

# Back to Work!

I would like to say a hearty hello to all of our readers. I have returned from my nearly yearlong maternity leave and am working once again as a *Japan SPOTLIGHT* editorial staff member. I gave birth to a healthy son on May 19, 2008, and during the period away from work, I spent the days with my child as a mother. Before I actually became a parent, I had heard from my mother and friends that looking after a child is hard, but I had secretly felt that I would get along somehow, and took the matter of child-rearing lightly. But I discovered that childcare is much more physically strenuous than I had ever imagined. I particularly felt this immediately after giving birth when my own physical condition was not at its best. Night and day, my son needed care, and I was so busy that I could not afford to steep myself in the state of mind feeling "the happiness of becoming a mother." It is only now, with my son gradually getting bigger, that I am beginning to feel blissful moments when I watch him laugh, clapping his hands or raising both arms in a *banzai* salute.

In Japan, there are many traditional events to celebrate landmark moments of a child's growth. Of the numerous events held until a child is a year old, I would like to introduce two here.

***Oshichiya (Seventh-Night Ceremony):*** On the night of the seventh day after a baby is born, the child's name is announced and the family celebrates his/her birth. *Oshichiya* literally means "seventh night." The baby's name is written on a piece of paper called *meimeisho* (letter of christening). The paper is placed in a place where it can be seen by everyone, such as in the *tokonoma* alcove, and the family gets together to celebrate over a meal. I chose not to learn the gender of my child before birth, so I had to think of both male and female names beforehand. Favorite names for a girl came to me straight away, but it took time to decide on a boy's name. By consulting a Japanese character dictionary, my husband and I decided on our boy's name at the very last moment, just in time for the *oshichiya* event.

***Okuizome (Weaning Ceremony):*** Around 100 days after birth, *okuizome* (literally "first eating") is held to pray that the child will never lack food for the rest of his or her life. A boiled fish is served whole (complete with head and tail), and the grandparent, or the oldest person in the family, mimics feeding the baby. It is done by a male family member if the baby is a boy, and by a female member if it is a girl. Some families



Photo: JEF

*My son Masabaru and a "meimeisho" (letter of christening). My husband carefully wrote the characters with a calligraphy brush.*

forgo this event and take a photograph instead. There are now photo studios that have an array of costumes for dressing up the baby to take sophisticated shots. Photo studios seem to understand the feelings of parents well. Once you have registered your child's birthday with them, they will send you, with perfect timing, a direct mail letter just before your child's next birthday, deftly titillating parental love.

**N. Harada**

## Readers' Column

**We welcome letters of opinion or comment from our readers.**

Letters may be edited for reasons of space or clarity. Limit your letter to 500-700 words.

The Editor has no obligation to acknowledge receipt of a letter or give a reason for not publishing it.

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