

Theme for the New Year's Poetry Reading (2023) : TOMO (FRIEND)

His Majesty the Emperor

Students smile

Talking about the joy of playing musical instruments

With friends

Even under the pandemic

(Background of the poem)

Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor and the Empress attended online the 36th National Cultural Festival Wakayama 2021 and the 21st Wakayama National Art and Culture Festival for Persons with Disabilities, held in Wakayama Prefecture on October 30, 2021.

During the "Festival of Wind Instrument Music", one of the events of the National Cultural Festival, Their Majesties interacted with the high school students who performed, and heard their story of how the members of the brass band had continued to practice while keeping a distance between each other, practicing in separate parts, and limiting the number of people entering the club room when preparing and cleaning their instruments, in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

This waka poem was composed to express how delighted His Majesty was to see the students talking about their joy of being able to keep on playing musical instruments with friends, with creativity and ingenuity despite various restrictions, even under the COVID-19 pandemic. This poem also displays His Majesty's sincere hope that people's daily lives will return to normal soon.

Her Majesty the Empress

I have spent half my life
In the Imperial Family
At His Majesty's side
While my close friends
Have kept kind watch over me

(Background of the poem)

Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor and the Empress married on the 9th of June 1993. On her birthday last December, Her Imperial Majesty the Empress was moved to notice that the time she spent in the Imperial Family since her marriage had reached about the same length as the time she had spent before her marriage, and expressed, in her birthday comments, her feelings of appreciation for the help and support she has received from many people.

This waka poem was composed to express Her Imperial Majesty's gratitude to her close friends who have been watching her warmly over those years.

His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino

Together with my friends
I journeyed near and far,
and I found joy
in things I heard
for the very first time.

(Background of the poem)

From the time His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino was a high school student until a little over a decade ago, he would travel with his acquaintances and visit various places. Particularly of interest for the Crown Prince was the period when he participated in a research project at the Graduate University for Advanced Studies. As he and his fellow researchers visited different localities, each of them would ask a variety of questions to the people living there, and the answers they received gave the Crown Prince a sense of freshness and excitement. It is such memories that he has written about in the above poem.

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Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino

Memories of journeys
recounted among friends
as we sat encircling
the grain of a table
hewn from Japanese elm wood.

(Background of the poem)

Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino had an opportunity to go out last spring, having been invited by her friends. Seated around a large table with a beautiful grain, hewn from and incorporating the warm, natural quality of Japanese elm wood, she and her friends recounted the memories of various journeys they had taken. The Crown Princess has written the poem with a sense of appreciation for having been able to sit at a table together with her friends, while taking precautions against COVID-19, and have conversations after a long time.

Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko

As I stroll down the lane
Covered with autumn foliage
My friend's profile flashes through my mind
Bringing back the memories of days
When I walked home from school with her

(Background of the poem)

Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko composed this waka poem to express her feelings while strolling through the palace garden. As she walked through the autumn foliage, she remembered the road which she had walked with her friend back from school and which had also been covered with autumn leaves, and recalled the profile of her friend with fond memories.