

# Going Home

By JACKSON SELLERS

SOMETHING different happened, something surprising, when we visited Komochi Village in the spring of 2009. It was the 10th time in 10 years that we had come. The visit was routine for us, nostalgic for Yoshi, interesting for me, a *gaijin* Kentuckian, a member of the Iizuka family only by marriage. This is where Yoshi was born and grew up. This is where her family's old compound still stands, in the foothills of the Komochi Mountains, with the family cemetery lying nearby. The mostly rural lands are wedged between the converging Tone and Agatsuma rivers and were annexed a few years ago by the Gunma Prefecture city of Shibukawa, which claims to be the geographical center of the entire Japanese archipelago, the heartland of Japan, no less. Accompanied by Yoshi's sister, Kazuko, we took a taxi to Komochi Village, passing by a cluster of monuments dedicated to Yoshi's grandfather, Ginai Iizuka, a master *kendo* swordsman of considerable reputation. Ginai, and eventually his son, Shigenobu Iizuka, Yoshi's father, owned extensive land stretching over the Komochi Mountains, along the foothills and even across the Tone River into rich flatlands. The Iizuka family crest, painted high on one end of the white gate house in the top photo here, translates as "Many Mountains." The gate house, refurbished and air-conditioned, is now used as a getaway by one of Yoshi's nephews. The big house, less than



half of which is visible in the photo, is rundown and boarded up, seldom entered. The main reason we were there was to pay respects to the dead Iizukas at the cemetery – Yoshi's parents, her elder brother, her grandparents, her great-grandparents, and on and on, going back hundreds of years. Above, Yoshi holds smoking incense sticks in front of a tombstone on which she and Kazuko had placed fresh flowers. Ah, yes, the surprising thing that happened on this visit: Somehow it became known that a couple of the Iizuka "girls" had come home. Two old women came out of their handsome farm houses to greet Yoshi and Ka-

zuko. Reintroductions were necessary, since they hadn't seen each other for 60 years or more, when all four women were indeed girls, when Yoshi and Kazuko were daughters of the master of the plantation, when the fathers of the other two women had bowed deeply as they delivered money and farm produce to Shigenobu Iizuka. Several times the two old women said, "We are doing nicely now, thanks to your father." Their gratitude was misplaced. It should have gone to General Douglas MacArthur, Japan's last *shogun*, who stripped poor Shigenobu of his land and gave it to the tenant farmers who actually worked the fields.