

W WOMIEN OF THE EARTH W

BY ERIKA ISHIBASHI



ON AUGUST 8TH, 2020, RIGHT AFTER THE MISS EARTH Tokyo 2020 pageant, seven contestants fatefully went out to eat. None of them had won and there was a mutual feeling of frustration and a feeling of not knowing what to do now. No one wanted to simply go back to their daily routine. They had all worked so hard and had a newfound passion to help the environment, and of course they could spread awareness on their own but deep down they all knew that the fire would eventually fade on its own. Unless they did it together... Once the idea of forming a group and spreading environmental awareness together came up, right then and there they created a name and an Instagram account. They started making plans for a photoshoot so they could formally introduce

each member on social media. Until Miss Earth Tokyo 2021, all seven of them have the title of 2020 finalists so this year would be a year of experimenting and testing to see what works for the seven of them as they all have to balance their jobs as well. The hope and the goal is turn this into a business after one year.

Although it has only been four months since the start, they have been able to consistently host two events per month, one that is a monthly trash pick-up event and one collaborative event with a WOE member sharing about their area of interest. But enough about the beginning as it has only be a few months, here's more about each of the members, what 2020 was like for them and what they're looking forward to in the new year!

MIYUKI KUDO

工藤みゆき - SCORPIO

AS A DESIGNER WHO CREATES THINGS, she feels strongly the responsibility to use the earth's resources sustainably. The resources provided to us by the earth are limited and this has inspired her to take the environment more seriously. Miyuki is an interior designer who specializes in offices and show rooms. She loves to read manga and has read over 20 books in one day before. She has also spent a week cycling from Tokyo to Osaka. From her cycling adventures, she has seen how beautiful the nature in Japan can be. However, Japan is also a country with many natural disasters. During both the 2011 earthquake disaster in eastern Japan and the typhoon that hit Chiba last year, Miyuki volunteered her time to help the efforts. She learned that something so beautiful and majestic could also be just as destructive and that nature is to be respected and protected.

Miyuki's 2020 was a year of resolution. She participated in Miss Earth Tokyo in 2019 and 2020 and was first runner up both years. This left her feeling incredibly frustrated as she was so close to winning both years, but she has turned that feeling of frustration into motivation for WOE. This year's frustration is next year's passion. By meeting the other WOE members, she has a newfound determination and a new project to work towards.

I personally love how Miyuki describes WOE. She thinks of WOE as the Avengers. Each member has their own area of interest and passion but we all come together as a stronger group to help support each other's goals and realize them in a bigger way.





NANAMI KANEKO

金子菜々美 - LEO

NANAMI WORKS AS A NARRATOR AND HAS THE MOST calming speaking voice. She came up with little catch phrases for all the members so people could easily remember each member. Her interest in the environment started when she was chosen as a finalist for Miss Earth Tokyo 2020. During the week of beauty training, she learned about the how much trash and waste there is on the earth and how that causes water pollution. She became aware of just how much people litter and decided to do something about it.

Through WOE, she has organized the monthly trash pick-up event in her hometown of Asakusa, Tokyo called Asakusa Clean Up. She hopes that when people see her and others picking up litter, it will inspire them to dispose of their trash properly. Another area she is passionate about is food waste. She has taken up an interest in learning how to ferment foods herself and is currently studying to become a certified fermented foods sommelier. Once she becomes certified, she hopes to host an event

through WOE where she can teach others how to properly ferment their own food.

2020 has also been a year of growth for Nanami. By becoming a Miss Earth Tokyo 2020 finalist, she had to take a good look at herself where she began the process of learning more about herself. She now takes self-care more seriously and a goal of hers for 2021 is to make more time for herself in the morning as she loves watching the sunrise.

The biggest thing she has learned in 2020 is that nothing begins without action. If she never applied for Miss Earth Tokyo 2020, she never would have gained her newfound confidence or met the other WOE members. If no one decided to go anything about the idea of starting a group, WOE never would have happened. This has inspired her to not overthink as much and to take more actions towards her goals. She is excited for what 2021 has to bring and wishes you all a wonderful 2021 filled with health and happiness!

ERIKA ISHIBASHI

石橋惠莉加 – ARIES

LIKE MANY OTHERS, 2020 WAS A YEAR where Erika grew in many ways. Competing in Miss Earth Tokyo 2020 was not something she intended to do but with the push of her older sister Lisa Opie, she decided to go for it.

Erika's biggest insecurity is the eczema that she has struggled with since birth. She never wanted to talk about it and has always kept it hidden but with bikini part of the competition, hiding it really wasn't an option. She came to terms with the fact that everyone watching would see how bad her skin was. Eczema is a very common chronic skin condition that isn't talked about as much as it should be and she decided to start that conversation. No longer afraid to open up about her struggles, she has become a strong advocate for skin positivity.

The only thing she is more passionate about than skin positivity is veganism. She started a vegan diet five years ago hoping to reduce the eczema but while doing the research, she learned that it was much more than just a diet. She made the ethical and moral choice to no longer consume animal products. Choosing to vote with her money, she chooses compassion for animals and the environment with every meal. Since moving to Tokyo a year ago, she has been spreading her vegan message in Japan and has hosted a vegan cookie decorating event through WOE. In 2021, she hopes to be able to reach more people through WOE about skin positivity and veganism.

Erika feels extremely lucky and blessed to have met the other WOE members and to be a part of this group of motivated young women. She also wants everyone to know that we all made it through 2020 and we should be proud. The most important thing we can do it continue to educate and better ourselves, take care of both our mental and physical health, and to go into 2021 excited about what the new year has in store for all of us.





WAKAKO YAMANA

山名和花子 - SCORPIO

WAKAKO LOVES TO TRAVEL AND through her travels, she has seen firsthand the discrimination the lower class of developing countries can experience. She's very passionate about creating a fair and just world where everyone is equal regardless of their background. It saddens her that so many things about a person's life can be decided just from which class or country they were born into and aspires to become a voice for those who don't have one. As someone who struggles with confidence herself, she hopes to gain confidence through helping those around her gain confidence as well.

Even though 2020 was hard, she is proud of herself for being able to adapt and move on. She can tell that she has grown and will continue to do so throughout 2021. She loves meeting new people and is excited to see how she herself will grow and hopes to contribute to WOE in any way she can. She encourages you to challenge yourself because you'd be surprised to find out just how much you can do with a single small step.



SAYO MIYAMOTO

宮本紗代 - ARIES

SAYO WORKS AS A NURSE IN A LOCAL gynecologists office. She has seen many young women with cervical cancer lose their battle and knows that the number of women with cervical cancer is on the rise. Wanting to spread awareness on this issue, she decided to apply for Miss Earth Tokyo 2020. Through WOE, she wants to continue to shed light onto women's reproductive health and the importance of it because we cannot care for others if we do not take care of ourselves first.

One of Sayo's hobbies is photography and she has taken on the role of organizing the WOE Instagram. She has expressed before that she wants to use her photography to show the state of the environment which will hopefully encourage people to take action. For example, on our monthly trash pick-up sessions, she likes to take artistic pictures of the trash before it is picked up to bring awareness to the litter problem in an artistic and modern way.

2020 for Sayo was one of identity. Like many of the other members, she was able to grow through Miss Earth Tokyo. Aside from learning more about herself, she has learned the importance of consistent action. Although it may not seem like you're going anywhere, small actions will turn into something big. She has big hopes for 2021 as she plans to attend graduate school and wants to keep the momentum from 2020 going into 2021. From Tokyo, Japan, she wants to remind you that only you are in charge of your life, and to always make conscious choices.



NANA OTA

太田奈那 - AQUARIUS

NANA BEGAN HER ENVIRONMENTAL journey when she watched a documentary about fast fashion. She's always loved fashion and was shocked to see how much pollution and harm these fashion brands and companies were causing to not only the environment but to women and children as well. She then realized the power she has as a consumer and decided to use that power to purchase from ethical and sustainable brands. From fashion to food, she encourages those around her to pay attention to where the foods we eat and the clothes we wear come from.

Nana is also an amazing raw sweets cook and through WOE, has already hosted two raw dessert lessons where she taught the participants how to make raw vegan doughnuts and raw vegan pumpkin tarts. All the ingredients she uses are from sustainable brands and it's amazing to see her spread her love for the environment through something everyone can get onboard with: desserts!

Her goals for 2021 include gathering more supporters for WOE as well as raising money to donate to animal sanctuaries. She feels that everything started when she applied for Miss Earth Tokyo 2020. Even though she only had a small amount of interest in pageants, she is very glad she did it and is thankful that she was able to meet people with similar interests. Even though you are only slightly interested in something, it is still worth going for.



ULALA MIKAMI

三上麗 - VIRGO

DURING THE BEGINNING OF QUARANTINE, ULALA started a YouTube channel as a way to kill time. Little did she know that her side hobby would turn into something more. Her niche of sex education is a rare one in Japan and it is something that needs to be talked about more. It all started when she was sexually assaulted in high school. She had always heard about these stories and knew about the #metoo movement but she didn't give it much thought because she had never experienced anything like it before, but after experiencing it firsthand, she knew that it was her problem too. Through this, she realized that other peoples' problems are her problems too. Of course it is easier to become an advocate for something you have experienced yourself but that doesn't mean you can't care or educate yourself on other societal problems. It is important to have compassion because we are all connected in some way or another.

She uses her platform to educate young teenagers about safe sex and has recently grown an interest in educating young girls about their periods as periods can still be a bit of a taboo subject in Japan. She has started a project to develop a First Time Period Kit that has everything a young girl needs to prepare for her first period. It even comes with a menstrual cup which is a very sustainable but lesser known feminine product.

She knows that Japan is a little behind when it comes to sex ed and can become discouraged knowing that there is still a long way to go but she is determined to use her experience and platform to explicitly speak to her young Japanese audience so that she can prevent others from going through what she did.

As for the environment, she actively tries to reduce the amount of trash she throws out. She learned that Japan was the fifth country in the world that threw away the most plastic trash and wanted to do her part to lessen the amount of trash thrown away. For example, she doesn't buy paper towels or napkins or anything that is thrown away after one use and has opted for cloth towels to wipe up spills and messes. She says that we have to be proactive in protecting the environment because the environment can't cry or become angry or show emotion like us humans can. Ignoring the environment is just the same as ignoring another fellow human being's problems.

2020 for Ulala has been challenging as it has been for most of us but she is positive about 2021 and hopes to finally launch her Period Kit. She plans to continue her YouTube channel hoping to reach more people with her story and will also continue to educate and grow herself as she someday would like to do a collaborative event with WOE.