recommend you attend at least one tournament. It's rough and ready, exciting, doesn't have a lot of complicated rules and is infinitely easier to follow than either cricket or Grand Theft Auto V.

And what the sumo world may lack in elegance, it certainly makes up for in...

I dunno. Fancy underpants?

(Editor)

In Taiwan, we met for the first time in 33 years.

When I was an exchange student in the U.S., International Friendship House offered foreign students like me an opportunity to stay with American families in Georgia for a couple of weeks during winter school holidays.

Everyday, my host family took me to meetings organized by the Baptist Church, on sightseeing excursions and even to a Christmas banquet, where I met a Taiwanese student who was living in New York.

After completing the homestay program, I stopped in Williamsburg, Virginia, Washington D.C. and then visited my new Taiwanese friend in New York.

He repaid my visit, coming to see me in Pennsylvania during spring vacation.

After returning to our respective countries, we exchanged letters, but, before I knew it, we somehow stopped writing each other.

Until my sister, her husband and my son planned on traveling to Taiwan this autumn, I hadn't thought of reaching out to him again. But my flight would arrive two days earlier than theirs, so I thought I'd try and meet him if even for a short time while I was by myself.

Despite not knowing if he was even still in Taiwan, I decided to write a letter to the address he'd given me three decades ago.

My letter was delivered to his mother's house, and after only a day or so, he replied to me online, saying he wanted to take me out to dinner and drive me around the day after to show me the sights.

I just couldn't keep up with all these sudden developments. Unexpectedly, a large-scale typhoon made landfall on my first day in Taiwan.

"Why of all times does it have to be during my trip?" I muttered.

But at last, we met again. Hurrying through the rain to a restaurant serving Taiwanese specialties, we exchanged brief histories of our careers, marriages and children, pouring forth our lives like two dragons blowing fire.

Rare local dishes were brought to our table one after another. Over beer, we looked back over our time in America and laughed because we couldn't imagine how we'd gotten in touch with each other and made appointments without cell phones.

Overnight, the wind gradually became stronger.

The next morning, all the tourist attractions in Taiwan were closed. However, he texted me that he was ready to go for a drive as planned. He also asked me if he could bring his daughter. Her office was closed because of the typhoon.

A lovely young lady knocked at my hotel room door, and when I opened it, she greeted me in Japanese. "Konnichiwa."

Typhoons, as far as natural disasters go, can't be helped. Nevertheless, thanks to this particular typhoon, I have come to value more the significance of the chance encounter that brought me there.

After all, the combination of the memories of Christmas holidays and the timing of this typhoon brought me even more precious memories.

I will continue this story in my next essay.

(Miwa N.)