

(Front cover, top)

SAITAMA

A city which, the more you discover the more you are going to love

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Have you ever wondered why people in Saitama eat a lot of pasta?

Why do many people here like milk?

Why are there many slopes in this city?

Even having spent years in Saitama one is still surrounded by many whys.

Why indeed does this city feel so genial and cozy?

p.3, bottom-left

from the rooftop of Saitama City Hall

p.4-5

People say that Urawa is a city of culture and education. Some say also that it is the town of unagi (eel) and soccer. Yet, being born and raised here, I didn't particularly think of these things so much. Even so, when I draw on my personal memories, I see how from the time I was little whenever my family and relatives gathered or had occasion to celebrate, my granny would always order unagi for us all. And didn't some of my classmates go to Brazil on a soccer field trip, even though they were only elementary school students? Every time I told somebody the name of my school I got the invariable answer "it's a prestigious school." I had even thought to myself "how can it be when it's public?"

Now I've got it! I have lived here all my life so for me it was so familiar and commonplace that I didn't really notice it.

In the coming holidays I will go to the yard of my old school and I will play with a ball there. Then, on my way home, I will have some unagi and I will think again of my kind old granny.

p.5, bottom-left

Urawa (in front of Urawa Prefectural Senior High School)

p.6

Iwatsuki has a special flavor. During a walk along the board fences in the backstreets, one feels it like a sudden gust of the wind.

Some five years ago people hung wooden signs for the street names that read "Hiro-ko-ji" or "Kubo-juku-dori." These names have been used since the time when the place was a castle town. At the spot where I am now, a samurai too might have stood, and when I think of it I feel deeply moved for a moment.

When I look around the time-honored houses impose their presence, yet seem granted and accepted as common, being used as shops for sweets, bicycle shops or something else.

The sudden gust makes one feel a flavor of living history and the people's tender care to preserve it.

p.7, bottom-left

Iwatsuki (close to Ichi-juku-dori)

p.8

When I was a senior high school student, my school was at Yono and it took me more than 30 minutes to go there by bike. On the way back after my club activity I would stop by a meat shop to eat croquettes, the only entertainment for my empty stomach until dinner time. "You must be tired after practice. Are you sure only one will be enough?" the woman at the shop would start a nonchalant exchange with me. It was fun. The town's row of shops and houses I passed was commonplace yet so warm.

Now I am an adult and while driving my car I get a view of the town. I see the Saitama Arts Theater or big shopping malls which were not there before. But I only have to meet an old friend and the atmosphere of this town transports me back to the springtime of my life and makes me feel like I am at school again.

It always feels like I am about to run into the myself I used to be.

p.9, bottom-left

Yono (Sai-no-kuni Saitama Arts Theater)

p.10

When I was little, Omiya was one of the places I longed for. At that time it was the only place with department stores, and to have a lunch set for kids there, and then to play at the nearby Omiya Park, all that was such a fanciful luxury for a child.

After I failed my entrance exam I enrolled at a preparatory school that too was in Omiya. My train passed Yono station, the scenery outside the window changing to a row of Keyaki trees, and when in a short time the boxing gym with the sign of Joe Yabuki appeared, I knew I was in Omiya already. Feeling guilty to my parents, sometimes I skipped school and strode along Suzuran Street.

Even now when I get off at Omiya station and see the crowds there I get in the mood to do something exciting.

Omiya is still a dream place for me.

p.11, bottom-left

Omiya (Omiya Station, West Exit)

p.12-13

(top-right) Enjoying one's meal

(notice board, bottom-right) Today's lunch menu

- fried nigiri (balls) of mashed satoimo (taro) potatoes
- salad
- other coming with coffee or black tea
- black rice
- miso soup
- pickles

860 yen

Farmer's restaurant

HIDAMARI

The main feature of this shop is that its owner uses as much as possible local farms' produce for ingredients.

It started as a place to rest in the owner's fruit garden and now it offers only one fixed lunch set that changes every week with coffee or black tea. The owner cares most about using local produce so that everyone can enjoy the real freshness, sweetness, or bitterness of the food.

The shop owner, Mikawa-san, smiles and explains: "I want to use fruits and vegetables grown at home. The ingredients that I cannot grow by myself I purchase at the farm stand next door, so the result is food made with local produce. You can tell that the meal is made with fresh ingredients when you taste it."

Her face is radiant like the sun when she tells us that the shop's name origin comes from "the wish that it be a shop full of warm feeling."

It is a place where I would like simply to enjoy the taste of my meal, without thinking of my problems, having leisure time in a leisure atmosphere.

(Map) Farmer's restaurant Hidamari,

Address: 3-140-2, Tsukamoto-cho, Nishi-ku

Tel: 048-626-2288

Open: 10 am to 5 pm (closed: on Tue. and Wed.; winter period holiday in Jan. and Feb.)

People who make the town colorful and interesting

Smile-Making Shop COSUCOJI

Shop owner KOJI KOSUGI

(notice) We, a group of friendly families, made this shop with utmost care and almost entirely by hand

This is a corner to introduce inspirational people to our readers. This time we interviewed the owner of two “smile-making” shops “COSUCOJI” at Kita Urawa, Mr. Koji Kosugi.

I started this business precisely because I wanted to see my customers’ smiling faces. I wanted to see especially smiling families with children, to contribute to their smiles. This is the origin of the shops.

This is why when I put goods on sale, I first assess if they have the quality to evoke a smile. There is no deviation from this rule. It is not just a shop to buy stuff, but a place where people smile. The goods are the means to make people smile.

In the past I worked at a shop chain expanding throughout the country. I spent my time chasing only numbers. I strained myself too much and got sick. It was then that I reconsidered what I was doing. I asked myself “what is it that I really want to do?”

What I thought of in this time of crisis was my old home. The home where I grew up was a kimono shop. Contact, or communication, with customers is very important for such a business. I was certainly influenced by what I have observed since my youth about my parents’ way of life. That you can actually build a sound relationship with people while selling things and how wonderful it is.

Nowadays, you can buy goods online as well, right? Then why would customers bother to come all the way to the shop, I wonder? Maybe it is because they are seeking personal contact with others. It is hard nowadays to raise children and if we could help alleviate this burden from the mothers by being here for them in some more meaningful way than just selling goods... Then they would laugh, kids would laugh, families would be happier. I would like to help them smile.

This way of thinking may seem quite eccentric. Of course, in any sales business cold calculations are a necessary part. Still I believe that contributing to society is also necessary. I would like to see this idea become commonly accepted in the retail industry. That's how I want to change society.

To create smiles on my clients' faces is the way I contribute to society and the meaning of my life. Seen in that light, to me work and life are combined.

Mr. Koji Kosugi's profile

He was born in Fukiage town, Saitama prefecture, in 1973.

At present, he lives with his wife and daughter in Kitamoto City.