

April 2010

**Toyooka, Crab County**  
**Travel Japan: Ise**  
**Outside-Outsiders**





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## HYOGO TIMES STAFF

Editor: Matthew Stott

Design Editor:

Jaclyn Threadgill

Cover: Jaclyn Threadgill

Contributors:

Ryan Parker, Cheryl Dicello,

Jonathan Cooper, Raena

Mina, Caitlin Orr, JayDee,

Emily Lemmon, Esper-

anza Urbaez, Lauren McRae,

Ferra-Lynn McCaffery,

Emma Nicoletti, Andra Hilse,

Connor Mannion, JJCappa,

Andrew Tamashiro, Travis

Love

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## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

BY MATTHEW STOTT



## Greetings, all

The cherry-blossom season is a fading memory of blue tarpaulin and *ume-shu*, and Himeji Castle will be wrapped in swaddling and scaffolding until 2015. For those of you bidding sayonara to the JET Programme this year, you picked a good time to leave, and I hope you made the most of it!

Of far greater interest and amusement, for me at least, are these opening days of the new school year. Even as I two-finger type away here on one of the staff computers—my own laptop temporarily having been disabled by the latest Ubuntu installment (I'm sure you all can relate)—the ecosystem of the teacher's room has taken on something of the mad flurry of a bee hive. Teachers flit and fly from desk to desk to printer to photocopier to desk: expressions on their faces half of impenetrable blankness and half of mad determination, and with little time to spare for trivial

matters like—maybe—apprising the ALT of his timetable or something. No, in Week 1 under such hostile conditions, the ALT is best advised to take a book and retire to an empty classroom, or perhaps to take a walk... I don't know... around the block, perhaps, or down to the subway station. Who could blame him if said ALT were to perchance take this train—for a lark, and for the noble purpose of not being underfoot—not very far... Osaka perhaps. Maybe Spa World.

Not that I would ever condone such an action, you understand. It's just one of those flights of fancy that might occur to the average JET, having foolishly accepted a seat in the assembly hall during the induction ceremony for the first-year students, and now struggling to stay conscious under the harshest and most uncompromising of conditions, as each worthy on the speaker's list endeavors to outdo the rest in a contest of interminability. (I discovered that day, during the aged PTA chief's oratory, that colorless green ideas do indeed sleep furiously.)

There are benefits to sticking around on campus, on the other hand. I did get bento twice during the "interregnum" period (i.e. the changeover period when new staff arrive and old staff leave—see what I did there?) due, as it was later explained to me, to all the meetings the teachers had to attend... while I've been having meetings with the Internet. Never look

a gift horse, &c. (There was no horse in the bento, alas.) And if minimum quantities of food and maximum quantities of alcohol is your thing, Term 1 is a particularly lively *enkai* season, given all the hellos and goodbyes that must be said, in various states of inebriation. (And I plan to visit all 50—I'll never have the opportunity at these prices again!)

Anyway, onto business. I'm very happy to announce a new partnership between the *Hyogo Times* and *Yomoyama Magazine*, an online journal serving JETs across Japan. What does this mean, you ask? It means *Yomoyama* will be featuring a selection of our articles on the magazine website—which means that if you write for us, and write well, you could be famous! (Or at least more well-known among JETs nationwide than you were hitherto.) You'll also have access to best JET journalism and JET writing across the prefectures. I'm very excited that we're a part of this project. Hopefully, in the near future, and with the assistance of web-savvy Hyogo JETs (Volunteers? Anyone?), the *Hyogo Times* will have its own online presence. But in the meantime, please visit *Yomoyama Magazine* at <http://yomoyama.whitneyconti.com/>.

Have a great start to Term 1!

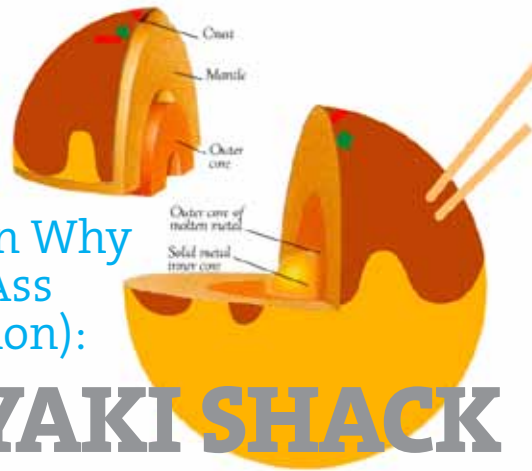
—Matt Stott

[publications@hyogo.ajet.net](mailto:publications@hyogo.ajet.net)



## April's Reason Why Awaji Kicks Ass (Epicure Edition):

# TAKOYAKI SHACK



**T**akoyaki. A single takoyaki is much like our planet Earth. At the center you have a core of octopus meat. Then there is the searing, loose batter portion (also known as the mantle of the takoyaki), all lovingly cradled by the crust. Which is the outside part. Then, much like our planet Earth, you have toppings. Like mayo, sauce, bonito flakes, etc. Some days you might have a higher seaweed-to-bonito ratio, others might experience severe pockets of mayonnaise activity. In the business we refer to these as *weather systems*. As you might comment on Earth weather with an aside like 'it sure is raining buckets,' you can also say, in reference to the condition of your takoyaki, 'it's saucing cats and dogs today' or 'octopus enough for ya?'. Also they typically—much like planets—come in even-numbered sets.

While takoyaki translates roughly into 'angel balls', it is all too frequently maligned with comments like 'it's too hot and it burned my mouth' or 'the looseness of the batter is gross'. Even 'it's just so samey everywhere I go'. I say

grow a pair. Also, contrary to popular belief, takoyaki is not a food designed specifically or exclusively for the poor. Some people actually enjoy eating it! I know because I am now one of those people. Ever since I found the takoyaki shack right by my house, that is. Let me put it this way... this dingy, mildly gross little building has found the takoya-key to my heart. You want some no-nonsense takoyaki at a sensible price? Done. Want mayonnaise on that? Boosh... Consider yourself mayonnaised. Tired of the same old boring plain mayo all the time on everything everywhere? *Karashimayo*, barn. Double done. And the service comes with a smile. If I remember correctly it is something like 12 (12!) takoyaki for 400 yen. Maybe 10. And during tough economic times like these, every yen matters.

I'll bet you just wish you could get your hands on some of this takoyaki action. Or to put it another way, 'get all Eric Massa on those balls'. And here's the great thing... you can! Just drive to the southern coast of Hyogo. When you get to Maiko you should see a bridge. If you

can't find it just ask one of the locals, they can help you spot it. Easy to miss. Next you want to take your car and drive it all the way across that bridge. Don't stop. When you get to the other side you are going to want to take the 28 south turn... which I believe is to your left. Do not take 31. That is the wrong way. Then you'll drive through some towns. This part will take about a half an hour. When you get to a town called Tsuna I want you to start paying more attention to what you are doing. You'll see a post office on your right. At the very next intersection take a right. If you reach the abandoned Come Cat Café YOU HAVE GONE TOO FAR! Turn around. Now the turn will be to your left, not your right. And if you see a post office on your left, not your right, you have gone too far again and you need to turn back around and follow the directions as stated the first time, not the second time. Go down this road for a while until you see an intersection with a Kinki supermarket, Kinki books and a Kinki coin laundry. Just before these shops you want to take a right. Although the prices at the Kinki supermarket are fairly good, and you might want to stop right now, you should probably wait till your way back just in case you end up wanting to buy ice cream or something. It could melt. The takoyaki shack will be on your left up this road just a tiny little bit. It is the shack with the sign out front that says "takoyaki". To get home, reverse the directions. Also if you are coming from the south I suggest driving to Maiko and following these directions as written.

Also did you know takoyaki was invented by a man named Endo Tomekichi? It was! Look it up! ●

Takoyaki image from: <http://www3.ocn.ne.jp/~nikari/kuebu.html>

## My tutelage in Japanese graffiti, aka *shodo*

**I**live in a town of about 45,000, mostly young families and *obaa-chans*, where you escape to big cities like Osaka and Kobe if you are young and able enough to get out of *inaka* life. Sometimes, seeing my students graduate, I feel a twinge of jealousy as they move on to an exciting care-free Japanese university life, in the metropolis of Japan, leaving their little ALT behind in the rice fields and mountains of this small town. I'm a big city girl but I really adore life in *inaka* Japan. However, as a *gaijin* coming from the youth subculture of the West, I find the need to fulfill my restless boredom and empty void. I need to find my scene, if you will. Do I enter the infamous world of snack bars (as described in the famous presentation of the World's Largest Abacus at the 2009 Hyogo Mid-Year Conference)? Do I become a karaoke or *izakaya* frequenter? As it turned out, I chose to befriend all the *obaa-chans* of my hometown, as an enthusiastic young pupil to Japanese traditional culture. Enter my tutelage in Japanese calligraphy, or *shodo*.

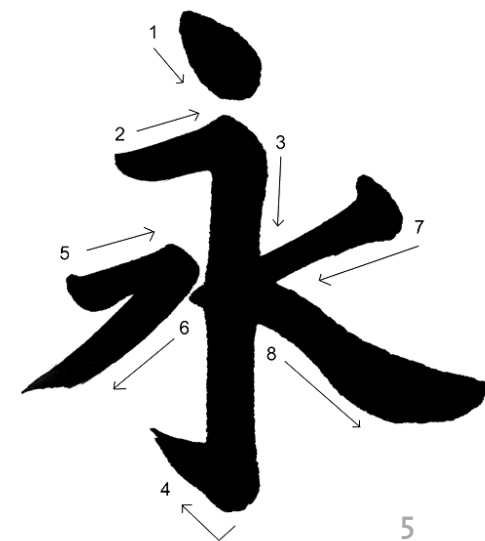
Why do I learn *shodo*? Not only is it the perfect way to learn and memorize *kanji*, stroke order and hence study the Japanese language, it also affords a chance to enjoy haikus and proverbs, since much of the subject matter is influenced by Zen philosophy. In addition to the deep meaning in the message itself, the characters and composition act as an art form. There are so many different styles and scripts, from regular

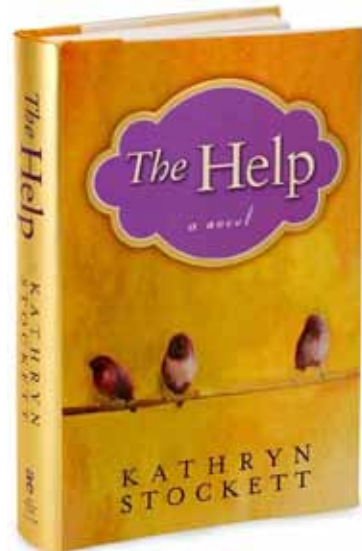
to cursive, and sometimes they even appear illegible. Despite the painful *seiza* position, and the frustration one can get from trying to write the characters perfectly, *shodo* is quite a relaxing and peaceful art. The sound of the brush strokes on the paper, the scent emitted from the bar of Indian ink when ground in water in the beautiful *suzuri* or grinding stone, all make for calm and soothing ambience. And as my *shodo* sensei once said, it's great during stressful times: because you need to focus and concentrate on every brush stroke—the balance, angle and the pressure—you can temporarily forget about things that are bothering you.

While a lot of people enjoy writing their favorite *kanji* as a first timer, if you're really serious, there is one *kanji* that will help hone your brush work: 永 or Eternity. In *shodo* this is known as *eiji happ*, as it uses the 8 basic strokes one must master. Brushes make shapes not lines, and controlling the head of the stroke, and the pressure of the brush as you drag it to create the body; how you lift the brush from your paper when you create the tail of the stroke, all depend on pressure and angles of your wrist. You need to visualize the strokes before you write the character. You need to put *きもち* into your brushwork to get the desired effect. Each *kanji* has a stroke order because if not followed, it cannot look the same. The stroke order is actually designed to create the *kanji* with the least amount of strokes almost in a continuous movement. Think

of it like a car navigation system: the easiest route to get from Point A to Point B. Once acquiring the skills in the technique of these unique strokes, one can write any character properly.

I liken *shodo* to graffiti, only because there are certain techniques to master in order to create the shape of the character properly—but once mastered, the individual artist can create their own style or writing, with the content and the composition both being expressed artistically. There are basic principles of every style, yet each style is beautiful and unique, not unlike the art of street graffiti and tagging, if that is your thing. As graffiti is a key element of hip hop, art, and political commentary, so is *shodo* key to Japanese traditional cultural art and history. It definitely led to my participation in other Japanese cultural arts such as tea ceremony, kimono wearing class, and *ikebana*. It has helped me to study Japanese and it has helped me to study Japan. It introduced me to many *obaa-chans* in my town and beyond. Screw the big city and its bar scene, the snacks and *bosozoku* gangs. Live in the *inaka*, get yourself an *obaa-chan* crew, and soon enough you'll be donning a kimono and tagging your *kanji* on *washi* paper. ●





# The Help

by Kathryn Stockett

to insist I read it. And now, after reading it, I am here to recommend *The Help* to everyone, with the same enthusiasm with which it was suggested to me.

Kathryn Stockett is a new author and her first book definitely has a point of view. *The Help* is an intricate novel that chronicles the lives of three very distinct women: Eugenia "Skeeter" Phelan, Aibileen, and Minny. The novel sets us in Jackson, Mississippi in the 1960's amid the tensions of racism, specifically that of black maids working for white families in the south.

Skeeter is a young white woman in her early twenties who comes home from college with the desire to be a writer, but is lacking inspiration. She was raised by her family's maid Constance, but returns to find that Constance has left, but no one will tell her why.

Aibileen is an elderly black maid who is helping to raise the little daughter of her new employer. She is wise, poised, and experienced, having raised 17 white children over the course of her career.

Minny, an extremely sassy woman and Aibileen's best friend, has a running mouth and has just lost herself another job. She offers constant comic relief and fierceness that makes

you hope, if you ever were to meet her, that she didn't take an immediate disliking to you.

*The Help* is a book centered around a book. Skeeter, naïve but passionate, gets inspired to write a book about black maids working for white families in the south. It's a risky proposal, given the circumstances of Mississippi in the 60's. Any maid who participates runs the risk of being discovered and would suffer the consequences if caught. You wonder if anyone will be brave enough to help her and simultaneously wondering if Skeeter herself is brave enough to commit to what she's started. As a reader you are given humanity at its most beautiful, and at its worst. It reminds you what humans are capable of doing out of hatred, fear, and love.

There is the common check list of attributes in this book, too. It makes you laugh, it makes you cry, it makes you angry and it makes you happy; most importantly, it makes you believe it. There were times where I swear I'd only been reading 10 minutes, but I'd have 50 pages behind me. I never put my feet down, not once.

If you want to celebrate how enticing a novel can be, find Kathryn Stockett's book *The Help*, as it will help you in more ways than you know. ●

Hello. My name is Caitlin Orr and I'll be your new reviewer of books from now on. It sounds so official to "review" books: I'd prefer to think of it as "playing" with books or "discovering" stories. So, yes, I can be your explorer. I have roughly 3 'rules' governing how I read:

- 1) If I've read more than 30 pages of a book, I have to finish it. Even if it's tedious, dragging, and in one case, almost 500 pages long, long, long.
  - 2) I won't start a new book on the same day I've finished another one. I think of dreaming on a book as a form of respect for the novel.
  - 3) I don't let my feet touch the ground while I'm reading. I think I've convinced myself it is part of the escapism.
- Now onwards towards this month's review.

This book came highly recommended to me by two different women with little in common, especially book taste. Surprised, I wondered what kind of story would please both of these friends and inspire them

# Single Sub Rosa

I thought for my first article it would be appropriate to introduce myself. In order to maintain some dignity on my part, some privacy on my friends' part (who will no doubt become references in future articles), and to allow myself to be completely honest, I have chosen to remain anonymous. This makes it all the more exciting for me as it is a step towards somewhat fulfilling my childhood 'Harriet the Spy' fantasies. Plus, being mysterious makes me feel just that little bit more cool. Anyway, I digress.

I am a female in my twenties. I am currently single and have no interest in pursuing a relationship at this stage in my life. I am perfectly content with the 'freedom' (interpret that how you will) that comes with being single. I have had one serious relationship, a sprinkling of minor relationships, and numerous 'fleeting encounters'. While I am somewhat cynical about all that lovey-dovey mushy crap, I'd like

to think that I am pretty good at being objective and fair.

In this day and age, life is more complicated than ever. Through the advancement of technology, we are now saturated in such 'self-help' media as reality TV shows, self-help books, movies, blogs, and \*cough\* articles about love and relationships in online publications \*cough\*. We are so inundated with so called 'guidance', which is all too often complex and contradictory, that no one really knows what to believe anymore. Back when Moses scaled a mountain and came back with God's list of no-nos (not as in nitrous oxide, nos as in the plural of no. I don't think they would have had the necessary paraphernalia in those days to properly appreciate nos) you knew what was what. The rules said "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's ass", and you didn't even *think* about arguing, right? Well, I happen to think my neighbour's ass is rather covetable, not to mention his kick-ass hair. My point is there

are no rules anymore in the world of love and relationships. Men aren't from Mars, women aren't from Venus, 'The Secret' is utter BS, and Dr Phil doesn't know jack. It's basically a big free-for-all out there these days and, barring the obvious taboo and not to mention illegal things such as necrophilia, anything goes. When reading my articles, keep in mind that I'm just one of thousands of people that have been harping on about the same BS for centuries.

Sorry this is such a rush-job piece of writing. Procrastination is a skill I have been crafting since high school, and I think I have it down to a fine art. At the time of writing this I have approximately one hour before I have to catch my train to get out of the *inaka* for the long weekend/ Spring break.... and I am still in my pyjamas. I hope you enjoy reading my musings on love and relationships and, if I am not ousted for such a sub-par article, look forward to future topics such as 'The Gaijin Girl and the Japanese Man', 'Relationship Deal breakers: What would make you run for the hills?' and, if you're really lucky, 'The Men I Have Slept With: a Collection of Haiku.' ●



# MAIGO IN HYOGO

Where in Hyogo is this? Guess the location, and for bonus ... erm ... praise, guess the JET!

Got a picture worthy enough for Maigo in Hyogo? Send it to me: [publications@hyogo.ajet.net](mailto:publications@hyogo.ajet.net)

Last month's solution: Kobe Kachoen (Bird and Flower Park)



# Mie

BY CHERYL DICELLO

Opening my mail box to discover that I'd been accepted to be an ALT by the BOE of Kuwana in Mie, I was very happy. *Yay, I have a job!* But, where is Mie? I did as many recently accepted JETs probably did, and googled the location of my future home.

There wasn't much about Mie on the internet, but I did find a map, information about the former asthma capital, Yokkaichi, and the mythical birthplace of *Amaterasu*, Ise. After living here for the past three and a half years, I have found much more that is culturally interesting and just plain interesting about Mie.

Ise is my favorite place in Mie. If you go to any of Ise's stations, you can take a bus to the shrines. The shrines are surrounded by huge trees. Although the oldest tree was recently struck down by lightning there are still some pretty old trees there. If you talk with any of the landscape workers, they will be happy to point out the oldest tree to you and tell you all about the shrines.

In the marketplace area just outside of the shrines, you can try all the local specialties, such as *Ise-ebi*, *Ise-udon*, *daifuku kakigori* (high fortune snowcone), *Ise-tofu*, and see live *taiko* on Sundays. [Editor's note: for a closer look at Ise, see this issue's *Travel Japan*.]

Near Ise is a place called Spain Mura. I don't recommend going there, but because of this place there is a lot of live flamenco dancing in Mie.

For hikers, we share the world heritage site trails called Kumano-Kodou with Wakayama. A high recommend if you like *mikan* and waterfalls.

Also, there is the amazing Kumano firework festival. ranked one of the best 10 in Japan. It is a part of the *O-bon* festival.

Last year, as I was watching these fireworks, some kind *oji-chans* told me that the fireworks were extra great this year because some great people kindly died. If you are thinking of going, get in touch with

the Mie JETs via the website at [www.miejets.org](http://www.miejets.org). They can usually reserve a space for you.

If you would like to see some junior high schoolers proving their adulthood by galloping horses up a very steep cliff while inebriated, welcome to Mie. On the Sunday and Monday of every Golden Week is the *Ageuma* Festival at the Tado-Taisha. in Tado

It's free to watch, transportation costs aside. At the same location, to celebrate the harvest, there is a horseback archery festival called *Yabusame*, held on Substitute Thanksgiving day. If you do go to any of the Tado events, Tado also has a micro-brewery. Try it if you like dark beer.

Yokkaichi, the aforementioned former asthma capital of Japan, has an underground metal scene. The city also hosts marathons.

Although there are many things to see and do in Mie, I am just beginning to find out more about this prefecture. I am sure many have experienced going to Japan and then realizing that they actually travelled more around Japan than their home prefectures. Living in Mie, maybe this has happened to me as well. Let's get to know our own *ken*. ●



## Hiroshima and Miyajima

Photos by Ryan Parker and Jaclyn Threadgill





# “Funniest Story Involving a Student”

## SPECIAL EXTENDED EDITION



BY EMILY LEMMON (SEE HER FULL PROFILE ON PAGE XX)

This comes in three installments. And it got better every time.

### Part I:

One day in early October, I was helping out with an English lesson since, you know, that's my job. I've kind of gotten used to the fact that there is information all around me that I cannot really read.

When I see English, though, I tend to gravitate towards it because I'm actually much more used to being surrounded by information I CAN read but do not actually care about (advertisements, etc.).

So when I happened to notice English at the back of the room, I read it very quickly. And when I read it, I almost giggled right out loud. And after that, I kept looking back at it and trying not

to giggle. Because it was just so... well, look at the photo.

I later examined the words at the top of the board, and saw that they were "something for this month" ... later actually translated to "A murmur of this month." This made it even more fun, since I kind of felt that way about October, too. But it just cracked me up that a kid wrote this, and put it up. I assumed it was one of our brash and outspoken guys, and

wondered where he might have learned it.

I also began to imagine it as myself, amidst a sea of *kanji* and other Japanese writing ... me, not alone, but standing out, in English ... crying out this phrase, in surprise, and horror, and delight. It seemed a good image for how I sometimes feel in Japan.

### Part II:

I was eating lunch in this classroom, and it was a totally different experience from eating lunch with any other grade level, ever. The third-years actually talk to me, and they're not afraid to struggle through English to attempt a chat. After asking them their names and a bit of gossip about who had a girlfriend (it's apparently a big secret if you do ... we're all part of the Ichinan family, though!), I just had to ask.

"Who ..." (giggle) "Who put that up, over there, on the board?"

They all looked at it, and then pointed to one boy in particular, whom I honestly had not suspected. He, it turns out, is the son of one of my adult students in the conversation class. This made me laugh even more, because it meant that maybe, he didn't learn it at school ... maybe he learned it from his parent, who learned it from Big Brother or from Predecessor. I tried to imagine them teaching a lesson, or accidentally dropping that

phrase so often it became part of someone's vernacular. I then tried to imagine that particular student whose son it was picking up that phrase in her daily life. No. Way.

So, I was going through all this in my head, and then one of the student leaders (I was basically at a desk cluster full of them) turned back to me and said "*Holy shitto? Holy shitto*. What means, in Japanese?" I was overcome. I also had my mouth full of food. I *also* can't translate that ... there really is no Japanese direct equivalent. I just shook my head and said I didn't know, but that it wasn't something you wanted to say to someone's parents.

Which is totally vague, and just left them confused. This particular student frowned (not in an upset way, just in an I-will-discover-the-truth kind of way) and left the room. I know that he probably went next door to ask Awesome-Sensei what it was in Japanese. He returned with no answer. I tried to imagine how that conversation had just gone. No way. No. Way!

### Part III:

The student whose son it is doesn't come to class all that often, but she was at my birthday dinner. I had a beer or two, and then there I was telling her that her son put something on the board that made me laugh and laugh. She assured

me that he is crazy, her son, and asked what he put up. I didn't want to tell her, but I had to have known she would ask, so I told her (and the rest of the table).

The adult students had pretty much the same reaction "Can you translate that for us?" Big Brother cracked up when one lady (our leader, actually) was like "Tell me holy. I know 'shit'!" So I spelled "holy" for them to look up in their dictionaries, but then I had to explain that this phrase is different than the sum of its parts. We tried to find a suitable equivalent, but there aren't really a lot of curse words in Japanese.

But I was still curious as to where he'd learned it, and his mother then mentioned "Oh, he heard it on this video game," and I instantly asked, "Was it *Grand Theft Auto*?"

And yes, dear readers, it was indeed *GTA*, and she was amazed that I had guessed so quickly.

*Grand Theft Auto*: because sometimes you just need to beat up some hookers ... ?

Anyway, in this moment, on my birthday, it made the entire saga that much more wonderful, to know that he had learned these words from a video game.

The end! ●





# Toyooka, Crab County

Where the crab is plenty and the people are *genki*.

BY TAJIMA CORRESPONDENT ESPERANZA URBAEZ

They came from far and wide to witness the grand display of the freshest, biggest and most delicious crab in all of Hyogo at the 19th Toyooka Tuiyama Port Crab Festival. Held by the Toyooka piers along the scenic Maruyama river, this popular winter festival attracted all types of people, including families, young students, senior citizens and yours truly—despite the early Sunday morning start (8:30 AM), the out-of-the-way location and the cold winter weather (5 C). “It was way too early for a matsuri,” said Kenny Wu, Toyooka City JHS ALT who has attended

about six festivals since arriving in Japan last July. “However, I enjoyed it a lot.”

The day began with the Opening Ceremony which included Heike Suigun Taiko (Drum) performance and free warm sake served in a crab shell. Bowls of hot crab leg soup were sold for 300 yen, and about 50 local fresh fish and seafood vendors had their best quality products on sale for exceptionally low prices. It was truly paradise for any serious seafood lover. “There was lots of crab, for cheap!” said Wu. Not only was the crab cheap, there

was octopus, squid, salmon, etc. You name it, they had it and for cheap! They even offered crab sake. After being offered several hefty samples by the generous vendors we discovered that crab sake is very tasty and bought several bottles.

The fast-talking host with the million-yen smile, the showcasing of enormous crab on stage, the pushing, shoving and hollering of low prices from the crowd below were all part of the exciting amateur fresh delicacy auction. “That auction was crazy. Crates of live crab worth hundreds of dollars selling for like

\$10?!?!” said Alvin Tran, Kinosaki JHS ALT who recently arrived in Japan and was happy to attend his first Japanese festival. “[The festival] was really cool and lots of fun. It was a great mini-introduction to Japanese-culture.”

As if all this activity was not enough to satisfy anyone before 10 AM, they then held a Tsuiyama crab raffle which Kenny Wu won! The grand prize was a night stay at a fancy and authentic ryokan, including a special and highly reputed Tsuiyama crab dinner course for two. “I was surprised when I won the raffle! Grand prize! Booyah!” exclaimed Wu. For Chinyere Okoli, Toyooka City SHS ALT, who was expecting more for her first festival in Japan, the festival was not as exciting. “I expected lots of people, lots of decorations and a bigger

arena like in the town itself,” said Okoli. She was surprised to see people selling whole fish and crabs. “It seemed more like a Day market,” she added.

Okoli did enjoy seeing and taking a photo with the official festival mascot, Genbudo-san, a giant Rock man (because all Japanese festivals must have mascots). Accompanied by two assistants who were local models, Gen-san (for short) also came with his own rice-cake (*mochi*) wooden mallet (*kine*). This was convenient for all the *mochi* making that went on next in the schedule.

It was quite a sight to see a bit of *mochitsuki*, the traditional *mochi*-pounding ceremony in Japan. The cooked rice was pounded with the large mallets

in a traditional mortar (*usu*). In a *mochitsuki*, two people alternate the work, one pounding and the other turning and wetting the *mochi*. They must keep a steady rhythm or they may accidentally injure one another with the heavy *kine*. “The most fun was when that lady slapped that *mochi*!” said Wu. “It made a good sound.”

As the day wore on and the chill in the air became stronger, the 100-yen bowl of hot porridge made from crab, rice and vegetables being served to all the festival attendees was a delicious (and cheap) relief. Wu, Tran and Okoli plan on returning and strongly recommend everyone to attend next year’s crab festival in Toyooka. According to Wu, “Everyone should be able to enjoy cheap crab once in their life.” ●





# Ise

Ise may be a small town, but it is home to Japan's most sacred Shinto shrine, Ise jingu.

Ise jingu (shrine) dates from the third century. The shrines are rebuilt every 20 years on adjacent sites using ancient techniques where the wood interlocks rather being nailed together. The Sengu No Gi festival is when the God is transferred from the old shrine to the new one. The wood from the old shrine is used to rebuild the *torii* (gate) at the entrance and is also sent to other shrines all over Japan.

The main shrine buildings are hidden, and you are unable to take photos any closer than the bottom of the steps leading

to the shrine. However, there are smaller shrines which look similar to the main shrine and you can photograph these. Geku is the outer shrine, Naiku is the inner shrine and they are located in two different places. The shrines are open from sunrise to sunset and it is free to enter the shrine grounds. If you don't have much time and have to choose between the two shrines, Naiku is more impressive, but it is located outside the city centre and can be reached by bus from Ise-shi station in about 20 minutes. Geku is a 15 minute walk from Ise-shi station.

Ise is a good base from which to travel to the surrounding areas. Nearby is Toba, about 20 minutes from Ise-shi

Station by bus. If you like pearls and don't mind a bit of Japanese tourism, it is worth the trip. Mikimoto Pearl Island is connected to the mainland by bridge, and on the island you can see some exhibits about cultured pearls, buy pearls and watch pearl divers. The pearl divers, women known as *ama*, dive for pearls, oysters, shellfish or seaweed. Here you can see them in traditional costume and using traditional methods. There is also an aquarium which costs ¥2500 to enter.

Futami is also close to Ise and it is where you can see the Wedded Rocks (Meoto-iwa). They are two rocks considered to be male and female and they



are "married" by sacred ropes joining them. There is also a shrine, Futami Okitama jinja, on the edge of the ocean. A special festival is held here on the 5th of January every year to re-new the ropes. You can get to the Wedded Rocks by JR train from Ise: it takes about 10 minutes to Futaminoura station and then it is a 15 minute walk. Try to go during high tide, when the rocks are separated by water, or early on a clear day you might even see Mt Fuji in the distance. ●

[Editor's note: for more on Mie Prefecture, see this month's *Better Know a Ken*, page xx]



## GETTING THERE AND AROUND

From Himeji take a super rapid train to Osaka, the Osaka loop line to Tsuruhashi and then a Kintetsu limited express train to Ise-shi. It takes about 3 hours from Himeji and costs about ¥5000.

A one day pass for the CAN bus costs ¥1000 and provides unlimited rides, as well as discounts on admission to various attractions. A two day pass is available for ¥1600.

## ACCOMMODATION

Hoshide-kan is a Japanese ryokan close to Ise Jingu. Prices start at ¥5500 per person per night. Breakfast is available for ¥900 and dinner from ¥1300 but you need to order when you check-in. Hoside-kan is a 7 minute walk from the north exit of Ise-shi station. The first 3 days of the year is the most popular time to visit the shrines and accommodation can book up quickly.





# Miki Horseland Park

BY FERRA-LYNN MCCAFFERY

The sun briefly filters through the canopy of deciduous trees above us, speckling dead leaves littering the path below with golden hints of warmth. However, what sunshine there is does little to warm me, as the biting wind and cold easily invade the seven layers of clothing I am bundled in.

I shiver but I barely notice my own discomfort because I am grinning with child-like abandon and hollering a command to “Go faster!”

Where am I? I am galloping down a heavily forested trail that looks more like rugged Northern Canada than anywhere I have been (to-date) in Japan; shouting with joy and urging the poor beast beneath me to race down the ravine. I just can’t get enough!

A year and a half ago, I was approached by a JTE at my very first school in Japan who asked me if I liked to horse-back ride. Having

ridden as a child and attended summer camps, I did have some experience; but it had been a long time since I was on the back of a horse. I was apprehensive about riding in Japan not knowing the horses, the words for gear or even how to say “Woah!” in Japanese, but I agreed to try.

I’ll admit, I was calm and cool on the outside, but when I straddled that horse for the first time and my knees bent at 90 degree angles because the stirrups were way too short for my *gaijin*-length legs, I felt a ripple of fear realizing that the language barrier here might prove to be a problem. A big problem.

After some creative charades and a lot of laughter on both sides, I discerned that the guides at Miki Horseland Park were absolute professionals; and they noticed my problem long before I started flailing for help. From then on, things went a lot more smoothly. The Horseland guides were kind, and although they claimed not to speak any English, they understood my questions

about the horses and the trails with little to no issues.

By the time we returned to the stables, the guides were racking their brains, trying to recall long-forgotten junior high school English phrases to impress me with and their shyness eventually dissipated.

That first 60 minute riding course actually ended up being just short of two hours long, because everyone wanted to make sure I felt comfortable and safe on an unfamiliar horse before actually taking me riding through the trails that wind around the gorgeous landscape of Miki City.

Considerate and kind, the Miki City guides make up a large part of why I continue to return to the Horse Trek Park on a semi-regular basis. (I also suspect that since I have become more or less of a regular sight around Miki, the employees have brushed up their English skills. They have a suspiciously “knowing” look on their faces when I talk to my horse in English.)

Which is why, when you fast-forward 16 months, you’ll find me atop my “noble steed,” *Hidarugo*, in the biting cold of early January, sniffing and shivering, numb in parts where no one should ever be numb, but simply not caring because of the thrill of the ride, the scent of nature and beast, and the stunning trails that wind through forested hills and valleys devoid of anything remotely urban, unparalleled in beauty. That, and there is a fantastic buffet lunch to indulge in at the main centre when you’re done riding.

Riding courses at Miki Horseland Park range from 30 minutes of walking with a guide and sight-seeing nature trails to (my personal favourite), the 2 hour-long galloping course. You can customize your own packages; and all gear including helmets, protective chest vests and leg protectors are available to rent for a minimal fee of 200 yen. (Sorry, you have to bring your own shoes!) You can even pick your horse from a photo gallery and choose who you like the most, *a la* host bar. Whatever floats your boat, eh? \*wink\*

Membership will get you discounts, although I don’t recommend it unless you can really commit to regular attendance. Riding reservations are a must because during the summer months; there is usually a one to two-month long wait to ride on a weekend.

If you have never ridden horse-back and are afraid that it is not something you want to try in a foreign country, put your fears aside. The trainers and guides at Miki Horseland Park are very professional and will walk you

through everything you need to know with extra-special attention—*because* of the language barrier. They will make sure you are 100% comfortable before you embark on a trail, and if you have any concerns at all, just wave your hands around and say “*Chotto... sumimasen...*” and someone will come running over to assist you.

If you have experience in riding and are looking for that thrill again, look no further. Galloping is only the beginning; you can show-jump, ride cross-country, and compete in jumping and

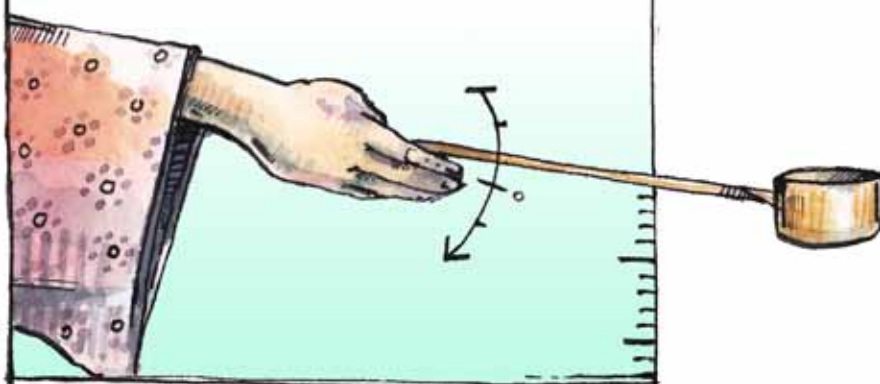
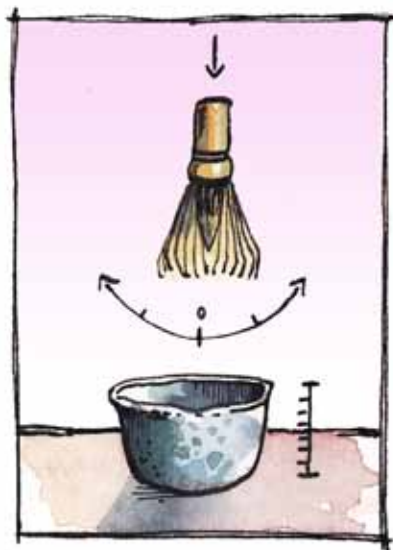
riding competitions at Miki Horseland Park. The centre is huge and the people are really friendly. If you have a day off and are looking for something different to do in Japan, check out Miki City Horseland Park. ●

## Contact information:

Miki Horseland Park  
三木 ホースランドパーク  
TEL: 079 483 8670  
FAX: 079 483 8671  
Email: [info@miki-ht.jp](mailto:info@miki-ht.jp)  
Website: [www.miki-ht.jp](http://www.miki-ht.jp) (Sorry, Japanese only!)







Inside JET:

# The Outside-Outsiders

BY EMMA NICOLETTI

*Editor's note: This is the first in a three-part series. Subsequent instalments will appear in future issues of the Hyogo Times.*

"One day Roland Barthes strolled up the Champs Elysees toward L'Etoile and met an outside-insider. There are many outside-outsiders and a few inside-insiders, he would say, and there are even a very few inside-outsiders [...] but the authentic outside-insider is rare." (Robert Rawdon Wilson, *In Palamedes' Shadow* 48)

I first encountered these words while nestled under a warm *kotatsu* on a chilly Japanese winter evening. The book was about English literature, language and play. Admittedly a dry topic for most people,

but nevertheless interesting reading for a graduate of Literature Studies. After finishing the chapter, filing the book away and settling down to sleep, I encountered the words again, but this time in my thoughts: am I, Emma Nicoletti, an outside-insider? Or are my Japanese friends, colleagues and students outside-insiders? Is it me or them who is like the man Barthes met on the Champs Elysees? Or are none of us like him? Of course, to answer these questions satisfactorily, we need to know what is an outside-insider, and for that matter, how an outside-insider is different from an

outside-outsider, and an inside-insider, and also an inside-outsider.

**The outside-outsider:** *An outside-outsider is a person who doesn't seem to understand their culture or group's spoken and unspoken rules. They break taboos not because they are trying to be clever or rude, but because they don't know any better. They are the person at the party who you try to avoid. They are often the person who hears what you are saying, but doesn't really listen. Their comments often sound insensitive, and their manner seems rough. They don't fit into your group, and you don't think they can easily fit into most groups.*

## Emma: The Case of an Outside-outsider in Tokyo.

On the bus from Narita airport to Tokyo's Keio Plaza, I was surrounded by other West Australians. I had met them once or twice in Perth before leaving for Japan, we were friendly, but we weren't friends yet. I still couldn't remember all their names, and I wasn't familiar with their humour. Were they people I would become friends with? Or were they people I would quickly grow apart from? Right then, on that bus ride, I felt different from them. They all seemed to be talking quickly in excited discussions, full of hopes and dreams; all seemed agog, fingers pointing at every novelty and difference they could see. I felt I didn't belong, I didn't share their mood nor did I want to participate in it. I felt the absence of my parents and brother and close friends. I felt loss, not hope. Looking outside and seeing Tokyo's megalopolis didn't relieve my brown study either. There was nothing familiar. There were too many buildings, they were too tall, and the air was too thick with humidity. I closed my eyes and wondered if I would ever fit in with these people, and this country.

As I write this, two and a half years after coming to Japan, and as I am starting to make preparations for my return to Australia in August, I struggle to quell the surge of emotions my JET friends and my Japan experiences have stirred in me. The first thought that comes to my mind are the tears I've shed for my dear friends who have already returned to their distant home countries. Indeed, they did become my new family, they were and will continue to be a group of dynamic, supportive and kind people, with

whom I've shared invaluable experiences. As for Japan, my feelings are neatly summed up in my instantaneous reaction to a fellow teacher's recent farewell. Teacher: "Emma, Japan will miss you in August." Me: "Not as much as I will miss Japan."

## Mikage-sensei: The Case of 'I Don't Want My Mum to be an Outside-outsider Anymore', or, Please Come to my Mother's House.'

One day Mikage-sensei turned to me and told me about her mother, carefully prefacing the conversation with the warning, "It's a secret, but my mother is a little strange." It turned out that her mother was not afflicted with a behaviour altering illness, nor even so much as a twitch; her strangeness emerged from her dislike of foreigners. She had never been introduced to one before, and she'd had no desire to approach one herself. Mikage-sensei explained her mother's opinion of foreigners, and it soon became apparent that she was well-versed in many unflattering stereotypes: foreigners are loud, inconsiderate, pushy, obnoxious and they think

they are better than the Japanese. However, Mikage-sensei told me that none of her mother's friends shared her prejudice, and Mikage-sensei herself felt ashamed of her mother's irrationality. In an attempt to countervail her mother's racist attitude, Mikage-sensei told me she often talked to her mother about me; in particular, she had told her mother that I was friendly and nice. In a recent conversation, Mikage-sensei had told her mother that I was interested in Japanese culture and that I was learning how to perform the tea ceremony. Her mother, who formerly practiced tea ceremony every week when Mikage-sensei was a child, became very intrigued and quite unexpectedly asked Mikage-sensei to invite me to her house so we could do tea ceremony together. I accepted the invitation and went to Mikage-san's house in Kyoto. We prepared tea for each other, we both made mistakes, and we both helped each other when we forgot the procedure. More often than not, we laughed. ●

*The second part of this series will appear in the May 2010 issue.*





# A Hinamatsuri Visit



BY AUDRA HILSE

One night a few weeks ago, my fellow Ichikawa ALT Katrina and I drove a few blocks from our apartment building and met with a secretary from one of our elementary schools, Namba-sensei, who had invited us to her home for a special treat. It was dark that evening, and chilly, as we walked up to the front door of the big, traditional Japanese house and slid the door open. We were greeted by warmth, soft light, and a wonderful picture: a beautiful *hinamatsuri* display vivid with reds and golds, taller than my (160 cm) head. The display was set up on miniature bleachers draped in red cloth, and took up most of the entryway.

We took off our shoes and settled in front of the display as our hostess joined us, and she encouraged us to get out our cameras and take

pictures. We did so, taking the time to admire the miniature furniture, and of course the elaborate dolls wearing Heian Era clothes and clutching various accoutrements in their hands. The whole thing was quite exquisite, from the Emperor and Empress sitting at the top, to the three ladies-in-waiting, the five musicians, the two guards holding their weapons, and the three court ministers. Each doll was done in great detail, from the Empress's twelve layers of the *kimono* to the musicians' instruments. The guards, one young and one old, each carried an unstrung bow and wore a quiver of arrows on their backs, and bore swords that could be drawn at their waists. The surrounding furniture, with tiny tea implements and mirror, and the miniature ox-cart, were also beautiful.

After admiring the display for a few minutes, Namba-sensei and her

husband invited us into the front room, offering tea and snacks. Sweet *anko* was accompanied by a cup of *sakura* tea: hot water with a single *sakura* blossom and stem soaking in it. It's an interesting tea, staring out with a very delicate flavor that becomes bitter and almost salty the longer the flower steeps. We drank and ate and chatted, and our hosts even pulled some of the dolls down from the display and brought them to the table so that we could look at them more closely. The detail was really amazing.

Namba-sensei then explained that this would be the last year they would set up the *hinamatsuri* display, because their daughter was getting married in a few weeks, and of course this is a festival for unmarried girls. Although we won't be able to see the dolls next year, the upcoming wedding did give us



an opportunity to see something of Japanese nuptial traditions. In the room next to the one we were sitting in (both were traditional *tatami* rooms), there was a pre-wedding display set up on a cloth spread over the floor. It involved three trees fashioned by twisting and looping thick, metallic threads together: a pine tree, a peach tree and a bamboo, which all were symbols of good luck. There was also a crane and a turtle fashioned out of the same material. There was a place for cards brought by well-wishers, and at the center was another pair of dolls depicting an old man and an old woman holding traditional farming and household tools. This, our hosts explained, is meant to ensure that the married couple will have a long, happy marriage and grow old together. Indeed, the elderly dolls from their own wedding were still neatly preserved inside a small

glass case in another corner of the room. After admiring the wedding display, we finished our snacks and then got ready to head home.

Thus, our visit turned into an educational evening about some absorbing Japanese traditions. I'm very grateful that we got to go and see both of these traditional displays, since they were both very beautiful. For those wanting to see some large, elaborate *hinamatsuri* displays, the Japan Toy Museum in Kōdera (on the Bantan line north of Himeji) currently has an entire room devoted to them. The displays in the exhibit hail from several different eras of Japanese history, and it is fascinating to see how the styles change with the years. The doll exhibition will (I believe) be open until May, and I highly recommend it to anyone curious about such things; the rest of the Toy Museum is very interesting as well. ●





# GETTING TO KNOW RANDOM JETS



## THE BASICS

**Name:** Conor Mannion

**Please call me:** Conor

**School and Location in Hyogo:** Sanda Shounkan, Sanda

**How we know you:** Futsal Mondays and Wednesdays; and first years may know me as the guy who passed out in front of the hotel in Tokyo on night one of my JET experience. Not my finest hour.

**Birthday:** 13/7/85

**Born and raised:** Dublin/Kildare, Ireland

**Family:** One sister going by the name of Niamh

**University and Degree:**

Dublin City University, Science Education

**Other jobs that you have**

**had:** Worked in a fridge for LIDL, Post Office, Chocolate Factory, Fruit picker, Bookshop, Clothing store.

**Travels:** Lived in Australia (7 months) and Paris (six months). Some of the more out of the way places I visited

include New Zealand, Fiji, Hawaii... loads more but pretty much your average JET's "places I've been".

**Hobbies:** Soccer (Playing, watching and playing winning eleven), Reading everything from food labels to weird sci-fi/fantasy no-one has heard of, drinking (socializing), travelling.

**Staying another year?** You betcha!!

## FAVORITES

**Food:** Battered sausage and chips

drowned in vinegar, soaked up by wads of salt eaten from a brown paper bag while walking home after a few pints in the local.

**Sports:** FOOTBALL. The real kind where they actually use their feet.

**Music:** AC/DC: can't wait for March in Osaka.

**Shop:** Electronics. I like gadgets, gizmos and those whatchamacallits.

**TV Show:** *House*

**Movie:** *Rush Hour 1, 2 & 3* (buddy cop movies are the best)

## RANDOM TRIVIA

**Most Proud Achievement:** Keeping real life at arms length.

**Best life experience:** Living and working in Australia.

**Motto to live by:** Work to live, don't live to work.

**I remember when...** I had just finished university and didn't have a clue what to do. Not

much has changed in 4 years.

**What are you drinking?** Cider, sweet rage-inducing cider.

**Who would you like to meet?** Sir Alex Ferguson

**Why should we elect you President of the World?** Sir Alex Ferguson

**Best thing about Japan so far?** My placement: both school and location.

**If it was my last day on earth I would...** meet my best friend and eat a load of junk food while watching *Rush Hours 1* through 3.

**Interesting Fact about me:** I'm a science teacher back home.

## TEACHING:

**My top tip for teaching:** Relax. If you make a mistake and the students spot it, feel good about it! It means they are listening.

**When the class is TOO QUIET I...** open the windows and let some of that good winter air in.

**Bribery for students.. YAY or NAY?** YAY all the way: as much as I'd like to believe they are self-motivated wonders they aren't. A few stamps and stickers here and there can mean the difference between passing and failing an exam through lack of participation.

**Funniest Story involving a student:** Pre-international day in Sanda. Two first year students come up and ask "Do you like one-piece?" I say "No." "Do you like skirt?" "No." They ask "What do foreigners like girls to wear?" "Eh.... Jeans." Two days later students turn up to International day wearing jeans. Commence *gaijin* husband-hunt.

## THE BASICS

**Name:** Emily Lemmon

**Please call me:** EmLem, Emily, Lems, Lemmon, whatever

**School and Location in Hyogo:** Ichinomiya Minami Chuugakko in Shiso (about an hour north of Himeji)

**How we know you:** I was the murder-maid at Himeji Halloween!

**Birthday:** 10/29/85

**Born and raised:** Cherokee County, Georgia

**Family:** Parents and younger brother (married) all still in Cherokee County. I have 31 cousins scattered across the US because my mom was one of 12 (Dutch Catholic, go figure), and my dad was one of 5.

**University and Degree:**

BA Classical Languages, Vanderbilt University

**Other jobs that you have had:** restaurant wench, substitute (Latin) teacher, RA for gifted high school students

**Travels:** Vienna (3 days), Spain (one week), Italy (3.5 months), lots of US road trips (Texas, Michigan, Kansas, Louisiana, DC, Vegas). Within Japan: Hiroshima/Miyajima, Kyoto, Tokyo (only a little), Fukui Dinosaur Museum, Osaka, Kobe, Himeji

**Hobbies:** Learning, reading, writing, poetry, flowers, martial arts, hiking, being in awe

**Staying another year?** Djes!

## FAVORITES

**(I hate picking favorites!)**

**Food:** Italian, or *satsuma imo*.

**Sports:** I lack all forms of physical coordination, but enjoy karate.

**Music:** Yes.

**TV Show:** *Scrubs*, *Glee* (yeah, I'm that kid)

**Movie:** *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* has to be top three.. I also love *Dragonheart*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Nausicaa*, *The Fountain*, and *Lord of the Rings*

## RANDOM TRIVIA

**Most Proud Achievement:** Giving a valedictory speech not approved by the office (as it was written at 6am graduation morning).

**Best life experience:** Swimming in the Ichetucknee River, marching in (well, with) the NYC St. Patrick's Day parade, karaoke with friends, and getting lost and crawling up the side of Mt. Misen on my hands and knees (in vain). I suggest everyone do it.

**Motto to live by:** No one is alone.

**I remember when...** *I could read.*

**What are you drinking?**

Depends on where I am. Currently. Water.

**Who would you like to meet?**

Thomas Jefferson, Jesus, the Dalai Lama, Remus Lupin

**Why should we elect you President of the World?**

Because I crave power! And

have a superior intellect.

**Best thing about Japan so far?** Well... Not winter. Probably the rivers and the important rocks. And the abundance of shrines and temples, and seeing life everywhere.

**If it was my last day on earth I would...** Demand that anyone who cares about me come and visit me this instant because it really is an emergency this time. I'd be pretty pissed off if it were a cold and cloudy day, too.

**Interesting Fact about me:** I moved to Kansas once, for love.

## TEACHING:

**My top tip for teaching:**

Be patient. You can't fix everything, and getting upset about that will not help anyone.

**When the class is TOO QUIET**

I... Laugh and ask them, "Really, guys?" Then I wave an Emi-dollar in the air and say "volunteeeers?"

**Bribery for students.. YAY or NAY?** Oh yes. Use your Emi-

dollars at the Emporium to get puzzles, dream catchers, pencils, and silly putty.

**Funniest Story involving a student:** (read it in full on page xx)







# HANA BI

BY J J CAPPA

**H**ANA-BI is the best Japanese movie ever made. Need proof? In 1997, it won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, one of the highest honors in the film industry. Need more? In 2005, it changed my life (which is also a pretty big deal).

Have you ever noticed that students quote the same joke (Toose!) over and over for months but eventually the joke (Ichi, ni, SAN!) mysteriously disappears? This occurs because Japanese comedians frequently fade into obscurity as quickly as they rose to popularity. The director and star of HANA-BI, however, is a rare exception in the unforgiving Japanese entertainment industry. He is legendary manzai comedian Beat Takeshi/Kitano Takeshi, a man worth becoming familiar with while living in Japan. His decades-long career has spanned nearly every artistic medium available, surviving through the occasional scandal and even a devastating motorcycle crash in 1994. HANA-BI is his greatest work of art.

HANA-BI is a story in two acts. The first half of the film explains why Detective Nishi (played by Kitano) is no longer a police officer nor mentally stable. In a single day, his best friend and partner is shot and paralyzed, he is informed that his wife will not recover from her leukemia and, worst of

all, he blames these problems on himself. Did I mention that before this he also lost a young daughter? And that yakuza are constantly hounding him about debts? “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.” However, you can only drink so much lemonade before it starts making you sick. And Nishi can only (brutally) beat up so many yakuza debt-collectors before it catches up to him.

The second act of HANA-BI focuses on the relationship between Nishi and his wife. Following advice from her doctor, Nishi takes his wife on vacation (with money he acquires by robbing a bank) so that she may enjoy what remaining time she has left. The trip serves as the last stand for their life together, eventually leading to the best ending I have ever seen in a movie. I am not exaggerating: the final moments of HANA-BI are so awesome that your heart might explode (that was an exaggeration).

Thanks to HANA-BI, the number one reason I love Japanese films is that I love the soundtracks. There is an indescribable “sound” that is unique to Japanese music, and not because it comes from a traditional instrument like the shamisen. No, the sound is a modern one; it is in the music that resonates on the streets in my imagination’s version of Akihabara and in many SEGA

games like Sonic the Hedgehog and Phantasy Star Online. This distinct sound gives the music a Japanese “feel” that never fails to draw a strong emotional response from me, whether it is in a game, a film or even just songs à la carte.

Composer Joe Hisaishi (who has also scored many Miyazaki Hayao films) created a soundtrack for HANA-BI that has that same powerful effect. HANA-BI is a serious drama, but there is ample violence in the film and there are moments that are very funny as well. The actors rarely speak and never wear their hearts on their sleeves; a recurring shot in HANA-BI is of Nishi staring directly at the camera without even the slightest hint of emotion in his face. Therefore, the action and the comedy threaten to steal the show. However, the focus never shifts away from the characters’ emotional experience thanks to Hisaishi, whose score makes their feelings something tangible. The long, disconcerting shots of

Nishi provide an opportunity to understand the character in a way his own words could never accurately express, while the hauntingly beautiful music will make the heavy weight on his heart feel as if it were on your own. Above all, the brilliant soundtrack is what brings me back to HANA-BI again and again.

HANA-BI is the best Japanese movie ever made and this review hardly does it justice. Sure, it was not directed by Ozu or Kurosawa nor can it be found on any “all-time greatest films” lists. As far as I am concerned, however, HANA-BI is the most important Japanese film I have ever seen. There is something special in the violence, the humor, the drama, and the soundtrack that ignited my passion for Japan and its culture; that passion eventually brought me here. Even if HANA-BI does not end up changing your life, it is a film that cannot be missed.

Thanks for watching! ●







## A Ramentary Diptych

BY ANDREW TAMASHIRO

This article is sort of a two-in-one. I visited Makoto Ramen in Himeji earlier this year, but found no good reason to write about it before. I guess it's time to start talking about ramen I actually don't like. The second part is a piece on weird kinds of ramen. You'll find some unusual stuff (there's ramen with ingredients like milk, yakiniku beef, even chocolate on Valentine's day). Obviously not all of them are good, but I want to discuss some of the better ones I've had recently.

### I Can't Handle Makoto!

Makoto Ramen is located in Himeji at 西中島387-5. The shop is pretty big, and has ample free parking. The store's interior is bright and welcoming, with an open kitchen sitting above the dining floor so you can see the cooks and they can see you, but you can't tell what they're doing. They've got a large menu, and my companion and I opted for different styles and an order of gyoza and fried rice. If you read this column regularly, by now you've noticed that I ALWAYS get fried rice/gyoza if

they have it. They're delicious and really good for filling you up if you aren't into drinking all the soup.

In all honesty, the less said about this mediocre *ramen-ya*, the better. I found nothing of particular value here, from absolutely middle-of-the-road *tonkotsu* broth; to soggy, overdone noodles; to tough, flavorless *chashu*. Perhaps I came on a bad day, but the fact that this place was featured in my *Ramen Walker* has caused me to doubt the authoritativeness of the creators' opinions.

### Weird Variations of Ramen

Recently I've had three rather interesting ramen varieties. All three are from my favorite ramen joint, Jaran, and all three have been delicious.

The first is cheese ramen. I had mozzarella cheese ramen once in Sapporo and that was fantastic, so I was excited when Ryohei told me about his cream cheese ramen. Cheese that melts well is a must for ramen, since it allows the stuff to seep into the soup and get pulled up with the noodles. This was

an example of their typical excellence, subtle but obvious in each bite, the creaminess of the cheese blending perfectly with slightly tough noodles, crunchy *negi*, and a heady pork broth. Fantastic.

The second is the Mega Rock 69 ramen, and this is one of those food challenges. It's a triple dose of noodles, about double the soup, and some sort of multiplier attached to the *chashu*. I opted for a red *togarashi* (spicy pepper) noodles with shredded onion set, a variety that had me blissfully slurping the entire way. It's a handful, but if you put it away, you get your picture on the wall. So far I think there's only 5 folks up there.

The third is green tea ramen. It's topped with *azuki* red beans and yogurt. If you're like me, this sounds like about as big of a mistake as is possible, but it's actually rather delicious. The green tea flavoring is extremely light and the yogurt is creamy and tart. I will say, however, that I found the *azuki* beans added nothing to the flavor of the soup, only offering an odd and frankly unwelcome texture. ●

## Kicchiri Kitchen: Squid & Broccoli Stir-fry

BY TRAVIS LOVE

Traditional Japanese "springtime" recipes range from steamed *sakura* and rape blossoms to mackerel preserved in *miso*, to various attempts at making bamboo shoots edible. Personally, I'd rather leave the bamboo shoots for the pandas. So in this month's issue, we'll take advantage of a year-round ingredient you may not regularly use: fresh squid! If, like me, you don't know how to clean your own squid, just buy some pre-cleaned. I strongly recommend fresh over frozen, though.

2 squid, cleaned and sliced (イカ)  
1 long leek, sliced at an angle (長ネギ)  
1 head broccoli  
1 clove garlic, smashed, but not chopped  
¼ inch (1cm) piece of peeled ginger  
2 Tbsp oil  
4 Tbsp soy sauce, plus 2 Tbsp water  
dash turmeric powder  
salt & sugar to taste  
4 people's worth of *soba* or *udon* noodles, cooked, drained, and rinsed with cold water

1. Peel the stem of the broccoli to remove the hard



skin. Cut off the florets, and cut them into large, even-sized pieces. Cut the stems thinner, because they will take longer to cook.

2. Heat a large fry pan or wok over high heat. Add the oil. Add the garlic and ginger, cook for about 10 seconds, and then remove and discard. This is just to infuse the oil, and trust me, it's worth it.
3. Place half the squid into the wok. Let it cook for a minute or so, then stir-fry until opaque. Remove and set aside, then add the other half and do the same thing.
4. Add a little more oil if you need it, then add the broccoli. Let the broccoli partially cook for a minute or two. Then add the soy sauce, water, and turmeric. Toss to coat the broccoli. Add the leek, and toss to coat. If the sauce is too thick, add some more water to thin it out.
5. Once the broccoli has started to soften, but is still green and slightly crunchy, add the squid back in, and add the *soba*.

Stir-fry everything for a minute or so, until things get nice and warm. Taste the sauce for salt / sugar, tweaking as desired. Then remove from heat, plate and serve.

6. Optional: Ignore the *soba*.

Serves 3-4.  
(To halve, use a normal leek, only one squid, and half a head of broccoli.)

And lastly today, a little tip from the housewife downstairs.

If you want *tofu* that's firmer for whatever reason – say, to substitute for meat in a stir-fry, or to give it a little more texture – press more moisture out of it in the microwave. Just take that block of bean curd, wrap it in a few layers of paper towel, and put it in a bowl. Then, put another bowl full of water on top of the tofu, and microwave the whole package for a couple minutes. You may need to change the paper towel if it's still too moist for your liking. ●

Questions? Comments?  
Suggestions for future dishes?  
Send them to Travis Love –  
dr.t.love at gmail.com