

NUMBER 1 SHIMBUN

March 2013
Volume 45 No. 3
¥400



TWO YEARS AFTER THE TRIPLE DISASTER **BACK TO THE FUTURE**

**THE SAFE WAVE
TRIBUTE TO A
LOST VILLAGE**

**WHO DO YOU TRUST?
CROWD SOURCING BEATS
GOV'T RADIATION READINGS**

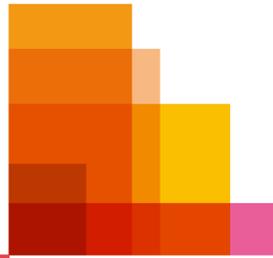
**FUKUSHIMA DAIICHI
DID TELEVISION REPORT
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of CEOs are very confident about their growth prospects
See page 3

82%
of CEOs plan to change customer strategies in 2013
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Heard at the Club

"We and others have for years been alleging that whaling has no economic future ... here it is in black and white."



Patrick Ramage, Director of the International Fund for Animal Welfare's whale program, referring to the Fund's new report, page 17

NUMBER 1 SHIMBUN

Volume 45, Number 3 March 2013

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Published by the FCCJ
All opinions contained within Number 1 Shimbun are those of the authors. As such, these opinions do not constitute an official position of Number 1 Shimbun, the editor or the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan.

Please pitch and send articles and photographs, or address comments to no.1shimbun@fccj.or.jp

President's message



THOSE WHO ARE NOT "WORKING press" may not be aware of one of the most important functions of the FCCJ: Foreign Press in Japan, or FPIJ. This is actually an independent organization, established in 1964, open to all accredited foreign media organizations in Japan (whether or not their correspondents are FCCJ Members). But the FCCJ runs the FPIJ secretariat, which has been chaired since 2011 by Justin McCurry of *The Guardian*.

The mandate of FPIJ is to "obtain the best possible news coverage facilities needed or requested by its members and to carry out all necessary acts for this purpose." In practice, FPIJ functions "as a clearing house for information about press events, organizing press pools and lobbying on behalf of our members for fair access to media events." This latter task has involved decades of continuous struggle.

I take this opportunity to spotlight Justin's efforts (ably assisted by Kubo and Kobayashi of the FCCJ staff) because he has done a commendable job under difficult circumstances in getting us fair access to the stricken Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The mission last year was to establish that Tepco is duty-bound to offer media tours of the plant to foreign media, and not just members of the domestic kisha club that regularly covers the electric utility. In this respect, Justin says we owe a debt of gratitude to Nori Shikata, the former prime ministerial spokesman, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who went to bat for us with Tepco.

This year, thanks to Justin's efforts to cultivate a cordial relationship with Tepco PR, in early March FPIJ members will get our second visit to Fukushima. But getting the trip was not the end of his struggle; there was still the question as to which of 24 "pen" journalists who applied could have the 12 places Tepco allotted. After a certain amount of hard feeling about who deserved to win a lottery for the seats, Justin reports:

"At least half a dozen people voluntarily withdrew their applications to give first-timers a better chance of being picked out of the hat. That demonstrates a certain esprit de corps, I think. In the end, though, Tepco agreed to take 16 writers."

In addition to writers, the FPIJ contingent will include pool photographers and TV cameramen, who will provide B-roll from the plant to member media.

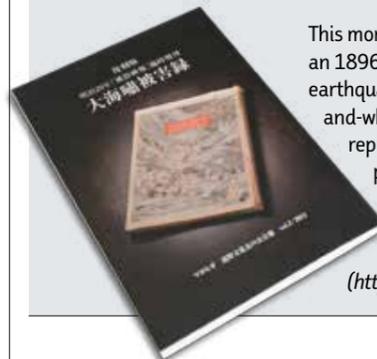
While I'm handing out kudos, one more for Justin. For many years there has been a certain estrangement between FPIJ and the South Korean correspondents in Japan. Recently, though, and due in large measure to Justin's efforts, the entire 15-member South Korean media contingent joined FPIJ. Now, if he can just get them all to join the FCCJ.

- Georges Baumgartner



Mongolian Yokozuna Harumafuji held a press conference at the Club on Feb. 18, a month after dominating the New Year Grand Tournament with a 15-0 record. It was his fifth title. When asked why it has become difficult for Japanese wrestlers to gain Yokozuna rank, the Grand Champion replied that reaching the top was a matter of the wrestler's "destiny."

On the cover



This month's cover picture is from a 2012 reprint of an 1896 pictorial magazine dedicated to that year's earthquake and tsunami in the Tohoku area. Many black-and-white and a few colour prints of that disaster are reprinted, some looking remarkably similar to the photographic images of the March 11 disaster.

The book, *Taikaihigairoku* (大海嘯被害録), is published by the Tono Culture Research Center in Iwate.

(http://honto.jp/netstore/pd-book_25177863.html)

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Steve McClure has an interim report on the quirky new online edition of our largest English newspaper

The *Japan Times* is beta than ever. The venerable organ "without fear or favor" launched the beta version of its new online edition on Jan. 23.

At first glance, it looks good. The HTML5-based design is crisp, clear and easy to navigate – on a mobile, that is. It's been designed to work on PCs, tablets and mobiles without a special app, but it's quite obvious that the focus has been on the latter two – understandable, perhaps, in a country where mobiles dominate the world of internet access – while the former suffers as a result.

On a PC, there's too much "air" from taking the creative-use-of-white-space concept too far. The typeface is needlessly large on all devices, meaning relatively little content can be viewed at one time. On the whole, the new JT website looks more bloggish than newsy. The websites of the *Guardian* and *The New York Times* are the gold standard for online newspapers, and the JT should take a leaf from their books.

The "beta" tag means the revamped site is still a work in progress. Not all the content from the older site can be viewed on the new site. "We will be migrating the legacy content over the coming weeks," the JT explains in the webspeak that is geekdom's vernacular.

The JT promises more multimedia content as the site develops. You can already view movie trailers that are handily placed at the top of reviews by the paper's terrific trio of film critics (Fazio, Schilling and Shoji). Very cool.

One of the old JT website's major failings was its wonky search function, which delivered incomplete results that weren't in chronological order. The beta version's search engine is something of an improvement, but the results are still inconsistent. Using my surname as the search term yields several stories I've written over the past few years, or articles by other writers who've quoted



me (for reasons best known to themselves). But some of my stories and those by various colleagues just don't come up at all – unless you use another search term. Definitely a bug that needs fixing.

In my December column, I lamented the lack of a readers' comments feature on the JT's website. Well, now it has one.

As you'd expect, readers' comments are moderated, which makes sense. The JT helpfully suggests that people "... take a deep breath and consider the consequences of your comment before you submit it." Wise words, indeed – but it seems more than a few readers are holding their breath, judging from the relative paucity of comments posted on the site so far.

One exception is Ian Martin's excellent Feb. 1 analysis of the imbroglio surrounding AKB48 member Minami Minegishi's head-shaving penance for engaging in some shagosity with a member of the male gender, contrary to the rules laid down by the group's management. As of Feb. 14, 67 JT readers had posted comments about the story, and there were 330 online "reactions" (mainly tweets) to the piece.

The Club's own Bob Whiting chimed in with a very perceptive and well-informed comment regarding a Feb. 11 story titled "Violent coaching rooted in militarism," pointing out that violent coaching methods predate the onset of militarism in Japan.

We're told that JT readers can also look forward to an email update service in the near future. I guess that's a good thing, but I hope it doesn't mean a deluge of emails in my already overcrowded inbox. ❶

Steve McClure has lived in Tokyo since 1985. Formerly *Billboard* magazine's Asia Bureau Chief, he now publishes the online music-industry newsletter *McClureMusic.com*.



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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.





Wakana Yokoyama (with tambourine) leads dancers from Ukedo in front of temporary housing for evacuees in Fukushima prefecture in Feb. 2012.

The safe wave

by Henry Tricks

This is a short tribute to a lost village. I first saw it from a nearby hill on an autumn morning in 2011, almost nine months after the tsunami. It is called Ukedo, and it lies on a beach on Fukushima's balmy shoreline. Lies is the operative word. At first, it was hard to tell that a 1,300-strong community had existed there, because its houses were broken stumps, and goldenrod flowers swept over the debris, blurring the boundary between village and surrounding marshland.

The place reminded me of Normandy in northwestern France. There were ducks and herons drifting lazily on the ponds, and salmon idling in the river. But jutting out of the undergrowth were vehicles and fishing boats that looked like the rusting shells of burnt-out tanks left in the wake of the Normandy landings. On the horizon, the dark chimney stacks of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant loomed eerily through the mist. The only people I saw were wearing white hazmat suits to shield them from the radiation. As three of them chatted

and sipped sake at a roadside shrine, they could have been ghosts of some of the 182 people in the area killed by the tsunami.

Ukedo haunts me. Perhaps it is its utter desolation. Perhaps it was being told that on the small hill where I stood, the tsunami had snagged those running for safety, pulling them away from the bamboo plants to which they desperately clung, drowning wives, sparing husbands. Perhaps it is the clutter of dislodged headstones in the graveyard, where the black waters of the tsunami have licked the burial urns clean, dissolving the bones and ashes into the surrounding swampy marshland. (This is the ultimate ignominy: not even the dead were spared). Perhaps it is the radiated burial site that it has become. Sitting so close to the nuclear power plant, it will probably never be rebuilt.

As I have tracked down its uprooted residents to reconstruct the lost village in my mind, I find in Ukedo a metaphor for a vanishing Japan. To Wakana Yokoyama, who was 12 when the tsunami killed her grandparents, village life is bound

up with memories of them. She lived in one of the biggest houses; adjoining it was her grandfather's workshop. He was the village's shipwright. When she came home from school, she would sit on a swing that he had built for her in the garden and watch him work. She loved the way his hands wielded his tools. His work was recognized far and wide. In the Fukushima prefectural museum in Aizu Wakamatsu, I discovered one of his small wooden sailing boats preserved for posterity. Next to it was the wooden figure of a sea spirit meant to protect the boat. That was made by Wakana's great grandmother. When I told Wakana I had seen them, her face beamed with pleasure.

The house was the closest in the village to the sea, so close, Wakana says, that her memory of it is bound up with the sound of the waves. Crabs would scuttle through her garden. Her favorite toys were the desiccated starfish thrown away by fishermen that she would toss across the beach like a frisbee. Fish and shellfish were always on the table. By the well in the garden, she

would watch her grandfather gut the fish that he would often bring home after a brisk walk to the port, given to him for free by local fishermen. As far as Wakana can remember, her family never paid for a fish during her whole life in Ukedo. Her grandfather's most mesmerizing trick was to use a fish knife with his left hand, open a salmon, and gently squeeze out the roe, which they ate on top of rice for breakfast. "He had hands like a god," Wakana says. "Grandpa did it beautifully, better than anyone else on Earth."

A different story of village life is told by Wakana's 62-year-old mentor, Shigeko Sasaki, who came to the village from her family home 10 miles away as a 19-year-old bride, her father's injunction ringing in her ears: "Never marry a poor man. Worse, never marry a poor man from Ukedo." For her, living in Ukedo was a lifelong struggle for acceptance. Her husband built her a fine house, made from cedar chopped from her father's farm. But then he disappeared. He would be gone for months on oceanic fishing trips without even warning her he was leaving. When he returned, the children would run upstairs and hide from the rough, bearded man they barely recognized. In his absence, drunken men would pass by the house at night, frightening her with their suggestive talk.

Eventually, her husband gave up the sea and devoted himself to carpentry. But as a drinker, he was as absent as ever. She called him a cuckoo. At night, he would head off to the bars of the nearby town. He would stagger home before dawn. Rarely did she receive much moral support from the villagers. Even when she took on responsibility for preserving one of the village's most sacred traditions – the folk dances performed by girls such as Wakana at the festival held every February – she heard whispers of disapproval because she was not Ukedo born and bred.

It is those dances that are now Ukedo's salvation. After the tsunami and nuclear accident, everyone in the village was evacuated. Wakana and her friends were scattered throughout Fukushima; Sasaki went to Tokyo. One day, walking through the high-rise tower blocks of her tem-



The dance was a year after the village's last Festival of the Safe Wave, which took place just weeks before the triple disaster.

porary home near the Sumida River in Tokyo, the dance teacher received an unexpected phone call. A Shinto priest from Fukushima, who she had never met before, called about the dances. "Could we rescue them?" he asked. When she hesitated, he made an even stranger request. Could she sing one of the songs to him? Bashfully, she began to sing into her mobile phone a song called "Soma Nagareyama," which dates back to samurai times. The more she sang, the more her spirits rose. It is a haunting song to hear, but the words are hopeful.

Soma Nagareyama, na-e na-e
Come over if you feel like it, na-e
In the middle of May
Chasing wild horses
Singing and dancing, na-e
Be cheerful, na-e
Come over, na-e
To Ukedo beach, na-e
Sea bream and plaice, na-e
Leaping up and down, na-e

With the help of the priest, Sasaki resolved to revive the dances. They

re-created the uproarious dancing costumes – red and yellow carnations on bamboo-framed hats, black-and-white scarves, multi-colored robes, plastic swords, clogs and sandals – that had been swept away in the tsunami. The priest hand carved the castanets that the children clicked in their fingers as they danced. Under Sasaki's tutelage, the children gathered to rehearse from their evacuation shelters across Fukushima. They were delighted to see each other; each had been scattered to different schools, mourning their lost relatives and lifelong friendships that had been cruelly cut short.

Some of the elderly members of the village grumbled that it was too soon to dance when they were still mourning their lost ones and their ruined lives. But the children persevered. For 18 months now, they have performed the folk dances, lifting the spirits of those in evacuation shelters, as well as appearing on television and at the Tokyo International Forum in Yurakucho.

The children, as young as five years old, dance with devoted concentration. When I saw them perform for three sweltering summer days at Meiji Jingu shrine in Shibuya last July, some of them ended up almost comatose from the fatigue and heat. But there were no tears.

Ukedo lives on in their dances, even as memory of it fades away, and the chances of rescuing it from the radiation-drenched soil diminish. Curious to watch now is how the ocean that destroyed it laps gently at its desolate shoreline with a beguiling innocence, as if whispering, "Mischievous? Who, me?"

Many of the children have already forgiven it. It is life by the sea that they miss most. For 1,000 years, they recall, the ocean kept them safe and provided Ukedo with innumerable bounties. That, too, is reflected in the dances they preserve. The children still perform them every February as part of the village's annual pageant. Its name, *Amba Matsuri*, says it all. In English, it is called the Festival of the Safe Wave. ❶

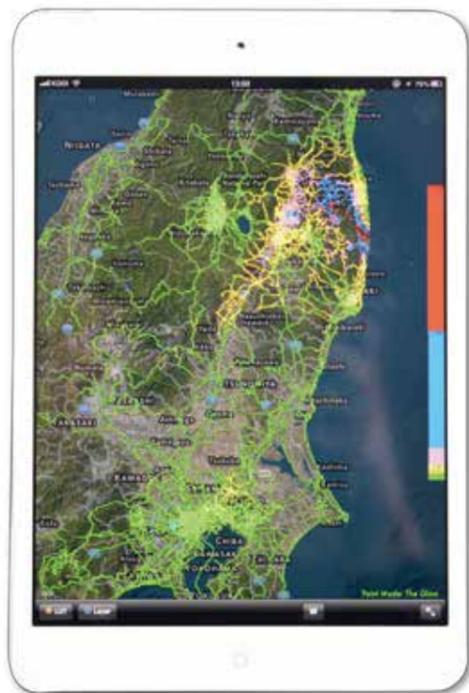
Henry Tricks has been the Tokyo Bureau Chief of *The Economist* since 2009.

UKEDO LIVES ON IN THEIR DANCES, EVEN AS MEMORY OF IT FADES AWAY, AND THE CHANCES OF RESCUING IT FROM THE RADIATION-DRENCHED SOIL DIMINISH

INDIVIDUALS, GOVERNMENT AND THE NGO
SAFECAST STRUGGLE TO ASSESS THE RISKS OF THE
CONTAMINATION THAT TEPCO HAS DUMPED ON US

Radiation redux

by Julian Ryall



The Safecast app has over 6 million measurements of radiation levels throughout Japan

Two short years ago, terabecquerels, exclusion zones and Geiger counters dominated headlines in Japan and around the world. For journalists based here, they largely became our world. Today, as the two-year anniversary of the second-worst nuclear disaster in history passes us, news editors beyond these shores are largely not interested. The global news cycle has moved on, there is another crisis in another country and Fukushima is slowly fading from the public consciousness.

The same is happening in Japan. The headlines, such as they are, can now be found below the fold on page three; we spend more time worrying about the potential impact of Kim Jong-un's nuclear arsenal than the radiation that has already settled like an ominous blanket across our lives.

But make no mistake: while we still can't see it, smell it or taste it, the radioactive materials that escaped from the battered reactors at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant are all around us.

Some former residents of Fukushima

have abandoned their previous lives entirely and moved to distant places: Hokkaido, Okinawa or even further afield. "For the first year, there were so many things that were not clear and I was so anxious about radiation," said Yuko Hirono. "I devoted many hours to researching information about safety and was careful about food and everything else."

"Initially, the government information was doubtful as they just tried not to make people panic and didn't share any of the important details. But, looking back, I think the government was simply panicking, didn't have good information themselves and no knowledge of how to control a critical situation."

That was sufficient to prompt Hirono and her husband, photographer Jeremy Sutton-Hibbert, to leave Japan and move to Glasgow with their five-year-old daughter, Hikari.

"Everybody is busy with their day-to-day lives and they seem to have forgotten all about what March 11, 2011, did to Japan," she said. "I don't think anybody believes the situation at the reactors is

under control, but people just don't pause to consider it."

Others – myself included – prefer not to think about the long-term impact and have plenty of other things to keep us occupied in our waking hours.

But there are groups that have emerged from the chaotic early days of the crisis and declined to adopt the ostrich's approach to the situation. They are actively working to identify the threat that radiation poses to each of us, the "hot spots" that exist well beyond the perimeter of the government-imposed exclusion zone and to provide accurate, concise and useful information on radiation levels to anyone who needs it. And they are not convinced by the explanations and data that are being provided by the government.

Safecast Japan began as a small group of individuals who became concerned after the first reactor at the Fukushima Daiichi plant started venting radiation into the atmosphere, and grew into the NGO that it is today as they tapped into their personal and professional networks.

There was, says Joe Moross, an engineer and Safecast volunteer, "a lot of not-knowing and a need for real information that people could use." Using data provided by a network of hundreds of volunteers and Geiger counters which they developed themselves, Safecast now has more than 6 million measurements of radiation levels across the country, provides that data on its website and is constantly adding to its database.

"There is a considerable amount of contamination in Fukushima," said Moross. "It's not in amounts that will kill you immediately, but over 20 years we will see an impact. There will be people who are taken ill because of this. The question is what can be done about it now to minimize the impact."

"A lot of the cleanup is superficial and cosmetic, but that is all that is required in some parts of the region," he pointed out. "The problem is that when they tell local residents that an area has not been heavily contaminated and there is no need for full decontamination efforts, the people get angry because they don't believe the authorities any more. So they have to do a full clean up to make people feel better and to encourage them to come back."

Safecast is presently carrying out tests on radiation levels before and after the decontamination efforts, but no comparative figures are available to date. And that is part of the problem.

"The government is trying to provide reassurance, but the information they are

providing is just not working," Moross believes. "It's not what people need and it's very paternalistic. The information is there, but it's not particularly accessible. It's not in a form that is readily understandable, it's not explained and it's not in a context that is helpful to the people who need it."

Sean Bonner, one of the founders of the organization, agrees with that assessment. "I don't think they care about getting the info out," he said. "In an ideal world, the government would have seen what we are doing and copied us so then we wouldn't have to keep doing it. And it's easier than what they are doing."

If there is anything positive to come out of the disaster, he said, it will be that people are quicker to react on their own initiative next time and will waste less time waiting for the authorities to help them.

Yoshiko Aoyama, deputy director of the Policy Review and Public Affairs Division of the Nuclear Regulation Authority, provided a series of internet links to NRA radiation monitoring information, as well as sites provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, The Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Public Health for data in the capital and the National Institute for Radiological Sciences.

Expressing confidence that the information "has been helpful" to the public, Aoyama added that, "NRA thinks transparency is important, so we disclose information about NRA's activities. Normally, NRA holds regular press briefings twice a week and broadcasts live coverage of our meetings and press briefings on YouTube."

To emphasize the organization's commitment to public health, she cited a speech by NRA Chairman Shunichi Tanaka to the Fukushima Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety in December, in which he said, "We will put the people's health first. Having learned from the accident, we will steadily move toward the goal of establishing an objective and rigorous regulatory system based on hard science rather than political or economic considerations."

But not everyone agrees that everything possible is being done. "For environmental measuring – MEXT's networked radiation monitoring is a lame effort that nevertheless cost a lot of money," says Azby Brown, Safecast volunteer and director of the KIT Future Design Institute. "It is not well thought-out from the standpoint of what citizens want and need to know."

"The meanings of their readings are not clear enough either. People want to know how contaminated their town is, but the data available is only a reliable indicator of how contaminated it is for a few meters around each monitoring post," he added. "The food-testing data is more thorough, but still not presented in a people-friendly format."

Brown believes much of the problem lies with the "bureaucratic mindset" that afflicts government here, which also serves to make it easy for someone in a position of power to place "a bottleneck" on information. "The government should err on the side of openness," he said. "This shouldn't be difficult; many

municipalities in Fukushima have seen the light and make almost everything available, but the prefecture and central government don't seem to have cultures that allow this to happen."

People in areas most seriously affected by the radiation need detailed maps of the contamination in their neighborhoods – and at a scale of at least 100 meters and finer if possible – that are updated frequently. A transparent process for determining decontamination priorities is also required, along with independent verification of the results. Equally, there is a need for clear and updated information on results of "glass-badge tests" for external contamination, whole-body counter tests for internal contamination and labeling of food for its radiation levels. And then the data reporting needs to be well designed and standardized, Brown points out.

"The fact is that the environment is contaminated," he said. "No one can pretend it isn't. It's depressing at best. The risk debate will continue into the far future I'm sure, but the more measurements we get of people and environment, the clearer the picture becomes."

"Most people seem to think, 'Someone is keeping an eye on all this for us.' In reality, it's not clear that anyone is." **1**

Further information on Safecast available at: <http://blog.safecast.org/>

Julian Ryall is Japan correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*.

FCCJ EXHIBITION: IN THE WAKE: MEMORIES OF TOHOKU



Photographs by Toby Marshall

When I arrived in Minamisanriku less than two weeks after the devastation, the immensity of the loss was staggering, impossible to comprehend. In my few spare moments between live TV work, I wandered through the ruined landscape, trying to make emotional sense of what I was seeing. I knew then that I had to try to use images to convey not only the pain and sorrow, but also the wonder and the awe that flowed through me as I looked upon the aftermath of this terrible event.

These photos use a technique called "high dynamic range," which allows a much wider range of tones than conventional photography.

Toby Marshall has worked for ZDF German TV in Tokyo and Beijing for 17 years as cameraman and video editor.

Bad news

Has the media hidden the truth about Fukushima?

by David McNeill

Two years after the Fukushima nuclear crisis began, two media experts dissect how it has been covered by the media. Takashi Uesugi is a freelance journalist and author of several books on the Fukushima crisis, including *Terebi Wa Naze Heiki De Uso Wo Tsukunoka?* (“Why does television tell so many lies?”). He is also one of the founders of The Free Press Association of Japan (www.fpoj.jp), an attempt to offer an alternative to Japan’s press club system. Mamoru Ito is professor of media and cultural studies at Waseda University and author of *Terebi Wa Genpatsu Jiko Dou Tsutaetenoka?* (“How did television cover the nuclear accident?”). Both are highly critical of the media’s performance.

Uesugi-san, is it true that you have been banned from the media because of your comments on Fukushima? Until two years ago, I had regular programs on television and radio. Now the only regular radio that I do is Tokyo FM. I don’t do TBS radio [where he had a regular slot]. I have no hope of appearing on NHK or on the commercial networks. I used to be a regular or semi-regular on several shows but now not even once. I was also a regular guest on radio shows, but not anymore.

I found out two years ago that the electric utilities in Japan are major TV sponsors. That year, they spent ¥70~88.8 billion on advertising, more than Panasonic’s ¥70 billion and Toyota’s ¥50 billion. When I started claiming that this amounted to bribery of the media by Tepco, I no longer was asked to appear on radio shows.

Ito-san, tell us about your research. You surveyed Japanese television coverage of the first week of the nuclear crisis and found that only a single anti-nuclear expert had appeared, right?

That’s right. Before the disaster, TBS had a history of inviting experts from the [anti-nuclear] citizens’ nuclear information center; the director of TBS had a personal contact with them. They also always invited pro-nuclear people from the so-called nuclear village as a balance. After the crisis, Fuji TV had a guy called Yuko Fujita, who has always been anti-nuclear, on once. On the afternoon of March 11, he said there was a possibility of a meltdown happening. He was never allowed back on the screen.

Some foreign correspondents believe that the government and the media had a duty to avoid triggering panic in the week after March 11. It was fine for the foreign media, perhaps, to sometimes report sensationally, but local journalists had a very heavy responsibility. What’s your take on this?

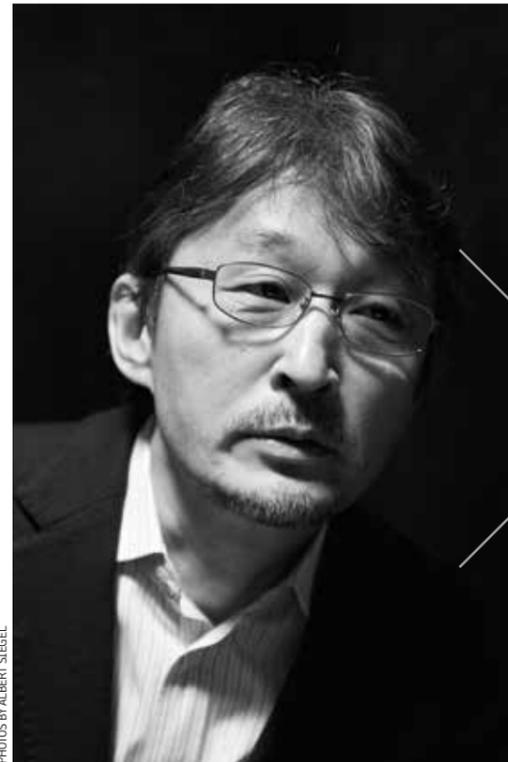
Ito: When the Fukushima Daiichi num-

ber one reactor exploded, a television camera for Fukushima Central Television captured the image and they broadcast it two minutes later. The reporters themselves were afraid about what was happening inside, but the head of the station had to report this. In other words, when journalists have information, even without knowing what it really means, it’s their responsibility to report it. They also reported which way the wind was blowing. Did Fukushima residents panic when they saw this video clip? No. Fukushima Central TV repeatedly asked the big Japanese broadcasting networks to report this explosion quickly. But it took an hour and 10 minutes before it was reported on Nihon TV, Fuji TV and NHK. And they all reported it at the same time.

They are all completely different broadcasting companies, so how does that happen – that they report it at the same time?

Ito: I don’t think it was a coincidence, but I can’t prove it. Even in Fukushima, all the networks monitor the local broadcasts and they would have known about the explosion report. They have some kind of collective agreement on what to cover. When the three TV stations finally aired the footage at the same time, they had almost the same explanation [for the blast]: they said it was a result of artificially releasing the vapor from a squib valve.

Uesugi: There is an image of the first reactor explosion that ran in the *New York Times* and another on the BBC. An hour and 10



PHOTOS BY ALBERT STEGEL

Mamoru Ito: “Each channel was telling people it was safe . . . at the same time they forbidding their own employees to report from there because of the dangers.”

minutes after the explosion, the image suddenly disappeared from Japan; the Japanese people couldn’t get access to it for over a year on the mainstream media. You could still see it on YouTube but not on TV.

I turned to the European Broadcasting Union, who had bought the rights for coverage. I insisted on humanitarian grounds the residents should have the information and then decide for themselves what to do after seeing the image. As soon as I reported it, the commercial broadcasting

companies in Japan demanded I remove that image from my homepage. It has become taboo in Japan.

Ito: Really, it was the government and the media who actually caused the panic. In a crisis like this, they feel the need to speak in a single voice. But when the government and the media together report that “everything is safe,” it has the opposite effect of making people worry. The government should distribute alternative information and admit there are a lot of things that are not clear. The biggest problem during the nuclear crisis was that there wasn’t that kind of informative environment.



Takashi Uesugi: “An hour and 10 minutes after the explosion, the image suddenly disappeared from Japan . . . You could still see it on YouTube but not on TV.”

Uesugi: It was not the public, but the government, METI and the mass media that were panicking. Allowing different views through the media is healthy. When there are different views you have to think for yourself and avoid panic. That’s why I called the Prime Minister’s Office during the crisis and asked them to let foreign journalists and freelance reporters for the internet and magazines into their press conferences. That would have made different types of

information available and subdue panic. It was the press clubs that were responsible for causing panic.

Ito: Around March 15 or 16, the central government directly asked Fukushima City if they wanted to evacuate the population of 400,000. The city refused but the media decided not to report this because they thought it would cause panic. The government once considered extending the evacuation zone that far. Then later, when the 20 millisieverts issue rose [the government upped the annual limit of “acceptable” radiation limits in schools from 1 to 20 MSv], they didn’t evacuate young children – those who should most definitely have been taken out of Fukushima and Koriyama cities.

Why do you think journalists for the mainstream media in Japan stayed out of the 20km evacuation zone, despite the demand for scoops about what was going on there?

Ito: One of my friends once said, “Japan’s journalism is compliance journalism.” Each channel was telling the people that it was safe to stay near the area at the same time they were forbidding their own employees to report within 30km of the plant because of the dangers. There was a real double standard but the employees could not go against that rule.

Uesugi: Members of the press clubs and the government were openly saying, “My wife’s hometown is in Kyushu, so I sent her back there” or “I let my child go to Singapore.” They were doing this from March 15. But as Ito-san has said, on TV and in the newspapers, they were saying that everything was safe. Even some of the politicians sent their families out of Japan.

Looking back, what are the key mistakes made by the Japanese media and the foreign media?

Ito: I think the British newspaper, *The Sun*, carried some awful reports, very sensational. Some of the foreign press exaggerated the crisis. But we have to look at differences. There is a huge difference between German TV and Japanese TV, for example. In Japan, the scientists who appear on TV work for universities and are naturally close to the government. In



Germany, more and more scientists collect independent scientific knowledge and get involved with antinuclear power movements or the Green Party.

In Japan, the establishment has too much power, and it has gotten worse after March 11. There is no freedom of speech inside the mainstream media. There are many people who know what is going on and want to speak out, but they are censored.

Uesugi: I think the nuclear sensationalism is the fault of the Japanese government and the press clubs for not letting the foreign media into their press conferences and for not making their reports accurate enough. I think the foreign media did better than the Japanese media, in the sense that they shared different voices.

The German and Norwegian media, for example, were among the first to report the radiation map. *The Washington Post* was the first to show the diagram of the meltdown. Foreign journalists also reported from inside the evacuation areas.

Ito: In a transnational crisis like this, even scientists have very different views on what should be done. The media should provide scientific data to the people and the government that will help them make more efficient decisions. But the media have not learned how to use communication technology; they simply assumed it was safe when the government said it was safe, just like back in the bad old days.

Uesugi: We have to be modest about the truth and point out which media was wrong and which was right. Otherwise, journalists end up doing the same thing as the government: they make a mistake, don’t admit it, and try to hide it. Unless this system is improved, I don’t think anything will change. In the end, people who are not told the truth will not trust the media. We have to make a proper accident investigation and confront our own mistakes. ●

David McNeill writes for *The Independent*, *The Economist*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and other publications. He is the co-author of *Strong in the Rain: Surviving Japan’s Earthquake, Tsunami and Fukushima Nuclear Disaster*.

Fukushima creatives

photographs by Everett Kennedy Brown



These photographs show young people pursuing creative careers in Fukushima, two years after the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident.

While many people with small children have taken health precautions and left the prefecture, there is a growing number of young people returning to the area – or moving there for the first time – to pursue their creative careers. Apart from the three featured here, the series features an eyeglass designer (specializing in completely wooden eyeglasses), an 18th-generation doll maker, a silk weaver in the region's 400-year-old silk-weaving tradition, and a popular DJ and master florist.

Because of the area's express rail connections, the abundant nature and onsen, the area has always been an attractive location. Following 3/11, the area is attracting young people with a creative vision for Japan. ❶



From the top, Shunsuke and Yoko Sato in their workshop in Fukushima city, 60 km from Fukushima Daichi nuclear power plant, Dec. 22, 2012. Drawn by Fukushima's disproportionately large number of violin players, the couple moved from Tokyo to open their musical instrument workshop, Grune Schurze.



Everett Kennedy Brown is a writer, fine art photographer, and former bureau chief of European Pressphoto Agency. His latest book is 日本力

Sanyo Nishimori making washi paper in Mihama city, 50 km from the nuclear plant, Jan. 27, 2013. Despite the issue of radioactivity, the conditions are ideal for making high-quality Japanese paper, he says. He has invested ¥10 million in his new workshop.

Mariko Kinoshita, right, at Ringo House, in Fukushima City, Dec. 22, 2012. Kinoshita, a former magazine editor, converted the house into an inn and salon that hosts young business and creative people from Tokyo who come to Fukushima to investigate the situation in the post-disaster region and to discuss ways to improve the wellbeing of people in the area.

THE OLD MAN AND THE TREES



DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER KAORU IKEYA IS no stranger to some FCCJ members, who might remember him showing and discussing his award-winning *Daughter From Yan'an* at the Club some 10 years ago. His powerful new documentary, *Roots*, focusing on recovery efforts in Tohoku after the March 11 disaster, opened last month in Tokyo, the same day it won the Ecumenical Jury Award at the 63rd Berlin International Film Festival.

More particularly, the film deals with the efforts of Naoshi Sato, a 77-year-old woodcutter and farmer, to rebuild his home and his life. He witnessed his firefighter son being swept away in front of him, but refuses to move from his ruined house to temporary public housing because the spirits of his ancestors, as well as the spirit of his son, still reside there.

Ikeya documents this determination to rebuild – no easy task in the face of bureaucratic governmental obstruction. Still, despite such serious, even tragic themes, the film is suffused with spontaneous moments of humor, and the resolute spirit and good nature of this old woodcutter.

In one scene, Ikeya and his superb cameraman, Masaharu Fukui, show the old man wielding his chainsaw to fell the trees as if he were an artist with a brush. Afterwards, we see him anoint what remains of the tree with sake, bow and clap, expressing his reverence for the natural world and concern that it survives for other generations.

Roots' Japanese title, *Senzo ni naru*, literally means something like "I'm going to be an ancestor," suggesting the importance of viewing what we do in this life as the wood-cutter does in his – namely that human responsibilities transcend individual births and deaths. Ikeya's film not only celebrates the essential connections of the living, but of the living to the dead and to the yet to be born. In this narrative of one person's determination to maintain this value, and the enduring Tohoku spirit, it touches a good part of our own nature. ❶ – Maki Wakiyama

The film is showing at the Image Forum theater in Shibuya. The last show every day has English subtitles. The official website is at <http://senzoninaru.com/english.html>

Maki Wakiyama is a freelance columnist, reporter and translator who has published a number of books on ocean resources, biotechnology and other issues.



Takahashi family/gasoline station (Minami Sanriku) The tsunami destroyed their gas station, but they kept a lifeline going by selling gasoline from 20-liter tanks out of the back of their truck. Last year they rebuilt the gas station at the previous location.



THESE PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRUCE OSBORN ARE FROM his series of families affected by the disasters in Tohoku – *Tohoku Oyako*. The smaller pictures are from 2011 (and featured in the Dec. 2011 *Number 1 Shimbun*). The larger photos were taken in Dec. 2012. <http://www.bruceosborn.com>

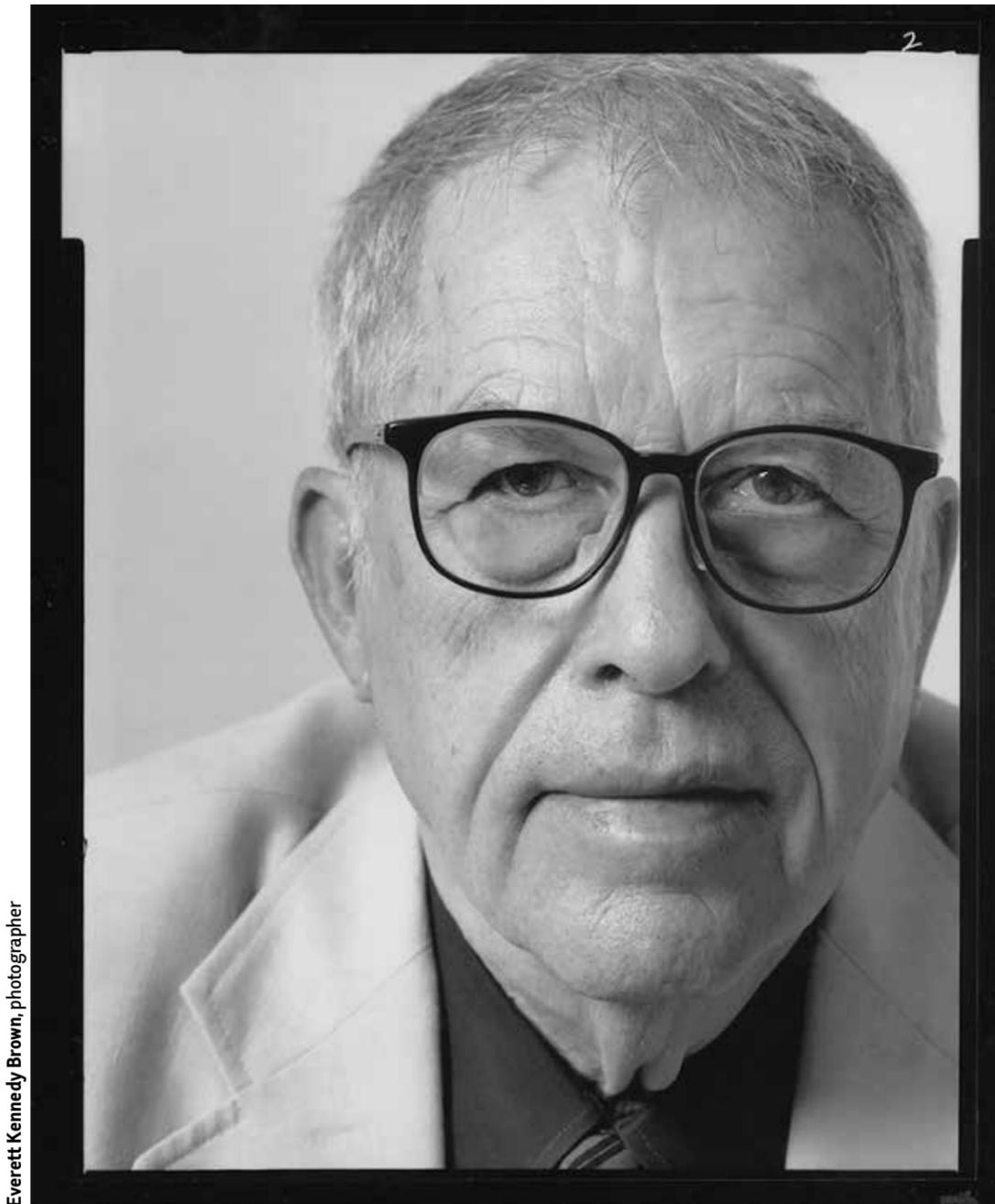
TOHOKU x 2



Takahashi father and son/fishermen (Soma) The son piloted their boat to safe waters, but their home was destroyed and they are still living in temporary housing. Tepco is now paying 70 percent of what they were making before the nuclear accident. Unable to fish, they are hauling tsunami debris out of the ocean.



Remembering Donald Richie



Everett Kennedy Brown, photographer

When Donald Richie passed away on Feb. 19 at age 88, he left behind enough books with his byline to fill a library shelf, innumerable articles on all manner of subjects penned for publications the world over and a global legacy of love for Japanese cinema, which he introduced to the world.

Equally impressive was his willingness to help others. As writers, photographers, editors and visitors to Japan of all professions and ages can attest, Donald was unstinting in sharing friendship, advice, assistance and introductions with anyone who needed them.

We asked friends and acquaintances to share, in turn, some of their memories.

John Howes, historian

Donald and I met on the *General Blatchford*, which was scheduled to arrive in Yokohama on Dec. 28, 1946 with 400 civilians to help run the Occupation. Donald was looking for adventure and very keen to get away from Ohio. We had departed the Brooklyn Navy Yard 50-some days earlier; engine trouble had made ours' one of the longest passages ever. The ship sailed like a billiard table with no stabilizers, so most of the

passengers physically shared in its lengthy struggle. En route, Donald, who was then 22, wrote a Christmas cantata for a choir that I was to conduct on the big day. We arrived in Naha on Christmas Eve, where there were few buildings standing; liquor, on the other hand, was everywhere around us. The resultant celebration left us with a cantata but no one sober enough to perform. And I don't think it has even been performed to this day.

Martin Fackler, journalist

I didn't know Donald very well, but one very brief glimpse into his character that I do recall was six or seven years ago at the FCCJ, when I asked him for his email in case I wanted to request an interview. He looked at me with an enigmatic smile and handed me his address – his mailing address, that is – in Ueno. He told me if I wanted to get in touch, the best thing was to write him a letter. Then after a pause, he explained that he thought cell phones and email had had the opposite of their intended effect: instead of linking people closer to together, he said they were actually isolating them and pushing them apart. Using the post office seemed to be his way of resisting this electronic atomization, or at least registering his lone protest against it.

Mark Schilling, film critic

One night at Donald's apartment in Ueno, after dinner and a shared bottle of wine, the subject turned to his WWII service in the Merchant Marine, which I had always imagined as relatively uneventful. He told me, rather matter-of-factly, that he had three ships shot out from under him. When one ship started going down after being torpedoed in the Mediterranean, he said, "I jumped one way and everybody else jumped the other." A German submarine surfaced and machine-gunned his crewmates, while he stayed hidden on the other side of the ship. By the time it sank, the submarine had left and Donald, the only survivor, somehow made it to shore. He reminisced about the feeling of freedom he enjoyed, wandering the Italian countryside, alone. "I had the time of my life," he said. I imagined Donald hoisted on the shoulders of brawny, cheering peasants, flowers garlanding his head.

Leza Lowitz, editor

Donald liked to stroll around Ueno park, where he lived for over two decades. As we circumambulated the lotus pond, he stopped to greet various people – denizens of the demimonde or perhaps a rung lower on the social ladder – people most others would walk by without noticing,

or in fact, turn away from. Donald was fully present, fully observant. He saw them. They were real. We stopped at a small stand where you could make ceramic plates and bowls. We each made a plate. He painted his in a blue and white pointillist pattern, then he gave it to me. He elevated those who were with him by helping us to see the ordinary moments that make life extraordinary.

Leo Rubinfiel, photographer

I was 15 when Donald formed the Tokyo Jane Austen Society with Seidensticker and my mother; I would visit him to talk about books and films. Wearing a vast hakama, he'd make waffles at his low table, insisting that no Westerner could ever become Japanese, that to think otherwise was dishonest. Decades later, however, wanting to demonstrate how much more adventurous he was than I, he took me to a shabby Okubo block full of women for hire, half of them Bolivian, dark and squat, half brightly lipsticked, Ukrainian, voluptuous. The police had stuck up warnings in Spanish and Cyrillic, and in the twilight eros mixed with gloom, it was a crazy scene. Donald was a connoisseur of backstreets, of course. This one was for sex, but he loved them all — food alleys, lanes where you saw into rooms and lives, culs-de-sac with gods secreted at their ends. They were, perhaps, his imagination's atelier. Now, suddenly, amid those women from Odessa and Cochabamba, a nationalistic stranger (Japanese) flamed at him resentfully, "What are you doing here? Go back to your own country!" Donald hesitated not half a second, but snapped back, "Kore wa boku no kuni dayo!"

Lesley Downer, author

Donald was wise and funny, also extremely mischievous. I first met Donald in the late 1980s. From then on, I saw him whenever I visited Japan, as well as at the London Film Festival, where he was treated with appropriate reverence. In 2008, we gathered in Tokyo to celebrate his 60th year in Japan. Donald gave us each a card with two photographs, one of him in 1948 in an overcoat, resting his elbow on the Nihonbashi bridge, the other 60 years later in the same pose, at exactly the same spot.

Gregory Starr, editor

In the early nineties, I was running excerpts from his then-unpublished diaries in *Tokyo Journal*, and we would meet monthly for lunch at the FCCJ to discuss the next selection. The diaries were a mine of fascination, a ribald, unabashed, free-flowing dissection of his life in Japan, as well as a detailed record

of celebrity excess – with him guiding world-famous authors, artists, actors, filmmakers through Tokyo's highlife and lowlifes. It was an astonishing history and Donald had gotten it all down, moments lofty and shocking – and often unlikely to be appreciated by the subject of the entry. I would pore over the pages and come in with various suggestions. Very often, Donald would get that mischievous grin of a child on a prank, lean over and say, "He's (or she's) still alive. We'd better hold on to that one." But the conversation would always lead to further detail, more stories and deeper insight – laughter fueled tales of filmmakers, fellatio and philosophy over the starched white tablecloths of the Club's main dining room.

Alex Kerr, author

From my *Journal*: September 21, 2009.

I carry my bag in the heat to Ueno park, and sit by the lotuses for a while as I call Donald about our lunch appointment but no answer. Finally I arrive at his door to find a note pinned on it. It says "Dear Alex, I'm sorry I can't have lunch with you today. I'm having a heart attack. You can reach me at Jikei Idai Byoin. Regrets, D." I jump in a taxi and go to the hospital, to find Donald, who's in ICU, with Fumio. It's serious (the doctor says it's not a heart attack, it's a stroke), but Donald pulls out his address book and gives me three numbers to call (Dae Jung, Gwen Robinson, and Paul McCarthy). I call them. Take Shinkansen to Kyoto.

Gwen Robinson, journalist

Donald cared greatly about his public image, not whether people liked him so much as whether they respected him. His real obsession was how he would be remembered. His aspiration to be a modern "renaissance man" clearly drove his forays into areas as diverse as painting, poetry, filmmaking and music composition. He always knew that his real talent lay in keen observations of people and society, like a contemporary Samuel Pepys, he once joked. He could only be such a chronicler, he told me, by being "in it but not of it," never letting people get too close and shunning emotional commitments and cohabitation. "I chose the loneliest – but by far the most rewarding – path in life," he added. No relationship ever threatened that philosophy. Even his long and genuinely affectionate relationship with his Korean partner in later years was a treasured liaison that nevertheless had its times and places. Over lunch at the Club two years ago, I asked him if he had any regrets about how he had lived his life. Smiling like a Cheshire cat, he answered slowly and clearly, "Well now, what do you think?"

Remembering Hal Drake

by Geoff Tudor

Legendary *Stars and Stripes* journalist and former FCCJ member Hal Drake died of stomach cancer on Jan. 27 in a hospice in Queensland, Australia. He was 83.

Drake spent nearly four decades with the newspaper, covering everything from high-level summits and the release of POWs from Vietnam to boxer Muhammad Ali and high-school sports.

But as well as Drake the newsmen, there was Drake the FCCJ fellow member, who charmed and amused us in jolly afternoons in the Main Bar, recalled FCCJ and AP veteran Richard Pyle.

"I imagine very few people at the Club today remember Hal or the fight some of us waged to get him accepted as a regular member," said Pyle. Drake was already known as a solid professional journalist and storyteller, but for many years, some members objected on grounds that he worked for *Stars and Stripes*, the U.S. military paper published in Tokyo since shortly after WWII.

Some Drake supporters at the time made the point that it was ridiculous that reporters working for state publications such as TASS and *Pravda* could be regular members but not *Stripes* correspondents.

"We prevailed on the technical but bona fide argument that S&S was an 'authorized but unofficial' publication, available at the FCCJ and widely read beyond its military audience," Pyle said. Hal became a full regular member in October 1984, and he and his wife, the beautiful and irrepressible Kaz, became regulars at the Club, enriching its social scene for many years.

Even before that, he managed to get into the Club when getting the news required it, as he remembered in a 1995 memoir in the No. 1 Shimbun: "The first time I was in the Club was early November of 1956 – covering the moving, never-forgotten story of the Hiroshima Maidens.

"These were 13 young women who,

as children, had been hideously scarred and crippled by that sunburst. They were returning from a year of treatment in the States. One of them, Michiyo Zomen, was close to tears as she said: 'I dreamed for 10 years of being able to use my arms again. We can never forget our deep feelings for everybody who helped us and we can never return their kindness.'

"I was close to tears myself," wrote Drake.

Brad Martin, former FCCJ board member now in Hawaii recalls, "In my first

"Hal clearly would have managed to spend his life as a storyteller even if writing had never been invented. He was one of the true greats. A fabulous writer and one of the last of the FCCJ's true raconteurs. We shall miss Hal greatly," said Martin.

In the 1995 article, Drake modestly wrote, "My memory is frequently a miasma of names, faces, long ago happenings that were once so important but now never told to the easily bored young."

"And one of the greatest events – being admitted at last to the FCCJ – the lively and intelligent company of Max Desfor, Jim Colligan, Richard Pyle, Jack Russell, Bruce Dunning, Pat Killen, and so many others. I could return only one Thanksgiving dinner a year."

Charles Pomeroy, who shared many experiences with Hal Drake over the years, recalled those dinners. "First among my memories of Hal would be those long-ago 'Turkey Days,' as Hal called them.

"To make such sumptuous feasts, Hal and Kaz no doubt started preparations at least a day ahead of time for these special occasions.

And feasts they were, 'with all the trimmings,' including a rarity in Tokyo, cranberry sauce. Pumpkin pie was the dessert, of course. Hal and Kaz hosted these social gatherings every year until their move to Australia after Hal's retirement in 1995.

But Pomeroy has a later memory. "Following the Drakes' move to Australia, they invited Atsuko and I, in 1996, for a week's stay at their place on the Gold Coast," said Pomeroy. "Needless to say, it was educational as well as entertaining in Hal's special way (yes, he still twirled the whirligig). A didgeridoo brought back as a memento still stands in the corner of our living room as a reminder of that visit."

From all of Hal's old friends at the Club: Thanks, Hal, for some great memories. RIP. 🕯

Geoff Tudor writes for *Orient Aviation*, Hong Kong



A DECLINING TASTE FOR WHALE MEAT IN JAPAN MAY SUCCEED IN SCUTTLING THE INDUSTRY AFTER SEA BATTLES HAVE FAILED

Appetite loss to sink fleet?

by Justin McCurry

The debate over Japan's controversial whaling program in the Antarctic usually focusses on its ecological impact and the diplomatic friction it causes with Australia and other anti-whaling nations. But after years of skirmishes between Japan's whaling fleet and activists from Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd, potentially the most compelling case against the annual slaughter of hundreds of whales centers on the simple matter of money.

Japan's whaling industry can only survive with huge government subsidies and is effectively "dead in the water" as a com-

mercial proposition, according to a new report by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

Government subsidies, thought to total at least ¥30 billion between 1987 and 2012, include ¥2.28 billion siphoned off from funds intended for the reconstruction of the region hit by the March 2011 tsunami.

Polling conducted on IFAW's behalf by E-Square, a Japanese public research company, shows that whale meat consumption has fallen to about one percent of its peak in the 1960s. Current stockpiles of unsold produce have increased to nearly 5,000



International Fund for Animal Welfare representatives, Toru Watanabe, Naoko Funahashi and Patrick Ramage at the Club

tons, about four times greater than they were 15 years ago.

The government has tried to boost consumption by including the product in school lunches and through public auctions that bypass the traditional supply chain. Yet even after appealing directly to consumers during 13 public auctions held since October 2011, 75 percent of the meat went unsold, according to figures compiled last year by the journalist Junko Sakuma.

"Shrinking demand and slow sales show that this is a declining industry," said Toru Watanabe, a policy analyst who chaired the team that drafted the E-Square report. "For these and other structural reasons, whaling is not economically sustainable."

According to an IFAW-commissioned survey released late last year, almost 89 percent of Japanese had not bought whale meat in the previous 12 months. The report found that more than 50 percent of Japanese had no opinion on their country's whaling program, while 26.8 percent said they supported it and 18.5 percent opposed it.

While Sea Shepherd activists have managed to limit the whalers' ability to operate in recent years, Watanabe suggested direct action could hinder the environmentalist cause back in Japan.

A consensus has emerged that opposes any backing down by Japan in the face of what some critics have called sabotage by eco-terrorists, he said, adding, "That will complicate the issue in the future – violent incidents at sea actually help Japan promote whaling at home."

Ramage acknowledged that campaigners faced a formidable task in persuading Japan to abandon its whaling program, citing a "committed core group" of fisheries, agency bureaucrats and politicians, who are trying to use international criticism to boost their case for lethal research.

"They've effectively married the funding issue to an argument that says anyone who criticizes whaling is anti-Japanese, or that whale meat is fundamental to Japanese food culture," he said. "But this report shows that the Japanese people don't buy that argument any more than they're buying whale meat."

The IFAW report was released as tensions began to rise in the Southern Ocean, where, according to one expert's estimate, the fleet expects to catch an estimated 300 whales this winter – far fewer than their usual target of just under 950 – having left port several weeks late last year. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) banned commercial whaling in 1986, but a clause in the moratorium allows Japan to kill more than 900 whales every winter and to sell the meat on the open market.

Instead of killing the mammals, IFAW is calling on the government to support the country's fledgling whale watching industry, which currently comprises about 30 ventures stretching from Hokkaido to Okinawa. "This is a whale-centered business that is profitable and growing without government subsidies," Ramage said, adding that policymakers he'd met in Tokyo had responded "positively" to the idea of expanding whale watching.

But he conceded that any decision to exploit whales as a tourist attraction, rather than as a product for consumption, would not be made at the IWC or on the perilous seas of the Antarctic. "That decision will be made here in Tokyo by Japanese decision makers for reasons that make sense to them," he said. 🕯

Justin McCurry is Tokyo correspondent for the *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers in London and principal Japan and Korea correspondent for *Global Post*.



Arrgghh!

Jake Adelstein on the exploitation of the pop army of female teens that dominate the media

What's the difference between a human trafficking group and the management of the mega-girl's band AKB48?

Both of them exploit young girls and sell them as sexual objects; they lock the girls into odious contracts, and they seek to control every aspect of the lives of the women and permit no resistance. They may both have distant yakuza connections.

Comparing the AKB48 management to human traffickers is, of course, extreme. Obviously there are differences – the major one being that while human traffickers force their girls to have sex with any man, against their will, the AKB48 management forces their girls not to have sex with any man, ignoring their will.

Last month, member Minami Minegishi shaved her head and then posted a tearful video apology on YouTube for violating the AKB48 management's no-dating rule. Only in Japan could

Minami Minegishi: in a sorry state on YouTube



a talent agency get away with contractually obligating their workers to remain celibate. It's not much different from compelling idols to have sex with their fans or the management, if you ask me. It's the same gross interference in the lives of an individual, and while it may be contractually possible, it's morally repugnant.

Management says it forbids its members from dating to maintain a clean and wholesome image and show their devotion to the group's fans – most of whom are Japanese males with some serious reality issues. For all the talk of "clean" and "pure," the marketing of the girls falls somewhere between child pornography and flashing panties: the AKB48 management ships these "virginal" girls out to do sexy but not quite nude spreads for *Weekly Playboy* and other Japanese skin magazines, and there was an infamous commercial where the girls passed a piece of candy from mouth to mouth in faux-lesbian play.

AKB48 was first launched in Akihabara, Japan's electronics center and otaku mecca, designed to appeal to men who wanted a fantasy girlfriend made flesh. It now consists of more than 80 girls between 14 and 20, split into several teams, each team with its own status. It's a lovely little caste system

– but there's always a chance for a lower caste member to rise up if their fans pay money to vote for them in the AKB48 general elections. So the AKB48 management do deserve special praise for showing that plutocracy and democracy can be unified in the magic world of pop entertainment.

From the beginning, the girls' "availability" was a major sales point for the band. The singers are supposed to belong entirely to their fans and satisfy their fantasy by remaining reachable and single. Of course, it's all a con game.

The promise of fame and fortune is dangled out to girls as young as 14 – which is way too young to know what they want out of life. They sign the contracts, not thinking of the future, and once they're in the game, it's human nature not to back out.

The girls get ripped off and cheated out of the chance to have mature relationships, in the hopes of a big pay-off, and the guys pour their money into buying the band's merchandise and "votes" without ever really having a chance of being with the object

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of their affection. It's clear that the AKB48 girls would never really want to be with the creepy guys that worship them. No one really wins except the AKB48 management.

So it's not surprising that, according to articles in *Shukan Bunshun*, one of the founders of AKB48, early in his career, worked for the odious Shoko Fund, a brutal consumer finance agency that became infamous for overcharging their victims – ahem – customers. He then went on to work for a yakuza-backed loan-sharking operation run by the Yamaguchi-gumi Goryokai, which at its peak operated 1,000 affiliated loan-sharking shops. If the *Shukan Bunshun* article is correct, and if you stop to think about it, he was the perfect guy for the job: someone who understood how to ruthlessly run a franchise and profit off the desperation of other people.

So when Minegishi broke the contract, she knew she was in big trouble. Perhaps her tearful performance was disingenuous, but it's likely her tears weren't from shame but from fear. Fear of retaliation by her managers, fear of losing her job, fear of attacks from her rabid fans who felt betrayed by the fact that she dared to have her own life.

As for her "boyfriend" – his talent agency proudly announced, "We don't comment on the personal lives of our clients."

Minegishi belonged to the top team, but her manager said she would be demoted to "research student" status. In the AKB48 universe, the girls aren't paid labor with worker's rights; they're "students" and can be demoted or promoted at the whims of their teachers – the AKB48 management. Somehow, I feel what the management has to teach is not very beneficial – unless exploitation, hypocrisy, and misogyny are things worth learning.

Some argue that if she doesn't like the way she's treated, she could just leave. Well, post AKB48 life is even bleaker, and many former members end up in soft-core or hard-core pornography.

So that's just how it is for Japanese idols in an AKB48 world – you either get paid to have sex or not to have sex, but either way, your sexuality is what's being exploited. ❶

NEW MEMBERS



AARON SHELDRIK is Chief Correspondent, Commodities and Energy, Japan at Reuters in Tokyo, coordinating coverage of a beat that involves everything from weekly government wheat tenders to the Fukushima nuclear disaster and its ramifications for energy markets, policy and business. Prior to joining Reuters in April last year, Aaron did stints at news organizations including Bloomberg, Thomson IFR and Hong Kong's now-defunct Eastern Express, covering everything from stock markets to general news over a period of more than 18 years.



TOMOKI UEDA joined Kyodo News in 1979 after being awarded diplomas by the University of Salamanca, Spain. After covering local news in Kyushu, he was assigned as a reporter for the Foreign News Section in 1987. Over the next 11 years, he served as bureau chief in Hanoi and Mexico City before posts in the agency's Tokyo head office and Osaka. As Washington deputy bureau chief (1998-2003) he experienced the turbulent news of the Clinton Impeachment, the Yugoslavia civil war, the 2000 Presidential Campaign, the 9/11 terror attack and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. He was bureau chief in New York from 2007 to 2009, covering the Obama campaign and the 2008 financial crisis. He became Deputy Managing Director of the International Department in 2009 and Managing Director in June 2012.

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