

## **Tomo Tsurumi**

Country of origin: Japan

Circumstances of arrival: Tomo first came to the United States to study English as a second language. Music and origami were the connections that inspired him to stay. A saxophone player, with a preference for funk, he has performed widely as a solo musician and as a member of many bands. He was a member of the Indie Rock band *Volifonix*, which received sponsorships from various businesses and performed at many music festivals such as Bumbershoot. *Volifonix* was voted to the Best of Eugene twice in 2008 and 2009 and won several band contests including Next Big Thing in 2012.

Tomo's career as an origami instructor is as important as the one as a musician. He has taught origami in the U.S. for 22 years, including at the Oregon Asian Celebration for 12 years, and was voted Best Visual Artist of Eugene in 2012. He is a member of Nippon Origami Association in Tokyo, Japan. One of Tomo's favorite kinds of events is making origami art with kids at birthday parties.

Work: Tomo is a teacher of Japanese language and culture at Yujin Gakuen Elementary School, the oldest public Japanese immersion school in the nation. He tutors ten students of all ages after school.

*For me, Eugene is more diverse than any other small cities in Oregon. Not compared to Portland—but I like Eugene because it is surrounded by nature, and because of its education system. This area has a very good amount of civilization and educational resources, and people appreciate other cultures here.*

Note: The day of this interview, March 11, 2017, was also Memorial Day in Japan, the 6th anniversary of the 9.0 earthquake that struck off Japan's northeastern coast near Fukushima, triggering a tsunami. In a statement published for Japanese Immigrant Public Comment, in remembrance of the anniversary, Tomo expressed his desire that people in the United States recognize how hard the Japanese people are working to recover from the disaster. He also stated his intention to donate to the organization SOLVE: *No matter how small my contribution is, I would like to create hope instead of hate and misinformation.*

Photographer: Melissa "Mimi" Nolloedo

