

The magazine of The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan



NUMBER 1 SHIMBUN

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Plus: Fixers for journalists | Fostering children | Japan gets Trump'd | New Board

“HELLO FROM THE OUTSIDE”



From the journalists
who were behind
the scenes at the
G7 and Hiroshima . . .

way behind the scenes



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WHILE THIS IS MY first column for the *Number 1 Shimbun* since becoming president of the FCCJ on June 15, I would like to pick up where my predecessor Suvendrini Kakuchi left off in her last column. Continuity of purpose in a number of issues facing the Club is important.

But before going into some of the topics in her last column, I think it's perhaps necessary to ask more fundamental questions about the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan: What is its purpose and what is its future?

The FCCJ is more than 70 years old. If it were human, it would be drawing a pension and looking forward to visits from grandchildren. If not quite playing gateball, it would lack the energy of 30 years ago and the spring in the step would pretty much have sprung.

The General Manager tells me the average age of the membership is now 62 years, so generally speaking we Members aren't exactly a collection of spring chickens, either.

Yet, at the heart of the FCCJ is something vital, powerful, essential to democracy, essential to freedom and something we must guard and defend to ensure it outlives us all. That, of course, is Freedom of the Press in the service of the public's right to know.

Reporters Without Borders releases a ranking of freedom of the press in scores of countries around the world. The higher a country's position in the index, the greater the measure of press freedoms. Japan's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index was 59 in 2014. It slipped slightly to 61 in 2015 and then took a much larger slump this year to 72. That slotted Japan between Tanzania and Lesotho on the index, which covers 180 countries.

Why is Japan falling down the table in this key measure of democracy? Well, you can read for yourself on their website <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2016>.

I would argue the FCCJ plays a particularly precious role in preserving press freedoms in Japan and it has nothing to do with the word "Foreign." The FCCJ is not owned by any press baron or media conglomerate that takes a particular tilt or editorial view of news events. The FCCJ is independent and its press events are open to all. It should remain this way.

At its heart and soul, the purpose of the FCCJ is to preserve and defend this space for the public's right to know. The Club may not always be bustling with packed press conferences, but that space is always there for when it's needed.

Historical examples show hard-won democratic freedoms don't typically disappear overnight, they are lost to slow erosion. Is that what the Reporters Without Borders index shows regarding press freedoms in Japan? Slow erosion?

The question remains, but it helps us answer the second question I asked at the start of this column. The FCCJ's future is here and now and ever more important. The FCCJ may not have the snazziest, jazziest facilities of Tokyo clubs (at least not yet) but it is unique.

I've run out of space here to follow up on some of my predecessor's important points. We can save that for future columns. So let me finish by wishing everyone fun-filled, yet relaxing summer holidays.

– Peter Langan

ELECTION RESULTS

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

“THE GREATEST” IN ACTION AT THE FCCJ



Boxer Muhammad Ali wowed the Club with his antics on June 18, 1976. He and pro wrestler Antonio Inoki appeared at a professional luncheon after a “weighing in” session for the “Bout of the Century” to be held a week later. Here, Ali playfully chokes FCCJ President Al Cullison (New York Journal of Commerce) who is attempting to hand an honorary membership card to Inoki while Ali’s manager looks on. Laughing to the left is Bill Shinn (Sisa News Agency). Partially visible next to Inoki is his interpreter and long-time Club member, Ichiro “Ken” Urushibara.

The death of Ali on June 3, after many years of fighting Parkinson's disease, brought back memories for people all over the world, including long-time Members of the Club. The “Bout of the Century” ended up being the “rip off of the century” wrote then Member and sports-writer Andy Adams (*Sumo World*) in a scathing review in the *Japan Times*. In his words: “Probably never in the history of sports has there been such a big buildup to such a big letdown as in this much-publicized, \$10-million contest between the world's best boxer and one of the world's top pro wrestlers.”

Ali and Inoki were born within a year of each other and both underwent name changes. Muhammad Ali was born Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. on Jan. 17, 1942 and Antonio Inoki was born Kanji Inoki on Feb. 20, 1943. After their bout, they became good friends, and perhaps as a result of that friendship, Inoki converted to Islam in 1990. He took the same first name to become Muhammad Hussain Inoki, although this was not made public until 2012.

It would take a book to describe Muhammad Ali's accomplishments. He was a major sports figure, including the winning of an Olympic gold medal and becoming the first three-time heavyweight champion. He converted to Islam under the influence of the African-American “Nation of Islam” and Malcolm X. A staunch fighter against racism and for civil rights, Ali also became a conscientious objector, refusing to be drafted for the war in Vietnam, which resulted in losing his boxing license for several years.

Antonio Inoki, too, went on to further accomplishments, becoming a lawmaker with an interest in international affairs. He negotiated with Saddam Hussein for the release of Japanese hostages in 1989 following his election to the Upper House of the Japanese Diet in the same year. Inoki was reelected to that body, the House of Councillors, in 2013 and remains active in Japanese politics.

A video of the FCCJ event can be viewed at this link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tn9OsmF-L8g.

– Charles Pomeroy

When the world was watching

With two events of global interest – the G7 Ise-Shima Summit and U.S. President Barack Obama’s Hiroshima visit – marking the early summer calendar, journalists scrambled to get an inside perspective . . . and some news.



WITNESS TO NOT MUCH OF ANYTHING

Sleep deprivation, mainlined caffeine and hours holed up inside a cavernous, windowless hall subjected to the press room’s version of auditory torture: the click-click of colleagues’ laptop keyboards. Welcome to the glamorous world of the foreign correspondent.

I could have just as easily covered last month’s G7 summit in Ise-Shima from the comfort of my Tokyo apartment – although the bed and bookcases in the background would have been difficult to explain to the presenters at France 24 TV, for whom I did several live reports.

Instead, I and many of the Tokyo press corps found ourselves ensconced in a sports stadium that, for a few days, doubled as the International Media Center for the G7 – an opportunity for Prime Minister Abe to establish his credentials as a statesman – and, more improbably, as something to help take David Cameron’s mind off the looming Brexit referendum.

With security concerns inevitably trumping all else in the minds of the officials who plan these diplomatic jamborees, any notion that journalists covering G7 summits are in any

I was on the first train bound for Hiroshima, where later that day we would bear witness to a moment of genuine historical significance

sense in proximity to power is laughingly wide of the mark.

I was in Okinawa in 2000 for the *Daily Yomiuri*, and recall daily contact with NGOs, government press officers and even world leaders who would drop by to talk to reporters, from Vladimir Putin’s entreaty to take Kim Jong-il more seriously to the delayed final presser by the summit host, Yoshiro Mori, who, it was rumored, was struggling to master his brief.

The thousands of reporters who descended on Ise, a

“...and, action” Justin McCurry readies himself for a report from the international media center

remote, and admittedly picturesque, corner of central Japan, occupied hotel rooms located anywhere between 20 minutes and more than an hour by road from the press center, itself a mere 20 km from the G7 summiteers meeting on Ise’s answer to Tracy Island.

So it was from some distance that we watched the day’s events unfold on a big screen. It made for awkward viewing. It was, for example, an odd choice to have each leader cross the Ujibashi Bridge to Ise Jingu one by one rather than as a group. And I’m sure I saw Abe mouth the words “*mada, mada,*” as he waited – and waited – for Barack Obama to arrive.

It says a lot about the low expectations for the summit that the *Guardian*’s two main news stories from the first day centered on political ructions thousands of miles away. After leading with European commission President Jean Claude Juncker’s broadside against prominent Brexiter Boris Johnson – BoJo as British prime minister, he said, would be a “horror scenario” – we ended the day with Obama’s warning that other G7 leaders were “rattled” by Donald Trump.

My time at the G7 press center was mercifully brief. After a late night of cold beers and *kaki-pi* with a fellow hack – who shall remain nameless – I was on the first train out of Ise, bound for Hiroshima, where later that day we would bear witness to a moment of genuine historical significance.

– Justin McCurry, the *Guardian*, France 24 TV

THE 600-WORD HARRUMPH

Everyone has an inner grump. Mine came out when I emptied the contents of the two G7 press swag bags onto my desk at the over-lit press center. Out tumbled rice crackers and Pocky snacks, saké, a calligraphy brush, antibacterial towels, a pin badge for the 2019 Rugby World Cup, a piece of spinning plastic promoting local tourism, pamphlets spinning the success of Abenomics and other essentials.

At that point, I began to doubt the wisdom of the editor who sent me to Ise. Perhaps he should have chosen a more responsible journalist, someone who would follow the fine details of the policy discussions underway by the world’s

If the aim of G7 summits is to promote tourism we’d have been better visiting when there wasn’t a cop every 50 yards guarding ditches and empty roads

most powerful leaders. Instead, all I could think about for the few painful hours I sat in the center was the appalling waste of the whole exercise.

G7 meetings began in the 1970s as an attempt to put together a collective response to the oil shock. Today, they are criticized as bloated talking shops with little to show for the time and money spent on them. The total budget for the Ise-Shima summit was reportedly about ¥60 billion, swelled by the cost of sending over 20,000 police officers to protect seven people.

The leaders buffet, including produce from across Japan, was a “meaningful opportunity to promote the appeal of Japan’s food culture to the world,” said MOFA. At least that’s honest. But if the aim of G7 summits is to promote tourism we’d have been better visiting when there wasn’t a cop every 50 yards guarding ditches and empty roads. I saw little of

beautiful Ise because I was cooped up on the press center. So I wrote a 600-word harrumph and took the train to Hiroshima.

– David McNeill, the *Irish Times/Economist*

THE OTHER SIDE

The main focus of attention of the Ise-Shima summit was to be the global economy, which has been going through another phase of chronic uncertainty. In the end, the leaders of world’s powerful economies seemed to have agreed to gloss over their disagreements by adopting a declaration that vaguely talks about advancing structural reforms and expanding investment in areas conducive to economic growth. The end result was a free interpretation of the statement, and many listeners felt a chill when Japan’s prime minister told the media at the concluding press conference that the three arrows of “Abenomics” were to be adopted as economic policies of other countries as well.

The other issues that the leaders discussed at the annual summit were merely a sideshow; the seven countries hardly have the desire or the means to solve any political and social problems of a global nature. The Syrian crisis has shown very clearly that in talks about peace and security, it is necessary to ensure the participation of all parties capable of influencing the situation. Hence, talks leaving important players like Russia and China out of the discussion are going to have minimum impact on the gathered parties’ hopes.

For me, there was a different dimension to covering the event. There is usually little interest in the event among the almost 200 nations that remain outside of G7; after all, the issues are chosen by the leaders of the selective super rich. At the Ise-Shima summit, however, the Japanese prime minister invited the leaders of seven countries from the other end of the great divide with the aim of reaching out to them with the messages that the rich adopt in their discussions. It was a gesture by the rich to reach the poor with assurances that their plights too are not forgotten. When Bangladesh was chosen as one of the countries, the summit became an important event for the country, at least from the media perspective. However, the outreach agenda, carefully arranged by the host nation, dashed on the onset much of the hope for a meaningful dialogue on issues considered crucial at both ends.

The session had two major items in the agenda, both with tacit political goals. “Quality Infrastructure Investment” is a notion floated by Japan and some other countries

to address the massive infrastructure need of Asian countries in coming decades. As there are a number of emerging economies moving aggressively to get a share of that big pie, the value-added terminology has been designed to outmaneuver such countries with the message that “quality” can be ensured only by those few who have the proven capability of providing it.

The second major topic was “Open and Stable Seas,” and the political connotation here seems more direct. As six of the seven outreach countries were representatives from the Asia-Pacific region, the message of an open and stable sea route was already quite clear. Many of these countries feel a bit uneasy over the issue, in a region where hostility on the seas is becoming a matter of great concern with the increasing involvement of big players.

The hope of the host nation to forge a greater alliance using the G7 as a pretext was not seen as casual by some of the partici-

pants and hence they felt the need to remain cautious. This was reflected clearly in the position that Bangladesh took regarding both main points of the outreach agenda. In an exclusive interview given to NHK after the outreach meeting, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was candid and wise enough to suggest that it was up to the countries directly involved in the disputes to find a resolution through negotiations. She also made it clear that her country would actively accept financing from the new China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Telling points, but unfortunately overlooked by the Western media who were focusing exclusively on the maneuvers of the major players.

– **Monzurul Huq, Protham Alo**

NOT WHAT THEY USED TO BE

When it comes to covering G7 summit meetings of political leaders, things are definitely not what they used to be. My first such assignment was the Venice Summit of 1980 and the contrast between that and the recent event in Japan's Ise Shima could hardly be greater.

One bright day 36 years ago I was conveyed from Venice Airport in an elegant water taxi across the harbor to a city that looked like a vast Canaletto canvas set out against the morning sky. It was an almost magical moment.

My rather charming (if somewhat aging) hotel was but a short vaporetto ride away from the summit venue, on the nearby Lido, and I was able to quickly check in my baggage before repairing with colleagues to Harry's Bar to contemplate the delights of the coming days over *vino rosso*.

And, delightful it proved to be, with generous amounts excellent food and wine and unending cups of espresso coffee supplied by lovely Venetian ladies who seemed equally delighted to extend warm hospitality to so many overseas journalists.

There was an extreme informality about the proceedings compared with the ultra-heavy security precautions that reduce summit meetings nowadays to something rather less than "close encounters" between leaders and the media. I recall ambling into a leaders' press conference at the Venice Summit with scarcely a cursory glance from a security guard and sitting down to await the arrival of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and their counterparts from Canada, Japan, Germany, France and Italy. We were seated less than a stone's throw (I suppose one would think now in terms of a bomb's throw) away from those eminent personages and it all seemed very friendly and informal.

This year, I arrived with an FCCJ colleague, Khaldon Azhari, via a local train at a small station seemingly in the middle of nowhere except that it was reasonably close to the International Media Center a temporarily converted sports stadium) close to the summit venue.

We went through the process of registering, having to pro-

“Let's drink! Get drunk!” A somewhat unnecessary exhortation – and just slightly unsubtle.

duce emails confirming accreditation, showing passports, being photographed, collecting badges and all the things that make summit attendance nowadays about as delightful as a visit to the dentist.

Inside were two vast auditoriums that served as press rooms, packed with several thousand journalists, mainly from Japan, but with a strong overseas contingent. There



Rooms with a view The scene from a hotel (above), a mere 45 minutes by bus from the media centre, where journalists watch the arrival of G7 leaders on a big screen (right).

were liberal supplies of free food and coffee for the newsmen and women, but “the Venice of Japan” it was not.

The summit events, including the leaders' visit to Ise Shrine (a controversial issue, seen to involve mixing “church” with state) were brought to us by TV monitors, with the exception of brief access given to pool photographers and one peek inside a Shinzo Abe-chaired meeting by a small band of reporters who were treated only to a short statement. As G7 summits go, it was an adequate if hardly memorable experience.

More memorable, perhaps, was Barack Obama's historic visit to Hiroshima, which most of us ended up watching on the special monitors. Unusually, for normally rowdy newsmen, his speech was watched with an almost reverent silence.

Perhaps we ourselves bear some responsibility for turning these summits from what began as a “fireside chat” into a media circus. The original G6 summit (Canada was not among the members then) was held in 1975 when French President Giscard d'Estaing invited them for an informal gathering at the chateau of Rambouillet, near Paris. Then the media demanded access to the leaders and they got it - thousands of them - and the “fireside” became rather overcrowded.

– **Anthony Rowley, Singapore Business Times**

OMOTENASHI OVERLOAD

The Ise-Shima G7 summit was pretty much a bust newswise. But it did serve as a chance to promote the Japan brand to the world – rather clumsily, as it turned out. Media types who covered the summit received a basket of goodies that included desiccated *oshibori* hand towels that expand when moistened, a box of Pocky, a makeup brush, and two rather nice ceramic saké cups. The latter were part of a boxed gift set that included a rather mediocre *nihonshu*.

What caught the attention of cynical hacks, though, was the message printed on the box: “Let's drink! Get drunk!” A somewhat unnecessary exhortation for bibulous ink-stained wretches – and just slightly unsubtle.

But a sign placed in the part of the International Media Center where free snacks and drinks were provided was the best example of how good intentions can be lost in translation. It urged hungry media folk to “Please follow the Japanese customs before and after every meal,” and then told the

unwashed gaijin how to use an *oshibori* and to say “*itadaki-masu*” and “*gochisosama*” at the appropriate junctures. No mention as to whether slurping noodles, belching or making origami with chopstick covers is kosher.

How do such silly linguistic *faux pas* keep making it through the quality filter is unclear. It's possible someone might have known better, but they didn't want their superior or an allegedly more knowledgeable person to lose face.

This kind of *omotenashi* hospitality makes me want to have a drink. . . .

– **Steve McClure, NHK World**

DESPERATE FOR NEWS

Covering big news events in Japan can sometimes be an exercise in meta-journalism. Never is this more true than at a big news event that produces no big news.

Organizers of the G7 Ise-Shima Summit gathered over 2,000 reporters, photographers and assorted TV types in a cavernous media center in rural Mie Prefecture at the end of May.

Then not a lot happened.

Sure, there were the exhibitions of delicate calligraphy, the demonstrations of weird personal mobility vehicles for which no one has yet found a use, and the displays of little space-bound robots intended to showcase Japanese tech at its best.

But Barack Obama and pals were a long way away in a swanky-looking hotel. And they weren't really talking about anything. Still, we've all got words to file or airtime to fill, so our colleagues in the Japanese media turned to one of their favorite stand-by subjects: what do the foreigners think?

“What are your expectations of the G7 Ise-Shima Summit?” Fairly low.

“What are your impressions of the G7 Ise-Shima Summit?” I expect they'll be talking about the economy.

“What do you think about Mie Prefecture?” Not seen much apart from the media center.

“How is the food? What is the most delicious?” I've had the pot noodles. The buffet is usually finished by the time I get there.

As a relatively early arriver at the venue – I was in the AFP booth first thing on the morning of May 25 – I was ripe for the picking. Five minutes after I sat down, the first reporter stuck his head around the door. And I committed a rookie error – I answered in Japanese.

The news spread like wildfire.

“There's one in there. He's not very good and barely intelligible, but he'll do,” I imagined them whispering to each other.



JUSTIN MCCURRY

For the next three-quarters of an hour, a steady stream of journalists piled through the door to hear my expectations and my impressions. My 15 minutes of fame had begun in earnest, with appearances, I'm told, on five separate TV networks and I-don't-know-how-many newspapers.

My 8-year-old son rang me excitedly to tell me he had seen me on the telly. No idea what I was talking about – “What is *kokusai keizai*?” – but bursting with pride and ready to boast to all his schoolfriends.

In between writing about warnings over Brexit, the European migrant crisis and the obligatory piece on Justin “The Hunk” Trudeau, I kept up a steady stream of impromptu media appearances over the following days. One interview really went very badly – my questioner's opening gambit was some drivel about how Japan is a model for global tolerance and diversity because people celebrate Shinto festivals, Buddhist ceremonies and (wait for it . . .) Christmas.

He got short shrift. But mostly I learned to Give Them What They Want. Especially the local TV channels trying desperately to puff up the tourist industry.

So what did I think about Mie? Oh, it's *wonderful*. And the food? *Oishiiiiiiiiiii!*

– **Huw Griffith, Deputy head of desk, Asia-Pacific, AFP (formerly deputy bureau chief, Tokyo)**

MAN ON THE STREET

In going to Hiroshima, Mari Yamamoto and I were hoping to get a sense of how the locals felt about the visit – and Obama and Abe. The first people we spoke to were a couple, a Hiroshima resident and his wife who had survived the bombing. They were great. The police security was immense and I noticed one older man arguing and laughing with some officers, insisting on crossing the road on his bicycle. He eventually waved them aside and crossed over. We flagged him down and he took our business card with some interest. We weren't talking for long before it became apparent that he used to be a yakuza (I can't help running into them) – and was on his way to the dentist. He had been a member of the Yamaguchi-gumi and had wound up living in Hiroshima after getting out of prison there. He insisted that he was now straight. He had great respect for Obama, but when asked about Abe he was hilariously critical. Luckily, my knowledge of Japanese folklore enabled me to translate his description of the prime minister as an “irrelevant shape-shifting badger-dog.”

– **Jake Adelstein, the Daily Beast** 🐾



Lucy Alexander

by TYLER ROTHMAR

Lucy Alexander is a freelance journalist who writes to bring Japan just a little bit closer to readers in the West. She was born to a Scottish mother and an English father in Stirling, Scotland, and moved to St. Andrews, where she grew up the eldest of three. “I should clarify that I consider myself Scottish,” she says. “But that’s not how I was perceived at school.”

She applied to Scottish universities with friends but settled on Oxford, where she read English literature in the academic sense, beginning with *Beowulf* in Anglo-Saxon and ending with Modernists such as James Joyce.

The experience was good, but three years of scholastic exertion left her “totally sick of writing. I wanted to earn money and not have to write long essays.” She took a job in London with the PR firm Freud Communications, discovering quickly that “being a PR person, a sales-y kind of person, was totally against my character. I was crap at bullshitting.”

Overworked and underpaid, Alexander decided to switch horses at full canter, using her vacation time to do a stint of work experience at the *Times* in 2001. Soon she was working part-time for its “Diary” gossip column, complimented by work in a pub, and by 2003 she had joined the *Times*’ Saturday magazine, doing a mix of commissioning, researching and writing. “But I wasn’t doing enough,” she remembers. “This was the days when newspapers had quite a lot of staff.”

Alexander then worked in both the features and properties sections of the broadsheet, with occasional contributions to the news and business pages. Property is “a total national obsession,” she says. “I covered crazy luxury London properties . . . but also government housing schemes and how to get first-time buyers onto the property ladder. The whole spectrum.”

By 2012 she had two young children and was married to a lawyer who’d been offered a position in Japan. She was eager to sample life outside the UK, and although Japan wasn’t at the top of the list, the family resettled in Tokyo.

FREED FROM THE GRIND of a staff position, Alexander began to string for the *Times*, covering news and business stories in Japan and Asia whenever bureau chief Richard Lloyd Parry was elsewhere on assignment. The two have developed a symbiotic relationship, exactly the opposite of the

fierce territoriality often found among journalists. “He’s been extremely helpful, and he is a real model, I think, of what a foreign correspondent ought to be. Very measured, very analytical, he never resorts to stereotype. So I learn a lot by reading his work,” she says.

Alexander accepts that Japanese fluency isn’t in the cards and uses interpreters where needed. In her coverage, which has included the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster and a host of business and hard-news stories, she aims to sketch

in some of the unknowns surrounding “a country that’s still a bit of a mystery to most people in the West.” In some cases, such as the recent story about a boy who went missing in Hokkaido, she’s left somewhat at odds with what her editors back home, and possibly her readers, want to hear. The 7-year-old boy’s parents left him by a roadside in the mountains as punishment for bad behavior, only to find him gone when they returned shortly thereafter. He was found six days later, unharmed, having travelled through woodlands known to host bears.

“I was covering it that week, and [the *Times* UK editors] were crazy about the story. They were like, “So, what does this tell us about the Japanese psyche? About Japanese parenting? Is this a normal thing that everybody does in Japan?” Of course that kind of anthropological and sociological analysis is interesting, but you have to tread carefully not to fall into a stereotypical portrayal. So while I want to fight against portraying Japan as this mad country, it has to be

“It has to be acknowledged that there are aspects of Japanese culture that remain alien in the West, and I think denying that isn’t actually very helpful.”

acknowledged that there are aspects of Japanese culture that remain alien in the West, and I think denying that isn’t actually very helpful.”

Alexander has written several articles for the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Financial Times* in the UK about Japan’s disposable houses, and would like to write more about the nation’s economy and working women. She worries, though, about journalism’s role amid a crumbling business model and a public that seems content with free content cobbled together by replacements for experts the industry can now ill afford.

Like many journalists, she’s taken on corporate jobs, but is always cognizant of the change in viewpoint. “Broadly speaking, journalists will drift into writing for clients,” she says, “because they’re not being paid to write critical articles about society, and that’s a shame, because it means corporations and governments get all the power and are unopposed.”



Tyler Rothmar is a Tokyo-based writer and editor.



My two (foster) sons

A volunteer parent experiences the joys and struggles of expanding children's horizons and building a family.

by CAROLINE PARSONS

One photo is of a 5-year-old boy, beyond cute in a blue plastic rain jacket, singing at a festival in his children's home. Another captures the big gentle eyes of his younger brother out on a country walk with me, wearing the orange dinosaur T-shirt I had just given him. They are prize possessions, some of the first pictures I ever took of my foster sons.

Eight years ago I started to foster these two Japanese children, turning me overnight into a mother – a foster one, anyway. Having children was something I'd always assumed I would do when it felt right. But my Japanese husband and I, both professional photographers, prioritized work, and watched as our thirties passed into our forties. We had four lovely cats but no children of our own.

Eventually I did feel ready. I had hopes that we could grow our family, even if we had to help nature along. But my husband was more determined than ever to live from his art with no day job and feared the resentment that he might feel with the demands of a larger family. So we made the hard decision to support each other's dreams – and divorced. He moved to Europe. I chose to stay in Japan, juggling the fortunes of life as a

foreign photographer while putting out feelers to see if there were children who might want what I had to offer: a heart very ready to love a child.

Divorce, single parenthood, adoption, step-parents, step-siblings and half-siblings. I had experienced all of this while growing up in the 1960s and '70s in the UK, and it was all perfectly normal. So even though my dream of starting my own family was beginning to look seriously challenged by the realities of aging, I knew there were many kinds of families and refused to believe that I could not, should not or would not have children. I did recognize, however, that giving birth to the mother I felt strongly growing inside me might require a fair bit of flexible thinking.

AN AMERICAN FRIEND OF a friend in Tokyo was in the process of adopting a Japanese baby. We'd never met, but she generously chatted to me on the phone between bottle-feeds. She knew how I felt and I could feel for her too as she described being on tenterhooks – for the next six months, the teenage birth mother of the infant in her arms had the right to change her mind at any time. She and her husband

Caroline Parsons is a retired photojournalist. For more on the foster parent experience, visit her website, friendsoftheboys.org

CAROLINE PARSONS

were caring for a baby who might not become theirs and they were having to keep cool, despite being on an emotional roller-coaster.

I learned that adoption of children unrelated to you by blood was rare in Japan, but it did exist. The woman's advice was that I build personal connections with people involved in childcare. I should let them get to know and trust me, and stay patient and open to the process.

I had all that in mind when I visited my local ward office looking for advice on local adoption agencies. They had no such list, but on the desk was a pamphlet about a child-fostering seminar that was taking place the very next day. When they saw that I was curious, the staff urged me to go along.

That was in 2008. Now it's a glorious May morning in 2016. As I write this, my foster sons, two brothers a year apart in age, are indulging in their favorite Sunday morning pastime: a long lie-in. I gaze at their sleeping faces – as angelic to me today as they were when they first turned "My Home" into "Our Home."

NOW 12 AND 13, they have lived in a children's home since they were 2 and 3, when their birth parents experienced intractable difficulties that made them unable to care for the toddlers. Altogether, we spend about two to three months of the year together, including regular weekends and the school holidays. We are a happy trio and, as I believe any parent does, I organize my life around them.

I'm not suggesting this is an easy journey. It has challenged me to the core every step of the way. Emotionally (the younger brother could be enormously challenging at the beginning),

Only about 15 percent find homes with foster families and only a tiny number get adopted. The majority live their whole childhood in institutions.

physically, financially, it has taken all I've got and more. I still approach things a day at a time and just continue to pray that we will all work out fine. I am heartened that the more time passes, the more closely and naturally we three seem to have bonded in an amazing, organic kind of process.

The number of children taken into care in Japan is increasing every year: there are currently over 36,000 such children nationwide. In the majority of cases, this is due to parental abuse or neglect. Economic hardship, of course, is a big factor.

Only about 15 percent of these children find homes with foster families and only a tiny number get adopted. The majority live their whole childhood in institutions. That figure is very different from the figures in Western countries. In the UK, some 75 percent of "looked-after children" are in foster care and in Australia the figure is over 90 percent.

Many studies have been done showing the negative effects of growing up in institutions, how many children will later have difficulty integrating into society as adults. Two years ago, the international NGO Human Rights Watch put out a damning report titled "Without Dreams," criticizing Japan for being predisposed to institutionalizing children rather than placing them in adoption or foster care. The report claimed these children were being deprived of the family-based care that is so important for their development and wellbeing. It urged Japan to be "consistent with its international legal obligations" and to "prioritize the best interests of the child" by phasing out institutions.

I AM A "VOLUNTEER Family" foster parent. Our role is to give the children an experience of life in a family, so we take chil-

dren growing up in an institution into our homes for weekends and/or the holidays. There are only a few of us doing this and most only take the children for a few days of the year. Most foster parents are Japanese married couples, but the law does not stipulate nationality or marital status and I was accepted into the system, the only foreigner doing this in my area.

If the boys were to live with me full time, which is theoretically possible, I would receive much more training than I did. And I would have full financial support from the child welfare authorities. Last year we discussed this, but the staff involved in the decision were worried that if things went wrong untold damage would be done to our relationship. They have witnessed "families" being crushed under the strain of suddenly living together full time, and asked me to continue as I have been.

One big problem is that there is little financial support in this category. "Volunteer Family" foster parents receive a small daily allowance when the children visit, but it does not cover much more than the cost of transport to and from the children's home. For the eight years I have been fostering the boys, I have borne the lion's share of the expenses myself, with help from my family in the UK and friends.

THE BOYS WANT TO come and stay as often as possible and of course I want that too. The more time we spend together, the more we truly do feel like family. But as they've grown, so have all the costs – food, transport, books and entrance tickets if we go out somewhere. As I currently earn only a modest salary as a children's teacher, I am now looking for grants and

other financial assistance to enable me to support the boys through university.

Fostering a child in the UK would have been an entirely different experience since the system there is far more developed, with a lot of training and financial support. But Japan is where I live so this has been my sole experience with fostering.

I have been warmly welcomed by everyone I have worked with – the caseworkers, the psychiatrists (my foster sons are each assigned one and meet with them at regular intervals), the coordinators, the special-needs teachers at school. The institution's teachers are very dedicated, and I know that if I run into trouble when the boys are with me, I can call and ask for help.

Noriko Yamauchi, who is in charge of coordinating with foster parents at the Yokosuka child consultation center, says the government recognizes the problems with institutions, and is working to expand the fostering system. But the target is far from ambitious, calling for only 30 percent of children in care to be placed with foster parents by 2030. While not phasing out institutions, Yamauchi said, they are working to reform them, making them closer to a family environment: group homes in which four or five children live with a male and female teacher.

My foster sons have woken up from their lie-in. I told them what I was writing and asked if they had anything to say. The older one said: "Well, when I come here, I have a proper parent and I can enjoy my life because of that." "I've lived in a children's home since I was little, so I'm used to it," said his younger brother. "But when I come here, I feel free."

And our family journey continues. ●

A group of fixers and journalists have joined forces to ensure that news from disaster-ravaged Tohoku will continue.

Rescue squad

by LUCY BIRMINGHAM

IT WAS A JOURNALIST'S nightmare: Japan's biggest story of the decade and no fixers or interpreters available. This was a frequent scenario during the March 2011 disaster, testing locally based foreign journalists and many from abroad, desperate to find assistance. But it's something that may not happen again. November 2015 saw the launch of the Japan Fixers & Journalists Network (JFJN), now offering a team of seven fixers concentrating on Fukushima and Tohoku issues. Most double as multilingual interpreters.



Makiko Segawa fixed and interpreted for Dominic Nahr (TIME), here photographing Terumi, who attempted suicide at her temporary home in Iwaki.

JFJN was co-founded by Makiko Segawa and Takaho Murakami, a veteran freelance editor, journalist and fixer for international and domestic news-related events. "Fukushima brought us together," says Segawa, now chief of the network.

Soon after the nuclear accident, Murakami, along with other Japanese freelance journalists, had founded another organization, the Free Press Association of Japan, in response to self-censorship by major media outlets. "They wanted the public to get all the information on Fukushima, not just information monopolized by the

Lucy Birmingham is a long-time Tokyo-based journalist, scriptwriter, author and former president of the FCCJ.

kisha clubs," says Segawa.

Segawa joined the Free Press after facing obstacles in her own reporting on the accident. "Besides *Shukan Kinjyobi* or other weekly magazines and tabloids, I couldn't find any place that would publish the truth about Fukushima." She later turned to Reporters Without Borders and in 2012 became their Japan correspondent covering issues such as freedom of the press, nuclear-related topics and the controversial State Secrecy Law enacted in 2014.

LAST YEAR, SHE AND Murakami decided to organize a group of fixers who could assist foreign journalists leading up to the fifth anniversary of the disaster. It was the start of JFJN. "We brought together many friends working as fixers, including those living in the Fukushima region," she says. "The official members are posted on the site, but we've also got 'underground' investigative journalists who we're collaborating with." For the 5th year anniversary coverage, the network assisted about

10 foreign journalists from such countries as Singapore, Korea and Australia.

Network members include people like trilingual (Japanese, English Norwegian) 26-year-old David Mori. He and his parents live in the town of Iwaki, which lies just outside the initial 40-kilometer evacuation zone set up immediately after the Fukushima Daiichi plant explosions. They chose not to

evacuate, despite government warnings.

David also assists with the Christian non-profit center set up by his father in 2012 to aid the locals and help revitalize the area. David's work with the center includes guiding Japanese and overseas visitors. "David also works part-time at a convenience store within the 20-kilometer exclusion zone," says Segawa. "He's helping out the owner as no one wants to work there because of radiation concerns."

With his many local contacts, disaster experience and multilingual skills, he has been an ideal fixer for JFJN, she says. "If a journalist needs, for instance, to talk with someone who tried to commit suicide or is struggling with divorce, David has the ability to find that person."

Other JFJN fixers include Elena Nakai from Kiev, Ukraine. Based in Tokyo, she has extensive experience as an interpreter and translator (English,

Japanese, Ukrainian and other Slavic languages) for nuclear conferences and a wide variety of Japanese and international media.

Fixer Yukiko Miyagoshi is a columnist who has written about her experiences in Chernobyl. From the age of 17 she became well known as a Japanese media figure for her visits to the destroyed nuclear plant and her human rights activism. Fluent in Russian, she graduated from the Moscow State University, and now specializes in both Chernobyl and Fukushima issues.

IN 2013, MIYAGOSHI and Segawa visited a hospital in Kiev where they met children of the Chernobyl plant workers, the second generation born after the accident. Many have heart disease and leukemia. "The disaster has been forgotten," says Segawa, "but the effects of it are still present."

Segawa and co-founder Murakami fear that Fukushima will face the same decrease in interest as time goes on. "We keep hearing how much the local Tohoku people want the foreign media to continue coming to the region and covering the many stories there," says Murakami. "The Japanese people don't trust the Japanese media, especially after 3/11. They know the foreign media has a much bigger impact. Their stories can result in outside pressure that changes things."

The two are now looking ahead, and readying to organize a strong team of fixers in time for the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. They're hoping that some of the competitions will be held in the tsunami and quake-hit areas and help revitalize the Tohoku region.

They're also looking toward expanding their numbers. "We're looking for candidates with foreign language ability, translation and interpreting skills, and ideally some journalism experience," Murakami says.

One of their ongoing challenges, however, is explaining to the Japanese the meaning of "fixer." "It has a bad connotation - meaning someone influencing things behind the scenes," says Murakami. "Like a *kuromaku* (black curtain)." They sometimes use the term "news coordinator" to bridge the communication gap.

Segawa and Murakami admit that their fixing work is more about passion than pay. "We're not in it for the money," says Segawa. "It's important and enjoyable work. And it's so nice that we can help bridge the gap between the Japanese and foreign media." ●

PHOTO COURTESY OF MAKIKO SEGAWA

The U.S. Republican presidential nominee, as reported on by Japan's lively tabloids.

Trump'd!

by MARK SCHREIBER

Shukan Diamond (April 9) showed the "hidden face" of Trump, who it described as "the worst candidate in history." (And also gave the reasons why "strongest candidate in history," Hillary Clinton, is so disliked.)

Shukan Post (April 22) raised 10 "surprising points" that Donald Trump has in common with the late Kakuei Tanaka. (Item 4: "His familiar and generous style was able to capture the people's hearts.")

Nikkan Gendai (May 19) noted common points that Trump and Shinzo Abe appear to share with Adolf Hitler.

Shukan Bunshun (May 26), in which columnist Isao Iijima wrote: "Even if Trump is elected, the Japan-U.S. alliance will be *daijobu*."

Shukan Shincho (May 26), in which author of *Eternal Zero* fame and former NHK director Naoki Hyakuta suggested that through Trump's election, Hyakuta's allegorical fantasy novel published earlier this year, *Kaeru no Rakuen* ("The Paradise of Frogs") - about two idealistic frogs named Socrates and Robert who travel to the peaceful and prosperous country of "Napaaju," where its amphibian inhabitants are obliged to follow a set of strange decrees - will come to be viewed as a "prophetic work."

Friday (May 27) claimed that in anticipation of Trump being elected president, Abe's office has been assembling "personal data," on Trump, which include acts of domestic violence and the rape of his former wife.

Will (July) featured Hideaki Kase's commentary on the Trump phenomenon - described as "already shocked speechless."

Shukan Jitsuwa (June 9) predicted that if Hillary Clinton defeats Trump in November, the "secret file" regarding the "aliens" supposedly found in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947 will finally be made public.

Shukan Gendai (June 11) envisaged the scenario for Trump's assassination, to take place at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland on July 18.

Sapio (July) contributor Nobuhiko Ochiai wrote that the "Fall of America" mantra being spun by Trump can trace its beginnings to events that occurred in 1968, such as the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy in Los Angeles.

Sunday Mainichi (June 12): "This is what's really behind the popularity of Trump, the king of bluster." (Sub-head: "What on earth is happening in America?")

Asahi Geino (June 16) looked back at Trump's supposed interest in romancing the late Princess Diana following her divorce, and then predicted, "Under 'President Trump,' the heretofore Japan-U.S. relationship will undergo extreme changes of the most outrageous kind!"

Yukan Fuji (June 10) Thursday columnist Tony "Texas Oyaji" Marano denounced the anti-Trump demonstrators at a rally in San Jose, California as being *boryokuteki chimpira* (violent punks).

- Mark Schreiber





FCCJ EXHIBITION

On the water: photographs by Rai Shizuno

“WATER IS EVERYTHING, IT is where it all starts”

Water is the theme of this exhibition. It's the origin of all that exists in the world that stretches beneath our feet. Water is never still and is forever changing form.

The exhibition features various expressions of water and nature along with the rich individuality of human life and the diversity of cultures. It shows beautiful moments and unalterable truths happening in the world, and the pulse of the Earth where nature and mankind coexist. ❶



Rai Shizuno's work appears in magazines and advertisements. He planned and photographed a trip to Rokkasho nuclear waste reprocessing plant, shot a documentary on the French equestrian theater, Zingaro, and collaborated with the contemporary artist Takashi Kuribayashi on the theme of "Borders."

A VISIT TO ICHIRO'S MALT



Above, Malt whisky mash is mixed in giant Japanese oak tubs; left, journalists Martin Fritz (ORF) left and Daniel Eskenazi (right) interview president and founder Ichiro Akuto.

Japanese whiskies now rank among the best – and most expensive – in the world, and one brand that is creating lots of interest comes from Chichibu, in western Saitama Prefecture.

In a distillery operated by the Venture Whisky Company, Ichiro Akuto is producing single malt whiskies – under the brand name Ichiro's Malt – that are becoming famous around the globe.

The Special Projects Committee arranged a visit to the distillery on June 2, that included observation of the distilling process, blending and storage. The company has also built a cooperage, or barrel-making workshop, where various woods are used for making barrels to help create new and distinctive whisky blends. Ichiro Akuto, president and founder, greeted the guests.

While the company currently imports most of the malted barley, which is essential to whisky making, it plans to increase use of barley grown in the Chichibu region by local farmers.

– Geoff Tudor

JOIN THE FILM COMMITTEE ...



... on Wednesday, July 30 at 7:00 pm for one of the most powerful character studies in recent memory, *Ken and Kazu*.

The extraordinarily beautiful, brutal and moving first feature by Hiroshi Shoji, it won the Best Picture Award in the Japanese Cinema Splash section at the 2015 Tokyo Film Festival, as well as international acclaim for its breathtaking cinematography, the bravura acting chemistry of its two leads and the Shakespearean dimensions of its tragic tale. Up-and-coming stars Shinsuke Kato and Katsuya Maiguma are the titular characters, small-time meth dealers who are in it only for the money: Ken needs it to start a new life with his pregnant girlfriend, and Kazu needs it

so he can put his mother into a care home. Increasingly intense and thrilling as it hurtles inexorably to its fateful climax, *Ken and Kazu* is anchored by performances of heartbreaking tenderness and explosive anger. The writer-director and his two stars will be on hand for the Q&A. (Japan, 2015; 98 minutes; Japanese with English subtitles.)

– Karen Severns



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For those already in on the secret, the application form is available on the FCCJ website or from the 19F Club office.



HEARD AT THE CLUB

“We focused on to trying to push the opposition parties to join forces, given the biased nature of the Upper House electoral system. Recently we were able to achieve a single joint candidacy from the opposition camp in all 32 single member districts. This is something that, historically, has never happened before.”

Koichi Nakano of the Civil Alliance for Peace and Constitutionalism, speaking at the Club on June 17, on the opposition coalition for the upcoming Upper House election



New Members

REGULAR MEMBER

TOSHIHIKO KASAHARA is a senior staff writer and member of the Article Review Committee at the *Mainichi Shimbun*. He was born in Fukui Prefecture, and studied Indonesian affairs at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. After graduation, he began his career as a journalist at the *Mainichi*. After 10 years at a few local bureaus he was assigned to the Foreign News Department at the Tokyo head office. He was assigned to London twice and once to Washington D.C. In London, he covered UK politics, diplomacy and more, as well as the wars in Kosovo and Afghanistan. His book, titled *Fushigina Igrisu* (“Mysterious UK”), was published by Kodansha last May. He returned to Tokyo in 2012 and worked as op-ed editor for two years prior to his present assignment. His favorite pastime is playing golf.



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Each June at RICOH, all eyes are on nature

Hands-on, we nurture nature!



This Ricoh team in Slovakia helped restore a forest damaged by flooding.

This planet being the only one we've got, pursuing environmental progress is just plain common sense. But at Ricoh we also believe it makes good business sense. The more we do with less, the better we can compete. And if our innovation yields environmental breakthroughs, we know our company will grow.

Where do you start, though? In a vast enterprise with 110,000 employees worldwide, how do you get all eyes focused on the goal?

At Ricoh, we do it by devoting the entire month of June to “Global Eco Action.” Ricoh teams in each country go out in search of beaches and streams to clean or nature reserves overrun by invasive plants – or whatever other good deeds they can imagine. And each employee is asked to think of positive steps they can take – like biking to work instead of driving.

No, of course, by themselves these small acts won't save the planet. But having focused on Global Eco Action each June for the past 11 years, environmental progress is now rooted in our collective imagination. And we know it's our capacity to imagine that drives our ability to change.

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
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