

VOICES From THE NEW YORKERS

Japan's New Era

Masuo Ichida

With a new Emperor on the Chrysanthemum Throne, Japan started a new "era". While in most business affairs the Gregorian calen-



dars are used, most forms in Japan are still filled out with the year in relation to the Japanese era. This is important in filling out any paperwork in Japan with one's birthdate, most likely the Showa Era for older folk, and the Heisei Era that began after the death of Emperor Hirohito in 1989.

In the US, we often think in terms of decades to match cultural events that are iconic to the time period. For example, we think of the 1960s as a time of the "British Invasion" with advent of the Beatles on to the music scene or Motown with the Supremes; the start of the Vietnam War also marks the 60's. Disco, bellbottom jeans, and afros come to mind when we think of the 70's. New York in the 80's was all about the nightclubs like Palladium, Tunnel, and Limelight, all downtown hotspots at the time.

In the same way, the Japanese wax nostalgic for different eras, even though they encompass more than decades, and the eras each have their own moods as the decades do here. Most elderly Japanese were very young when the war started in the Showa Era (1926) and the later generations born post-war think of the Showa era as one full of economic prosperity and a bustling Japan. Starting with cup ramen that was invented in 1958 and formally launched in the US in 1970 and continuing with the invention of the Sony Walkman, Japan was headed toward being a world leader in interesting new concepts and designs, and the economy boomed. The Heisei era (from 1989) was a peaceful time, true to its name, and yet more solemn with the downturn of the economy in the 90's and major natural disasters like the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011. The new Reiwa era promises "beautiful harmony" and with the 2020 Tokyo Olympics coming up next summer, there is optimism that not only will the special traditions of Japan be treasured and preserved, but presented on a world stage to introduce and shine. We are fortunate to experience and be a part of the beginnings of Japan's Reiva era! (Mas Ichida is an illustrator and Math teacher of Frederic Douglass Highschool)

THE JAPAN VOICE

COOL JAPAN from New Yorkers' Viewpoints

A Message from Okinawa to the USA

Battle of Ms. Teiko Yonaha-Tursi

The Battle of Okinawa has been described as the "Storm of Steel." Ms. Teiko Yonaha-Tursi, who was 4 years old when she experienced the fierce battle of Okinawa, was a guest speaker at an event on April 6th in Manhattan, New York. The symposium concerned Okinawa's past, present and future.

The memory of the war is branded clearly in Teiko's mind. Her first letter of the English alphabet was "B", as in the B-29s that dropped bombs from the sky. She remembers the hor-

rible fear she had of Japanese Imperial soldiers; they were known for having frightening attitudes as they would threaten to kill crying infants hiding in caves and shelters. When the war was over, refugees came out of the caves and shelters. Teiko was dressed up like a boy. Her memories of the war experience vividly surged.



After working for an American newspaper company in Okinawa, Teiko married an American military man in 1964 and moved to the USA. In 1978, the family with 3 children settled down in New Jersey. However, Teiko's husband had been suffering from unknown internal chronic pain of an unknown cause since he came back from Vietnam, and one day, it led to his untimely passing.

She was left with 3 young teenagers and medical bills from the civilian hospital. In order to face and get over her own trauma, she majored in psychology and attended karate school with her children. She worked as a psychiatric case manager and dealt with many youths during her work in New Jersey. Despite the demands of her life as a single parent in America, Teiko maintained her concern for the welfare of Okinawa and its island people. She explained that Okinawans have a unique culture, language, pride, and soul, but in spite of all these elements, both Japanese and American Governments keep ignoring and suppressing Okinawa. As Teiko seemed to humorously recall her emotions of bitter life and hardship in the past, she was determined to talk about the current situation in Okinawa and her speech patterns become sterner. She expresses, "This is an issue of human rights!"

One current issue has to do with the relocation of a Marine Air Base from its crowded confines in Futemma, located in the island's popular southern region, to the more isolated environment of Henoko Bay in Okinawa's northern coastal area. Teiko said that she expected the result of the past February's Referendum (over 72%=No!) of Okinawans' demo-



cratic will against the current construction of the Henoko Bay. Then again, it was ignored and suppressed by the Japanese government. The beautiful sea of Henoko fed families with plenty of fish and other kinds of seafood.

The event started with the screening of a short documentary film directed by Hanayo Oya on the anti-base movement in Henoko. Then after reporting back from Henoko about people's non-violent resistance, sit-in actions with singing and dancing at the Camp Schwab Gate, and the protest actions on the sea, members of the Raging Grannies, an American senior women's group, who perform music with satire lyrics to protest against injustice and/or oppression by the US government, sang an anti-base song made for Okinawa. At the end of the program Teiko-san performed a karate dance, which was applauded by the audience.

Teiko served 10 years of the

president as the New York Okinawa Cultural Association. Currently, she is playing the role of consultant for the association. In 2006, she was appointed as one of the world-wide Goodwill ambassadors for the Okinawa Prefecture.

Her grown children are concerned about their 78-year-old single mother's well-being as a social activist, going to Washington D.C., New York, and other cities attending events, but her grandchildren say to her "You're cool, Oba-Chan."

Seventeen years ago, Teiko's oldest grandchild (30) mentioned to her, "Hitler said to his officers about how fortunate it was for them to know that the citizens were ignorant, and how it was advantageous for them. Oba-Chan, I think Japan was the same." His comments had triggered the dormant volcano inside her - she had always subconsciously felt the same way. Talking about the memory to the reporter, she laughed, and said, "Perhaps it'll explode."

Teiko's strong sense of justice is something she inherited from her mother, who was a president of the Nago-city's women's association; also, in Okinawa, she was the first female president of the senior citizens club in Nago-city. A childhood friend who met with Teiko recently said, "You never change."

(KaoruKomi/Translated by Teiko Yonaha-Tursi)



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