

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize】

## Protecting the Amagi Forests

(Original in Japanese)

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*Boooooom*... In the silence, the low tone of the large *taiko* drum rings out.

It's the opening of a piece called *Yamanari (Rumbling of the Mountain)*, inspired by the nature of the Amagi Mountains. It represents the rumbling of the mountain deep within the dense forest—an omen that an earthquake is coming.

I belong to Amagi Mountain Taiko, a local musical group in the Amagi district of Izu, in Shizuoka Prefecture. My father leads the group. Most of the members work in forestry, spending their days in nature, and they put what they feel and experience into the music. And in conducting our group activities, we value each member's feelings and opinions.

My father is the type of person who speaks with his actions. He is loved and admired by the members of both the *taiko* group and the forestry association. He is also my role model.

Ever since I was old enough, I would accompany my father into the mountains. He would gallantly make his way through the forests of the Amagi Mountains, making preparations for felling trees in an efficient way. It was like magic watching him cut down one tree after another with precision, operating the powerful machinery. The forestry system that my father introduced to this area has enabled low-cost mass production of lumber, and it also protects the forests of Amagi.

Since olden times, Japanese people have used the blessings of the forests to make their livelihood. The forests of Amagi are no exception. Not only do the forests allow us to process lumber and other forest products such as mushrooms, but they have other diverse functions, such as protecting the soil and the watershed, which help support our livelihood for the long term.

When I asked my father, my grandfather, and other people from this area about the state of things today, I learned that because the forest is planted, for the sake of future generations, management of the forest is absolutely essential. However, because of the declining price of lumber and the lack of people to succeed them in this industry, much of

the forest is going unmanaged, and the distance between the habitats of wild animals and the human settlements in the hills is shrinking.

In particular, the damage caused by deer is worsening. Bark is being stripped off trees, and plants are being eaten up. It is an unbearable thing to see.

When the trees die off and the top soil disappears, it is disastrous for the forests. Their ability to retain water declines, they lose their functionality, and they cannot withstand the damage caused by typhoons and other events, resulting in large-scale calamities in certain places.

What can we do about this? Protecting the Amagi forests through correct management and making use of the lumber is an urgent issue that we need to deal with now. I told my father that I felt a need to do something about this now, and we talked about the future.

Nowadays in the lumber industry, people have thought up different ways to use the mill remnants and the timber from forest thinning, and all kind of goods are being produced. One of these is pellet fuel. The mill remnants and tree bark are pulverized and hardened, and used as fuel for stoves and home heaters. If we use this kind of biomass energy as much as possible in place of fossil fuels, it reduces the burden on the environment, and the mountains can become a source of treasure.

In addition, wood can be chipped and hardened to make particle board. Any size product can be made, and the strength can be adjusted by varying the density. In this way, the possibilities for using lumber are expanding. I am resolved that what I need to do is to discover the resources hidden in this region and find practical uses for them.

I think that what we should value most is the culture we have inherited up to this day.

*I want to protect the Amagi forests!* This dream of following after my father is gradually becoming more concrete.

In the future, as one who supports forestry in this region and protects the Amagi forests, I will make the best use of the nature of this region, and I will pass on to the next generation the forests and the culture that have been nurtured and preserved since ancient times. Although my individual steps may be small, I hope that by taking these steps I can help to change this region and my country.

I would like for my steps to be like the opening beats of a drum ringing out through the Amagi Mountains.