

A bus came into view ahead of us and so we leapt on. We tried to make ourselves small and obscure but were soon discovered. An old lady, her back rounded with age, sat down on the seat beside ours.

“Ohhh, how sweet. Are you two on a date?”

The old lady wasn't angry to see us cats, she simply laughed. “Or are you on a vacation? Uwajima's lovely, isn't it? It has so many yummy things to eat. I just love it.”

A pretty necklace glistened on the old woman's chest. “Whish! Whish!” Unable to control my feline instincts I grabbed at it. The old woman's smile grew broader as her eyes crinkled up even more.

“Yes, yes. These pearls are an Uwajima specialty too. But anyway, have you two tried the oranges?”

Madonna shook her head sideways. And then without even asking, the old woman pushed the buzzer signaling the driver to stop the bus.

“You have to try the oranges while you're here. Yoshida Town's oranges are the best in all Japan.”

Along with February, comes Valentine's Day. It always reminds me of 'Sad Fat Cat' Maru and his first love Madonna on their 'date' in a mandarin orange orchard in Uwajima.

Living in 'Citrus Kingdom' Ehime, it's hard not to wonder just how many types of citrus fruit exist. While south Ehime is famous for mandarin oranges in fall, the peak season for other citrus fruit is in February when you can find about 16 varieties on sale. At a local produce shop I was told they get 38 varieties annually, all differing in texture and fragrance as well as in taste of course, which depends on the balance of sweetness, tanginess, bitterness and richness. I went on to try them all over the last 2 years. My favorites are kanpei, hime-koharu, harumi, and setoka.

On the topic of Valentines' Day, while you probably know of White Day held on March 14th, when cookies and gifts are given in return for Valentine's Day gifts, did you know that April 14th is Orange Day, here in Ehime? It's a day established in 2009 by the prefecture, which highlights the region's citrus heritage. People are encouraged to give gifts of citrus fruit to deepen connections, as oranges symbolize joy and abundance. Chocolate, cookies, oranges – let's spread some sweetness and warmth as spring approaches. 🍊 🌸 💜

かなしきデブ猫ちゃん



Writer - Kazumasa Hayami, Illustrator - Karin Kano,
Excerpts used with permission from Ehime Newspaper.

ONE POINT JAPANESE

「～でも」の使い方
(How to use "even")

A: 今日は 残業で もう ぐたくただ。

Kyō wa zangyō de mō kutakutada.

(I'm exhausted from overtime today.)

B: そうだね。これから ビールでも 飲みに行こうか。

Sōdane. Korekara bīru demo nomini ikōka.

(Yeah. How about going out for some beers?)

A: いいね。行こう、行こう。

Īne. Ikō, ikō.

(That sounds great. Let's go.)

B: いつもの あの 店でも いい?

Itsumo no ano mise demo ī?

(Shall we just go to the usual spot?)

A: 飲めれば どこでも いいよ。

Nomereba doko demo īyo.

(If I can drink, anywhere will do.)



A: 今度の 日曜日、みんなで グランドゴルフを やろう。

Kondo no nichiyōbi, minna de gurandogorufu o yarō.

(Let's play some ground golf next Sunday.)

B: グランドゴルフは やった ことが ないです。

Gurandogorufu wa yatta koto ga naidesu.

(I've never played ground golf.)

A: 大丈夫、初心者でも できるよ。

Daijōbu, shosinsha demo dekiru yo.

(It's okay. It's easy, even for beginners.)

B: そうですか。じゃあ、やってみます。

Sōdesuka. Jā, yatte mimasu.

(Yeah? Ok, I'll try.)



A: 昼ご飯、うどんか ラーメンか どっちがいい?

Hirugohan, udon ka rāmen ka docchiga ī?

(Which would you rather have for lunch, udon or ramen?)

B: どっちでも 大丈夫です。好き嫌いは ないので、何でも 食べます。

Docchi demo daijōbudesu. Sukikirai wa nainode, nan demo tabemasu.

(Either will do. I'm not picky, I'll eat anything.)

< by Niihama Nihongo no Kai >

NNK also provides Japanese lessons for foreigners living in Niihama.

Feel free to contact us at:

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What's New?

Niihama City

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The Sleeping Giant

A Life in Search of the American Dream

Yuriko Shimamoto

I first encountered the words “*Sleeping Giant*” in my first-year junior high school English textbook. Beside them was a photograph of a rugged mountain of jagged stone rising in the distance. To the young person I was then, that image and its name became a symbol of America itself—a country I had never seen. Beyond the faintly misted silhouette of the mountain, what kind of world lay waiting? Filled with such quiet longing and expectation, that landscape lingered deep within me, becoming an enduring inner horizon. Here, I reflect on how that *Sleeping Giant* shifted in form and meaning throughout my life.

I was born in 1956 on the outskirts of Tokyo. As a child, I was timid and withdrawn, with little sense of self-worth. Both of my parents worked, and I grew up as a latchkey child, passing my afternoons among neighborhood children. I loved moving my body, yet I was never particularly good at school, and my introverted nature left me perpetually unsure of myself. At my parents' urging, I enrolled in an all-girls school. During the long commute, gazing out at the endless concrete of the city, I remember quietly thinking, *Someday, I want to escape this place.*

My path to higher education was marked by disappointment. I failed to gain admission to all of my chosen universities and began again by attending night school. It was there, at last, that I was able to immerse myself fully in English—the one subject I truly loved. Then, in 1976, during a short-term study program celebrating the bicentennial of the United States, I set foot on American soil for the first time. A homestay in Michigan, the vast expanse of Lake Michigan, the overwhelming grandeur of the Grand Canyon—this was the moment when the *Sleeping Giant* of my textbooks emerged into tangible reality. I was especially captivated by San Francisco, and I made a quiet vow to myself: *I will return.* That promise would come to guide the course of my life.

After graduating, I worked as a translator in Japan, yet my longing for America never faded. Encouraged by those around me, I made the decision to move to California. Reality, however, proved unforgiving. Lacking the credits necessary to transfer to a university, I had to begin again at a community college. There were moments when my English failed me entirely, when I wandered unknowingly into unsafe places. Still, I pressed on—riding buses and subways day after day—until I was finally able to transfer to the University of California, Berkeley.

Life after the transfer was difficult and relentless. From morning until night, I moved between the university and the library, studying without pause, even on weekends. Financially, I lived on the bare minimum, sustaining myself on simple meals. More than once, I asked myself, *Why am I pushing myself this far?* Yet I could not allow myself to turn back. To retreat would have meant betraying my choice to live in America, and so I continued forward.

After graduation, I sought permanent residency and found employment, but teaching proved ill-suited to me, and I suffered another setback. I moved on to clerical work at a travel agency and gradually began taking on interpreting assignments. Thrown into professional settings with little

preparation, I failed often—but through those failures, through experience gained in the field, I slowly grew as an interpreter. In time, I found my niche in simultaneous interpretation for high-tech companies in Silicon Valley. My work stabilized, and with it, my confidence quietly took root.



Meanwhile, my personal life unfolded through profound change—marriage, childbirth, child-rearing, and divorce. Working while raising a child in a foreign culture was never easy, yet I continued to search for balance between professional and private life. As I learned more about America’s immigrant history and the forced internment of Japanese Americans, I became acutely aware that I, too, was living this life as an immigrant, shaped by forces larger than myself.

In the later years of my life, I was confronted with an unexpected trial: sudden partial paralysis. In the face of fear and uncertainty, the illusion of my own invulnerability shattered. And yet, through rehabilitation, dance, and meditation, I slowly reclaimed both body and spirit. Spurred by the realization that *I had not yet given everything I had*, the image of the Sleeping Giant transformed once more—this time into a metaphor for the untapped potential sleeping within me.

America itself, it seems to me, is also a Sleeping Giant—harboring vast lands, unrealized resources, and unresolved challenges, its full power still dormant. I now understand that my journey in search of the Sleeping Giant was not only a pursuit of the American Dream, but also a lifelong journey toward understanding myself.

January 6, 2026

NIC: Niihama International Center

(Ehime Shimbun: November 25, 2025)

Niihama is a manufacturing city known as the industrial city of Ehime Prefecture. 1,976 people from 46 countries live in Niihama, including foreign students of the National Institute of Technology, Niihama College.



Niihama International Center (NIC), established in 2019, supports these foreign residents. The center provides counselling services for foreign residents and connects them with proper groups or public agencies, working with highly active volunteer groups.

Last fall, about 40 foreign residents, including men and women from six countries, gathered in colorful traditional Japanese kimono. They experienced Japanese culture, enjoying performances of the koto and traditional Japanese flute, and playing with otedama, a traditional Japanese form of juggling, all courtesy of Niihama Guide Club, established in 1999.



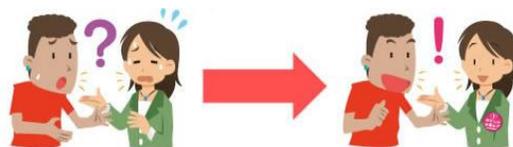
One week later, 16 participants from eight countries took part in the Japanese Language Speech Contest. All participants made their speeches in fluent Japanese. The contest was hosted by Niihama Nihongo no Kai, established in 1993. The group is commissioned by NIC and holds night classes twice a week. These results are the outcome of their classes.

Ehime SGG Club Niihama Branch, established in 1991, has worked on supporting foreign residents in Niihama, publishing a monthly English-language newsletter and providing interpretation. The Global Party is also held in February, where booths introducing the cultures of different countries are set up. All participants have a lot of fun talking, dancing and exchanging their cultures.

The number of foreign residents in Niihama was 893 in 2015, and has now increased to about 2.2 times that number. The number of represented countries was 30 in 2007 and has increased by about 1.5 times. As a result, various kinds of problems have emerged.

NIC is asked to offer consultation services on weekdays and on the second Sunday of the month under commission from the city. The center works to solve issues by connecting foreign residents with NGOs and public offices. NIC also runs their own projects such as disaster evacuation drills, ‘Easy Japanese courses’ (mainly for city officials so that they can explain city services in easy Japanese) and sporting events for foreign residents.

(Tsukioka Gaku)



February Events

- ☆ **The 34th Global Party**
Date: February 8th (Sun) 1:00pm~3:30pm
Venue: Niihama Women’s Plaza
Fee: ¥700/person Free for children 6yrs



- ★Wear your national costume ! ★Experience wearing a Japanese Yukata! ★Enjoy various booths! ★Try a variety of drinks&snacks! ★Select some Japanese tableware or outfits from the Giveaway Corner!
- ☆ **Teto (Vietnamese lunar New Year) Festival**
Date: February 22nd (Sun) 1:00pm~4:00pm
Venue: Niihama City Comprehensive Welfare Center (Fureai Plaza)
The international exchange officer (Vietnamese) introduces the cultures of Vietnamese lunar new year
Various cultural experiences
Further information: Niihama International Exchange Association Tel: 65 1579

Online Information in English from Niihama City

- ☆ **A Guide for Living in Niihama** 
- ☆ **The Niihama Medical Institution Map** 
- ☆ **Trash & Garbage Sorting Information** 
- ☆ **What’s New? in English** 
- ☆ **Niihama Tourist Information** 
<https://niihama.info/>
- ☆ **Help with legal matters, discrimination, insurance, etc. Japan Life Guide**
(Nationwide service) multilingual 
- ☆ **Yorisoi Helpline for foreigners**
TEL:0120-279-338 10:00 am~10:00 pm
Multilingual Your privacy will be protected.

This newsletter is published by SGG, a volunteer group that helps foreigners living in and around Niihama. If you need any advice, information, or support, please contact SGG. SGG would welcome any suggestions, questions, or ideas for monthly articles.

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* This month’s editors are Toshio Matsuoka & Michiko Hada.