

A People

Introducing prominent alumni in various fields

Ai Aochi (AN reporter, CLA '98)



I went to see Akio Mizusawa after a typhoon on a hot day in Miura Kaigan. We knew each other from ICU: I was relieved he hadn't changed. He sheepishly wondered if the AN really wanted to interview him. I asked him about his books, life at ICU and his current work.

The Legacy of the Golden Lucky Beetle and ICU

Mizusawa debuted as a writer when he won the 7th Shincho Entertainment Award for Golden Lucky Beetle no Densetsu (The Legacy of the Golden Lucky Beetle). The Beetle depicts the growing pains of three sixth graders Junpei, Yota, and Hina, who hide their precious golden

lucky beetle at their secret hideout in a junk yard. The three feel uncomfortable in their relationships with other people. In a cramped room, Junpei imagines the majestic scenery of the Grand Canyon while hearing his mother screeching. Hina wears a frayed black dress, and her friends suspect her of being a rabbit killer. Yota is hopeless in sports and doesn't like the lunches served at school, and his teacher often scolds him. Unable to fit in, he swears to the other two that he will find a place just right for him, where he will be allowed to be clumsy and slow.

Yota seems to be looking for a place like ICU. When we were students, I had a lot of friends who weren't good at empathizing with others, considered "strange" by conventional Japanese standards.

Mizusawa says he was not a good student. In the dorm, he read, talked and drank a lot resulting in many hangovers. When asked about Yota's ideal place, he said it was a bit like ICU where different people lived together without making value judgments about each other. "It's probably not fair to say anything about other universities, because ICU is the only place I know, but I'd say diversity was the characteristic that stood out. Especially in the dorms, it was impossible to conceal your true colors from your roommates. The culture shock was immense: a Russian refused

Akio Mizusawa (Novelist, CLA '98)

Never half-hearted in penning a story

to take a bath in the winter because he believed you would catch a cold if you rubbed the fat off your back; a Mexican insisted we try his native drink of red pepper and vinegar in beer; and a Korean had a funny way of mixing Japanese and English when he spoke. Sometimes it was frustrating, but in the end, it was fun to have different people around you."

A circuitous route and time necessary to follow it

After graduation he worked for a publishing company and edited a fashion magazine, but quit after 6 months. "I got sick working too hard and started to wonder whether my job was making people happy. But I guess I just didn't fit in." After that he worked as a freelance writer. He still had the dilemma of doing things that did not particularly interest him. "I interviewed many people. What interested me was how my interviewee would behave behind the scenes. A well-known figure would change his attitude depending on whom he was talking to. He would bow with a different angle and his tone of voice would change."

When it became difficult to support himself financially, he worked part-time jobs like a barker, a 12-hour guard, and for a moving company until he reached his thirties. "I was a slow starter, but

that's when I really started to write. That was the only thing I could do. In the beginning, it was just trial and error." He began work on the Beetle in 2009. This was when something in him crystallized.

"It took me about six months to write it. That may be long or short, depending on how you see it. It brought together all the sad, happy, and fun things I experienced, as well as the poverty and dreams in the first thirty some years of my life." For the next two years, he edited the novel on and off, and won the award for which Mutsu Onda, a writer he greatly admires, is one of the judges.

He lives a life of isolation as a writer. It is not hard to imagine that his work requires a very high level of concentration. "I wasn't doing anything seriously in my twenties, when people move at full throttle, so I think I really have to exert myself now. I have no choice but to continue." The mass of his life packed into his stories adds to the force of his narrative. His avid readers look forward to reading plenty more.

Akio Mizusawa is from Hyogo Prefecture. His widely-popular novel *Kashtunga*, a horror story about school caste problems, was serialized in the monthly *Shosetsu Non*.