

Taro Aizu. *My Fukushima* (in French, English, and Japanese). Fueisha Press, 2014, 232 pp., hardcover, 5.5 x 8 inches. Available from the author for US\$16 at aizu2013@dream.jp. Kindle edition (91 pp.) available from Amazon.com for US\$6.

by Kath Abela Wilson, Pasadena, CA

Children
From Fukushima
Dash into a white surf

Many of us think of “our” Fukushima, for good reason. Fukushima, March 11, 2011. There is a small leap of the heart common to all of us. This was the day of nuclear disaster, the meltdown at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima that was hit by a tsunami caused by the 9.0 magnitude earthquake. Three hundred thousand people were evacuated from this area, and the work of recovery will continue for decades.

For Taro Aizu (Aizu is his pen name, he was born in Aizu-Misato, Fukushima Prefecture) this is no small leap of the heart. It goes very personally and deeply to his roots. It is his Fukushima, his childhood, his cherished hometown.

Born in Fukushima, he lived there for 18 years until entering college in Tokyo. After graduation with a degree in French literature he moved to Kanagawa Prefecture, where he has lived for 37 years. Once a year, since then, he has visited his hometown for Obon, which honors the spirits of ancestors. “When I visited Fukushima in August 2011,” he told me, “I saw my nephews hanging dosimeters around their necks. The scene gave a great shock and it inspired me to write ‘My hometown, Fukushima’ in 2012. At last, I could publish it in May, 2014.”

I had read *My Fukushima* in the Kindle edition twice when I so fortunately traveled to Kanagawa, and was able to meet Taro there in June 2014. With gentle generosity he gave me the gift of his beautiful hardcover in French, Japanese, and English.

I have always loved the individual haiku of Taro for their crystal clear moments expressed with such heart, delicacy, and powerful description. But when I read *My Fukushima* I was surprised and further moved by the strength of his feeling and expression. His book draws me back, over and over.

Nothing can equal a book on a commonly felt theme that emerges from strong, immediate personal experience. Taro's haiku, tanka prose, and haibun recall with intensity his childhood home. He speaks with intimate detail of its innocence and the sudden change to a difficult, threatening existence. The progression gathers strength as we experience all this very emotionally and feel the seeds of the unseen and unknown—before and after the disaster. We are drawn to his side to view the scene. We read:

At last I visited Miharu to see the Takizakura | April 2012. It was as beautiful as always. I stayed looking up at it for two hours.

Takizakura is the beautiful cherry tree seen in Fukushima.

One thousand years
Flow through the blossoms—
Takizakura

Taro observes the scene in Fukushima . . .

One by one
One by one
Cherry blossoms

Then he views the familiar, now deserted, beaches near the nuclear plant.

As if the tsunami
Had been a fabrication
A calm sea in spring

As we progress with him through the seasons, we see what he sees and remembers, we notice with him endurance and fragility.

Summer grass
Only house foundations
Remain in silence

Groundwater
Climbs into the dead trunk
The silence in winter

The falling snow
Black cows wandering
Near the plant

Japanese daffodils
Bloom in midwinter
Quiet energy

The exquisitely written haibun set the scene with such specifics that we feel present in real time, in the hometown of our hearts in innocence, danger, and hope. The book ends with a litany of specific wishes for his hometown, in haiku form. *My Fukushima* speaks tenderly for all of us of the beauty and fragility of life itself.



Kath Abela Wilson, secretary of the Tanka Society of America, an active member of the Southern CA Haiku Study Group, creator and leader of the Pasadena-based international group Poets on Site, gives live performances and publishes her haiku and tanka widely in journals and anthologies. She travels the world with her mathematician husband who accompanies her on flutes of all countries.