

# MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, September 2025

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

## September Weddings and Pumpkins

Around May this year, I tried planting pumpkin seeds in my garden. These were the seeds from an already cut pumpkin I had bought at the supermarket to eat.

The ancestor of this particular kind of pumpkin is from Australia.

Normally, I would have thrown the discarded seeds away, but I thought, "Maybe they'll sprout." So I dug a small hole in the garden soil, planted the seeds and covered them with soil.

To be honest, it felt more like I had disposed of them rather than planted them. But one day, I was completely surprised to find numerous pale green pumpkin plants sprouting up. I left three of the young plants alone and thinned out the rest.

Soon, the pumpkin vines began to grow vigorously in all directions, blooming with many large yellow flowers. There were many male flowers, but very few female flowers.

One morning, I discovered a tiny pumpkin at the tip of a 5-meter-long stem. The fruit's diameter was only about 2 cm.

A total of four fruits grew, but three did not develop properly, and now only one is growing. It has dark and light green vertical stripes, measures 46 cm in diameter and weighs 1,000 g now.

It has been my global experience this summer to have Australian pumpkins growing in my garden. I am eagerly awaiting the day of harvest.

(T. Hiroko)

My husband started working guard duty at the Matsuyama Bicycle Race Track building recently, so I dropped by the venue to see how things were going.

The use of revenue from bicycle races is clearly outlined by the Cycling Competition Law.

75% of proceeds from ticket sales is used to payoff those who bet on winning tickets, and 5% is used for prize money for participating athletes and grants to the JKA Cycling Competition Association.

Once these amounts are subtracted, the local government takes their cut of about 20% of the proceeds.

The track is currently under construction, yet hundreds of people were watching cycling races on a big screen. That day a race held in Hakodate was being broadcast.

Even though he has stood at the entrance of the venue only a couple of times thus far, my husband recognizes some of the same faces among the crowd.

Many are retired men who enter as soon as the track opens. They sit all day long, making bet after bet until the end of the day. They carry a pencil with a pocket clip and alternate between looking at their scribbled notes about likely winners and checking racing forms, all the while making predictions about the outcome of each race with serious faces.

Sitting in the movie-theater-like hall, I saw a man in reading glasses seated next to me holding a list neatly marked with colorful highlighter pen.

If there was "Bicycle Race University," this guy would be a PhD. His analysis of the day's odds was charted on a graph that looked very data-driven. I caught a glimpse of how much he had been studying, building his dreams and honing his bettor's intuition for years.

I wonder if wives don't like their husbands hanging around doing nothing and actually prefer

they spend most of their day at the racetrack instead of pestering them at home.

This air-conditioned, dream-inspiring play land requires no entry fee. There is a restaurant and other facilities inside, so retirees, bored husbands and bike race enthusiasts can easily commute every day.

Elderly bettors use pension money they receive from the government at the track and thus give some of it back to local government. And if they pay five hundred yen, reserved seats will provide them with a cozy private space.

When I reached for the ticket machine with a hundred yen in order to try out my beginner's luck, a kind lady staff member helped me bet.

The race started just ten minutes later. I was screaming inside and my palms were sweating.

Now I know how seasoned gamblers must feel. It takes experience and a money investment to come up with a winning number out of so many possible combinations of racing odds, intuition and luck.

The bicycle racetrack will reopen after renovations are completed this February. (Miwa N.)

I've been to a few Japanese weddings, but a lot of things have changed in the past several years.

This was only the second or third actual wedding ceremony I've attended here in The Empire.

The wedding was held in an (I'm guessing) Anglican chapel high atop a hotel. I'm not sure if it was a real church or not, and the same goes for the (everyone referred to him as) "preacher", a Japanese-American lad. He had a five o'clock shadow, and women sitting near me kept commenting on how handsome he was.

These same women also giggled when the bride appeared in a shining white wedding gown.

This was her fourth marriage.

The minister led everyone in a rousing chorus of "Jesus Thou Art A Bulwark in These Troubled Times" or whatever it was called, only in Japanese. There was also "Amazing Grace" and that wedding perennial "Time to Say Goodbye".

The bride threw her bouquet at us and we threw artificial rose petals back at her.

But it was the reception where things really got lively. We were entertained with, in no particular order, karaoke, a video bio of the bride and groom and best-dressed guest contest.

I won because I was the only male not wearing a black suit with a white tie.

There was also a candle ceremony and a flash mob in which waiters, waitresses and a number of guests suddenly hit the floor en masse in a choreographed routine.

But the oddest part of all was at the reception's close, when a documentary about the reception we'd just experienced was screened.

Everyone took home commemorative pens, white and pink freeze dried ramen sets and cookies.

While leaving, I overheard a guest remark that a fifth wedding was no doubt in the cards.

(Editor)