

May 2010

Conbini

**Better Know a Ken: Nagano
Photo Sensei**



from the Editors3-4

from the PR.....5

REGULAR FEATURES

Awaji Dispatch 6

Japanese Riddle of the Month...7

Maigo in Hyogo.....7

Book Discoveries.....8

Photography.....10

Love and Relationships.....12

Better Know a Ken: Nagano14

Travel Japan22

Getting to know Random JETs . 24

I Heart T-Points 24

Ramentary 26

Recipe: Madeleines.....27

English Sensei Spirit 28

FEATURES

Photo Sensei.....16

Conbini.....18

The Inside-Insiders..... 20

HYOGO TIMES STAFF

Editor: Matthew Stott

Design Editor:

Jaclyn Threadgill

Cover: Ryan Parker

Contributors:

Ryan Parker, Cheryl Dicello,

Jonathan Cooper, Paul

Schuble, Caitlin Orr, Hannah

Hunt, Lauren McRae, JayDee,

Rika Sawatsky, Whitney

Conti, Adam Schellenberg,

Raena Mina, Emma

Nicoletti, Eric Lord, James

Kath, JJ Cappa, Andrew

Tamashiro, Travis Love

All JETs in Hyogo are encouraged to send in articles, musings, poetry, prose and any ideas to improve the *Hyogo Times* for the betterment of the Hyogo JET community.

Submit by the 20th of each month to: publications@hyogo.ajet.net

http://hyogoajet.net/wiki/Hyogo_Times

We're also on Facebook!

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

BY MATTHEW STOTT



Uprooting your whole life and transplanting to foreign soil—even if only for a short time—can be a terrifying experience: no doubt about it. Fortunately, for inbound Hyogo JETs, there's always been a strong community of JETs here to welcome the stranger. And the *Hyogo Times* has been here (at least as far back as 2002, according to the archives): a guide to the perplexed on a myriad of things that are needful for the newbie to know. Where to eat, or what to cook for dinner—and how to do both cheaply. Where to travel during summer or winter or spring vacation; or where to attend that curious local festival that may, if you don't keep your feet, find you swept away amidst a herd of ululating, testosterone-charged men wearing nappies. How to date the Japanese, should you so desire (and who could blame you?). What to read, what to see, where to play. Ramen that rocks and ramen that sucks. We learn that there are actually good reasons to visit Awaji. And importantly, since this is more than an extended holiday and we all have a job to do, the Hyogo

Times has long been a medium for the *sempai* among us to share their best lesson plans and classroom ideas. I doubt there is a reader of the *Hyogo Times* who hasn't been moved or influenced on at least one occasion by at least one of our articles—to know that his or her experiences as a JET, whether inside our outside the classroom—is by no means singular.

JETs are, as you know, a self-selecting group: being smarter and more fantastic than the average bear is part of the job description (how else can they manage to keep a respectable proportion of the students in a given class awake for 50 minutes?). That excellence, naturally, is going to be reflected in the quality of material that is sent this magazine's way, in response to the humble but doubtless annoying supplications of the editor. And the best part of being the editor of the *Hyogo Times* has been this: I've been able to read the many wonderful pieces of writing we monthly receive... before anyone else!

For this I thank our team of regular writers, the lifeblood of the publication. I have always been greatly entertained by their work and most excited to give it a wider audience. I thank Jaclyn, and before her Jeff, and the design team for going to such pains (and enduring some pains, including the tardiness of the editor) to give the finished product a look that is both professional and stunning. (Chip—your covers are always worth the wait!) And of course I thank anyone who has ever responded to my persistent Facebook and email begging with an article or photograph. This publication receives a lot of praise, both online and on the street: that praise is rightly directed at all who have ever taken the time to contribute content to the *Hyogo Times*. It has been an honour to work with you all.

I'm going home in August, and I leave the *Hyogo Times* in the more-than-capable hands of our new Editor-in-chief, Esperanza Urbaez. Epi's been a regular contributor since coming to Hyogo, and shares my enthusiasm for this magazine. I must also welcome to the editorial staff Emily Lemmon, who will be assisting Epi, and Jonathan Shalfi, our new and inaugural Online Editor. Let's just say there are big things in store for the *Hyogo Times*, once but a community newsletter, a mere page or two in length. The best, indeed, is yet to come!

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy the May issue.

—Matt Stott

14

18

16

Dear Hyogo Times readers,

Thank you for being a Hyogo Times reader. I hope you have enjoyed what you have read thus far. As the new Editor-in-Chief I am hoping to do my part so that you may continue to revel in the dynamic content that we provide you every month. If the publication at any time is not up to par with the standard you have come to expect please let me know! If you have a brilliant idea that is a bout to burst in your mind please share it with our staff. You will feel great when you do. I guarantee it.

The Hyogo Times exists to help you in times of distress and confusion, encourage you to do your best here in Japan and life in general and to entertain you when you need to see the lighter side of things. It's like a good friend who is always there when you need one. It is almost like a party, a publication party. I am happy to be the leader in this conga line also known as the Hyogo Times.



Hello there, Hyogo!

As spring continues, I appreciate more and more the notion that the one trait a JET really needs is flexibility. Our JTEs changed, our desks changed, our students changed, and we lost internet access at work... BUT, things started

blooming and for the most part, it stopped snowing and freezing. By now, it's almost passably warm, and we're all getting used to the new way of things.

Surprise! Another change: your clever and faithful editor is stepping down (something about

To the readers who are currently also columnists and/or contributors, the design team, and the PR, thank you for volunteering your time and creativity. I look forward to working with you this year. To those who are returning home, your effort in making the publication what it is now has not gone unnoticed and is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Epi

"going back to Australia"? and some fresh little upstart newbies are attempting a takeover of his leadership shoes.

I, for one, am quite happy with this turn of events, since as the new Junior Editor (I just made that up, do you like it?), I get to do lots of the fun work and field less than half of the power. Plus, I get to work with my better half in the north of this expansive and glorious province, Epi Urbaez! Together we hope to bring you the excellent level of quality you've come to expect from the Hyogo Times.

So keep sending us your stuff, and we'll keep hassling you for submissions, and together we can make this a fruitful and productive struggle. And if this change feels like the last straw, and your nerves are beginning to unravel as it sinks in, take two deep breaths and grab your coping strategies! Change is all there is!

Fastidiously yours,
Emily Lemmon



BY GORAN SELETKOVIC

With August only a few months away, many of us are preparing to leave the land of the rising sun, and the positions of POWER (haha) within AJET have begun to shift: sometime between now and August the positions of BR's, PR's and PA's will have made the transition. Huh? What's all that actually mean? "Speak English" I hear you say. OK, I'll try to break it down into four major points of interest.

1 It means that you'll have a new BR (Block Representative). Sifton Anipare will be replacing Brandon Kramer as our National AJET Block representative at block6@ajet.net

2 It means that Andrew Brasher & Sarah Lewis will be replacing Kym Farrant & Goran Seletkovic as acting Hyogo AJET PRs (Prefectural Representatives) at pr@hyogo.ajet.net

3 It means that Chris Pearce will be relinquishing his position as senior Hyogo Prefectural Advisor and passing that responsibility to Hanna Starr at hyogo_pa@yahoo.com

4 And finally... it means that there is a bucket-load of positions still available to fill within the Hyogo AJET ranks! The following is a quick breakdown of what's available, but don't let this list restrain you. If you want to get involved in any other capacity, you're more than welcome! Just step up and run with it!

We're looking for:

- Organizers! - Any kind of event organizing is welcome (sports, arts, dance, trips, etc.). It really depends on what 'you' like to do. To give you a working example... Eric Lord is a baseball fanatic: it's his passion, so he often

does the baseball organizing (i.e. tickets for Hanshin Tigers games). That's the kind of organizing of events we're looking to move towards with the whole of AJET. Whatever you're interested in, run with it and invite the rest of us along to share your passion!

- People to assist the Editor, Writers, Designers and IT crew for the *Hyogo Times*! - Traditionally the *Hyogo Times* has been a monthly/bi-monthly PDF magazine, but we're trying to also take it online through the power of Wordpress, so that anyone and everyone who wants to be involved is more than welcome. We need writers for the content, photographers for the photos, spelling and grammar Nazis to assist the Editor-in-Chief with copyediting, Wordpress gurus to play with the background jiggery-pokery stuff and designers to make the website look cool (said gurus and designers would be working with the new Online Editor Jonathan Shalfi)... basically, anyone willing and able to help lead the *Hyogo Times* into a bright new future.

- Ads/Business Liaison! - We've been trying to get this project off the ground and connect with local businesses for a couple of years now, but unfortunately we haven't had anyone acting as a business liaison. Now's the perfect time for someone to step up and take the reins. This position would involve talking to the local business (any place that's of interest or frequented by JETs) and securing some kind of deal for JETs in the form of discounts, coupons, special events, etc. The idea is that JETs will frequent the businesses that treat us nice, and the businesses in turn will profit more from the extra clientele. All of the necessary advertising

infrastructure is in place to make this work; the only thing that's missing is 'drive', and that would be the role of the Ads/Business Liaison. You might especially do well in this position if you're outgoing and proficient in Japanese.

It's worth noting that we now legitimize all positions by providing professional contact email address at hyogo.ajet.net, and access to our Google Hosted on-line office. This means that you can spruce up your experience portfolios with legitimate contact information, so it'll look GREAT on your future resume!

Let us know at pr@hyogo.ajet.net if you're interested in any of the above (or something that wasn't mentioned) and please spread the word!

I find myself compelled to recite that old saying which I heard many a time during those first few months in Japan, so many moons ago. "You get out what you put in" I thought it was hogwash at the time, but now that I find myself in the sunset of my tenure on the JET Programme, I can say with absolute certainty that those words have rung true for me throughout my stay in Hyogo and my involvement with the Hyogo community. It's been a blast and a half the entire way. Ah-BOOYAH!!, if you will. But like any good party, it has to end. It's time to put the booyah-buck down and let someone else pick it up.

All I can say is: follow your passions and get yourself involved and you'll soon find your passions following you.

-Goran Seletkovic
Prefectural Representative
2009/10
pr@hyogo.ajet.net

May's Reason Awaji Kicks Ass:



Stuff. From time immemorial man has been consumed with a burning desire for stuff. Stuff at cut-rate prices. We have built empires in the never ending quest for stuff. We have constructed great memorials to stuff out of stuff where stuff bearing the likeness of the very stuff-monument is bought and sold. Junk. Crap. Clutter. A wise man once spoke out on the importance of the Earth, arguing that 'that's where I keep all my stuff!' Another, somewhat less wise man said 'ambition should be made of sterner stuff.' Now I'm no scholar, and therefore I take that to mean Caesar's ambition was for more stuff. Sterner stuff.

Being human I too am afflicted with the stuff bug. Show me a sale and I'll show you my credit card. Make me a deal and I'll make you breakfast. Don't think I haven't thought of stealing Tsuna's world famous gold brick so I could exchange it on the black market for great piles of stuff. Man... I like stuff.

Take today for example. Just bought a super sick old boom-box. Cherry-red like a Corvette in a movie from the early 90's. Two

tape decks, built-in mic, *it even picks up TV audio signals!* How much was it, you ask? 1000 yen. That's it! Where you may ask can one find such deals? Well I'll let you in on a little secret... I got it from the junk shop by my house...

Picture, if you will, your weird hermit great aunt's garage. Stuff sitting in huge piles. Stuff bought ages ago and never taken out of the box. And she'll sell you this stuff at absurdly low prices. Because you are family. And she loves you. That's what my junk shop is like. It is owned (I believe) by a really, really old lady who is always sitting in the middle of all this junk watching TV. But don't ask her for help because she can't hear you, and even if she could she can't price any of the un-priced treasure that surrounds you! For that you need her son, also quite old himself. But half the time he isn't there. It's like going to the regular stuff store and being told nothing is being sold today because nobody is manning the register.

But that quaintness is half the charm! If you want to see the stuff in the back they have to

turn on the lights for you! Let me stress this point: *even when the store is open they don't turn on all the lights!* Presumably to cut down on utility charges. I've been to this shop dozens of times and I haven't even been close to the bottom of their piles of crap! Pornographic playing cards, old broken binoculars, erasers from the early 80's (still wrapped!), a green walled scummy fish-tank in the corner with living fish in it, what *don't* they have!

Have I gotten your attention? With all this stuff and the more than affordable prices it is sold at? You'd be crazy *not* to buy this stuff! I'll bet you are ready to hop in your car to a train to a ferry to Awaji right now! Well here's the problem: remember I told you before about how I'm human? Well, I've got the whole suite of classic human traits, including callous selfishness. If I told you where this shop is you might come and buy stuff I want to buy. I'm not saying I don't want you to have stuff, I'm just saying I don't want you to have stuff I want if it prevents me from having said stuff. I never claimed to be a saint. My goal has been simply to incite jealousy. In two ways. First of all, for not living on Awaji (unless you do), and second, for not having access to the stuff I have access to (which you don't).

It's a story that plays out time and time again, on the small stage and on the global Broadway. I'm a lioness protecting my kill from your encroaching hyenas. I'm the Second Polish Republic to your interwar Germany, I'll be damned if you get Upper Silesia. I'm a wily prospector protecting my prized panning patch. I've surveyed and staked my claim. History marches on. Get over it.

*like petals falling
the years rush by so swiftly
so I buy some stuff* ●

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

Japanese Riddle of the Month

BY PAUL SCHUBLE

So you're trying to learn Japanese, huh? Or maybe trying to impress that cute waitress who works at the bar you sometimes visit? Have I got just the thing for you. Some time ago I realized that in order to better retain the Japanese I was studying, I needed a context - a situation, a memory, or an object to anchor these random words and sayings to my mind. It was around that time that I heard my first Japanese *だじゃれ* (*dajare*, pun). Now I've never been a huge pun guy, but there's something...I dunno, different about *だじゃれ*, something special. So I got into *だじゃれ*. One thing led

to another and I was on to the hard stuff - *なぞなぞ* (*nazon-azo*, riddles). Do I regret it? Sometimes, late at night...

Once you come to terms with your addiction, though, you can finally realize how awesome it is. Learning Japanese puns and riddles is not only a great way to remember new vocabulary, but it provides you with a useful tool for breaking the ice or proving how truly amazing your Japanese is. You may elicit a few groans, but many will be impressed that you're interested enough in their culture to learn some crappy jokes. And so it is with great pleasure that I pledge to endeavor from here on out to get you

hooked, and to henceforth help you get your fix with some monthly J-word play. Hope you enjoy!

お父さんの嫌いな果物は何でしょうか?
(おとうさんのきらいなくだものはなんでしょうか?)

パパイヤ (papaya)
パパ = Papa, and いや = unpleasant or undesirable ●

Paul Schuble blogs at <http://jadij.blogspot.com/>.

MAIGO IN HYOGO

Where in Hyogo can these fine fellows be found? Post your answers on the discussion board on the Hyogo Times Facebook Group page.

"Maigo in Hyogo" needs your photos! Send them to publications@hyogo.ajet.net, and type "Maigo in Hyogo" in the subject line.

Last months solution: The jacket belongs to Goran Seletkovic. The picture was taken at Ayabeyama. Both were correctly answered by Eric Lord and Cassie Thoo.



Geraldine Brooks

This month's book review will be more of an author tour-de-force. I want to talk about one of my newly favorite writers, Geraldine Brooks. Recently heralded into my "favorite authors" collection, I have read three of her books since coming to Japan and rejoiced in each of them. Her talent for storytelling (and re-telling) is truly phenomenal – a gift you have to read to truly understand.

I have planned to do a quick overview of each novel and I hope you can take your pick of them if you are looking for something to read and delight in. I wrote the reviews in the order which I read them, though they are in the reverse order of their publishing dates. * I have yet to read *A Year of Wonders* (2001) a story about The Plague, but I will be adding that to my book list soon so I can feel like a verified Brooks Fan.

1. *People of the Book* (2008)

Brook's latest novel follows the history of an eminent religious text known as the Sarajevo Haggadah. Hanna Heath, our main narrator, is a book conservationist brought in to restore the book before it is put on display in a museum. During her work, Hanna begins to wonder about the book's missing clasps, a butterfly

wing, and some mysterious red stains she finds within its pages. Her questions ignite a chain of events that propel both books forward (*People of the Book* and the *Sarajevo Haggadah*).

This novel is a wonderful example of how powerful historical fiction can be in giving life to our imagination about the past. I had not known much about the existing Sarajevo Haggadah, only that it was a mysterious book complete with illustrations correlating with the Jewish tradition of Passover. I appreciated knowing it was an actual book that has survived destruction countless times, seemingly to have a will of its own to survive, as it gave me my own sense of wonderment before starting to read this novel. Brook provides her own answers to the questions surrounding this artifact, pulling us along with her and through the Haggadah's history on very fulfilling journey. If you want something with a touch of mystery and resolve then this is your book.

2. *March* (winner of the 2006 Pulitzer Prize)

If you have any connection with *Little Women* or Louisa May Alcott, then this is a must-read by all accounts. *March* is a novel weaving us into the life of Mr. March, the absent father

of our beloved *Little Women*. As a pacifist and chaplain, Mr. March is torn about the choice to participate in the Civil War or to stay behind with his family. He ultimately chooses to leave home and attempt to assist the wounded soldiers. Up until Brook's book, all we know about Mr. March is what he reveals in the letters he writes to his wife and children while he is away. In the novel, we discover the secrets he has withheld and the burden of guilt that he carries with him daily. Our insight into the struggles of Mr. March, really humanize this man as a father, a husband, and a soldier.

I was nervous going into this book as I brought with me a great respect for *Little Women* and a love for Alcott, but my fears were quickly put to rest. Brook's research and regard for this character made the novel very accessible – my resistance was short lived and extinguished within the first few pages.

As a reader, I was impressed by the extent of the parallels between Mr. March and Louisa May Alcott's own father, Amos Bronson Alcott. I got chills after I put this book down and began to read about the life of Mr. Alcott himself. It's delightful to notice direct influences that helped Brooks bring this formerly ambiguous character to life within the world of Alcott's history. This book was truly magnificent.

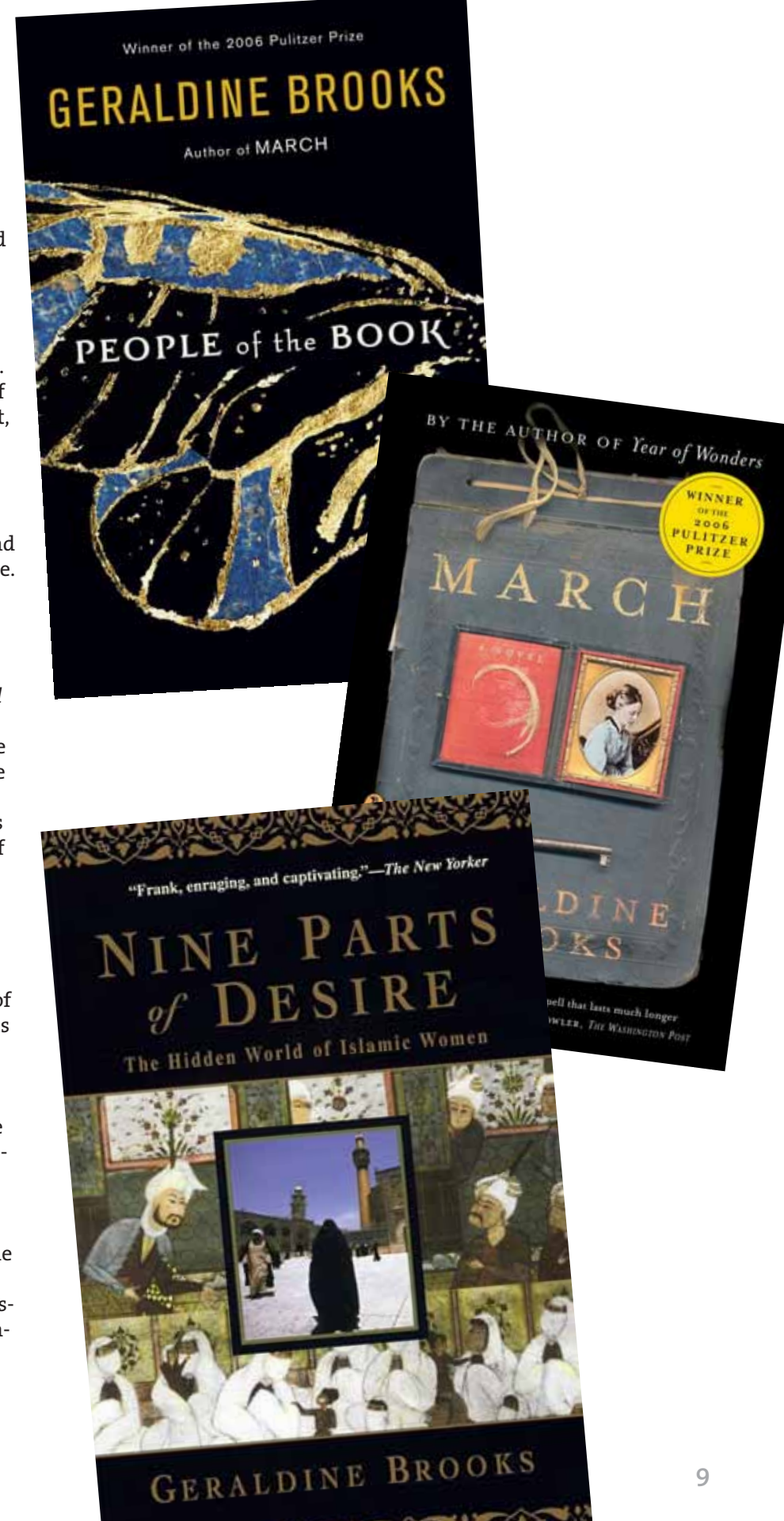
3. *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Muslim Women* (1994)

While over ten years old, I still found Brook's insight into the world of Muslim women completely compelling. I was curious

to find myself still asking many of the same questions she did, even over a decade later. This book was written with a kind of humility that is very hard to find in non-fiction today. It felt as though it was written as a kind of testimony to cultural differences and as an appreciation to the women that mark her pages. She writes first hand accounts of women's lives in the Middle East, often allowing the audience to come to his or her own conclusions about what they just read. The daily lives of these women become, at times, enchanting and at other times quite unbelievable.

This was actually Geraldine Brook's first book. She spent many years of her life as a journalist for *The Wall Street Journal* covering wars and crisis's in Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East. While she was living in the Middle East, she found herself unable to ask men the questions she wanted to due to a variety of reasons, most importantly, her gender. Instead of surrendering her work and settling for what little she could muster from the men she was questioning, she decided to switch the direction of her questions. She began to focus on the one area she *could* get intimate with: the women. Her extensive studies and questioning would later help her to write this book, documenting the true-life stories of the women Brook interviewed.

I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in resurfacing the near past and who have questions about women and femininity within the Middle East. You may wind up being very surprised with what you read. ●





Memories of Spring

Photos by Hannah Hunt and Lauren McRae



Single Sub Rosa: If men are from Mars, then Japanese men are from Pluto* (part one of two)

BY JAYDEE

* Disclaimer: I know in my previous article I said that the whole 'Men are from Mars' malarkey was shit, I just thought this title was snazzy. And yes, I did just say snazzy.

Warning: Gigantic generalizations and heavy bias ahead.

Foreign guys have it a lot easier when it comes to dating in Japan than foreign girls. A strong statement I know, but I thought we should start this off with a bang. Think about it. Consider the foreigners you hang out with, or even just the foreigners you know living in Japan; what is the ratio of Japanese girl/foreign guy couples to foreign girl/Japanese guy couples? Chances are there is a considerably higher number of *gaijin* guys dating Japanese girls than there are *gaijin* girls dating Japanese guys within your social circle. Why is this? Why are foreign guys so successful in dating Japanese people, while foreign girls are seriously lagging behind. Today I'm going to tell you why I think *gaijin* guys are ahead of the game and in turn, the reason why *gaijin* girls are somewhat falling short.

It is a widely known fact throughout foreign communities across Japan that *gaijin* guys

have it easy when it comes to pulling Japanese girls. That's not to say that nabbing a Japanese girl doesn't have its challenges. It's just that compared to foreign girls *gaijin* guys seem to pull with relative ease. And not just pull but pull well. Now, before I offend any of the male readers, I am in no way implying that the only reason why you have that cute Japanese girlfriend hanging off your arm is because you are foreign. Many of my male friends here have Japanese girlfriends and they are all really great guys. But let's be honest here. I bet all of you can think of at least one male foreigner you know that would be considered 'less than desirable' back in his home country, only to arrive in Japan and gain almost instant Brad-Pitt-like status.

I have many theories as to why this phenomenon may be prevalent. The first is the obvious novelty factor. This is especially the case if you live in a rural area, where foreigners are few and far between. Being foreign gets you instant attention (some of it unwanted) which is ultimately the first step in gaining someone's interest. But, then again *gaijin* girls are just as much a novelty as *gaijin* guys, so this concept doesn't go very far in explaining the vast difference in the male/female dating success rate.

My second theory is that *gaijin* guys tend to treat their girlfriends better than Japanese guys. This is of course a massive sweeping generalization, but in my observations many Japanese guys are far from affectionate and are still operating under that 'women belong in the kitchen' notion. Most *gaijin* guys have no issues with being openly affectionate with their girlfriends, and treat them as the equals they are. Japanese girls are then drawn to guys who will treat them well and respect them.

My third and final theory, and probably the most relevant, is the idea that Japanese men are becoming more and more 'herbivorous'. About a year ago I read an article on the 'Japan Times' website titled *Blurring the Boundaries*. This article described a new type of male emerging in Japanese society with such defining characteristics as a lack of competitiveness, being extremely fashion and weight conscious, and basically being mummy's boys. But the characteristic that stuck out for me the most was that this new generation of 'herbivores' "are not interested in dating girls, having relationships, or even having sex". This is dire news for the women of Japan, both foreign and Japanese, as well as the issue of Japan's aging population. And if Japanese women are struggling to get guys' attention, without the added complications of language and cultural barriers, then what chance do us *gaijin* girls have?! In a nutshell, we're screwed. Or are we? ●

AI-GO: Japan in the Service of Eros

PICKING UP, JAPANESE-STYLE

[Editor's note: Spring is in the air (no, really, it is), and this month we have a bounty of advice and wisdom for those seeking rabu-rabu with the locals. Gambare!]

BY RIKA SAWATSKY

I overhear foreigners make generalizations about Japanese culture all the time, and I often wonder if these "experts" know what it takes to pick up a Japanese person. I certainly don't, and I'm a hafu. The closest I've gotten to a Japanese guy is nibbling a middle-aged gym teacher's ear at the recent kansougeikai in front of the new principal, and I don't even remember it. Thus started my investigation into the topic of this month's column—picking up, Japanese-style.

After speaking with some men and women ranging in age from 23 to 50 years in good old bucolic Yashiro, it seemed as if we foreigners have it pretty good. They think we're all beautiful! But, how does a *gaijin* wield his beauty to disarm his Japanese target and land himself a date? My incredulity regarding our collective sexiness prompted further explanation from my survey participants as follows. (This article does not represent the thoughts of all Japanese people. And, unfortunately, the

only perceptions these participants had of foreigners were heterosexual, white, and American, which significantly detract from the relevance of this article.)

Gaijin men differ from Japanese men in many ways. Women (likely unfairly) label the latter as weak, undependable, self-centered and unfaithful oedipal maniacs who only care about getting themselves off. The *gaijin* man, on the other hand, is hot, chivalrous, kind and good in bed. The Japanese woman can show him off to her friends and score free English lessons to boot. Moreover, the couple's inability to communicate effectively results in fewer arguments. What women find most appealing about a foreigner, however, is his ability to express his feelings. So, guys, if you can utter that magic word, *suki*, you'll likely get yourself a girl. Bonus points for those who can perfect the art of imperfect Japanese. Struggling to communicate is charming.

As for foreign women, Japanese men perceive their hour-glass figures with long legs and high-bridged noses to be sexy. And, the simple combination of a miniskirt and a wink will seduce just about any Japanese guy. *Gaijin* women also seem more friendly, outgoing, clear, honest, and easy to talk to.

Unfortunately for us foreign women, our appeal purportedly ends there. Whereas Japanese women had few concerns about dating foreigners (whether to use Japanese or English in bed and their reluctance towards PDA), the list of foreign women's donbiki (repelling) characteristics extends much further. Ironically, the trait that Japanese women find so attractive in foreign men (openness) is what Japanese men find intimidating about foreign women. Japanese men are used to demure partners and could therefore interpret foreign women's straightforward-

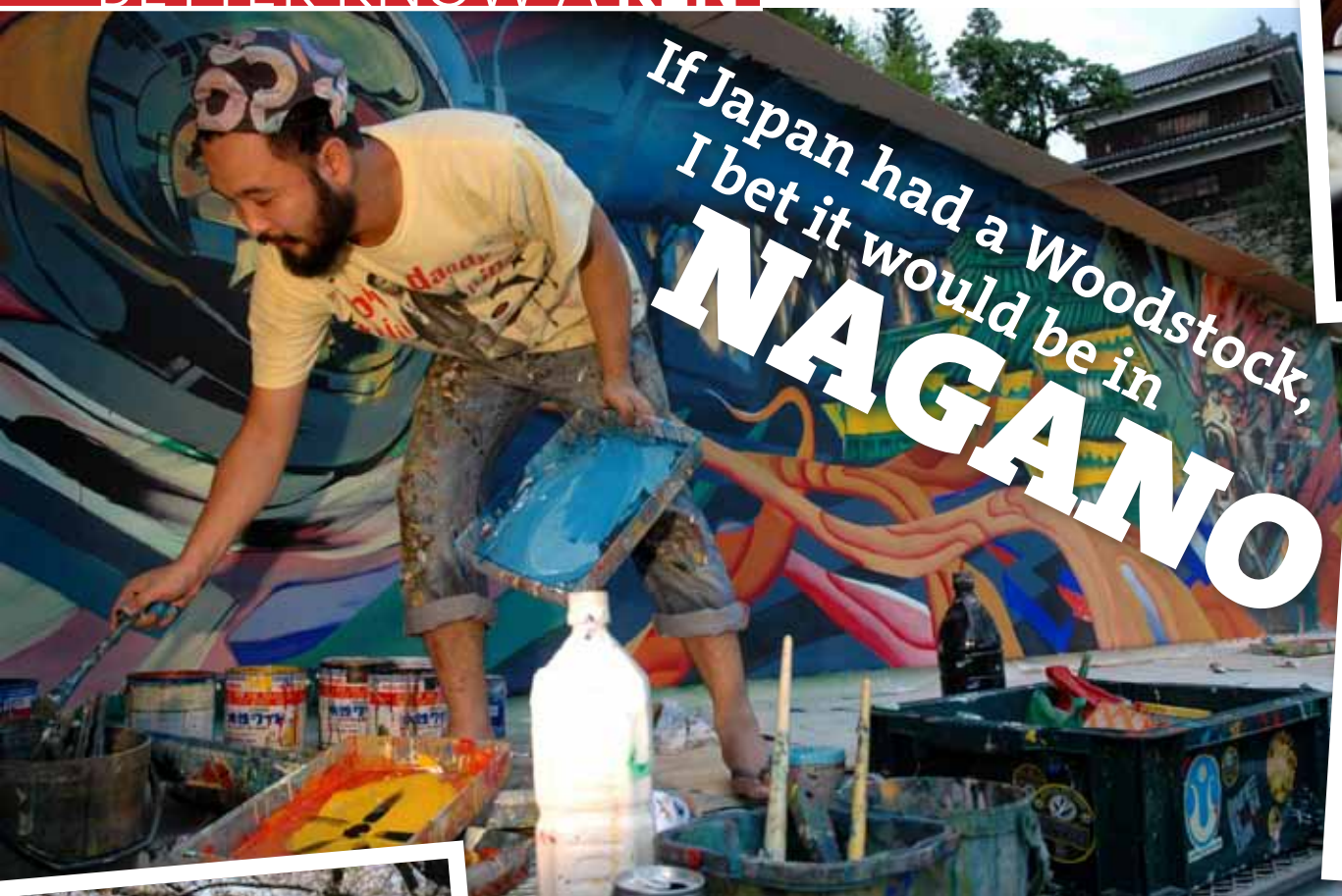
ness as recalcitrant and downright scary. In this vein, sex with a foreign woman would likely be too aggressive and not enjoyable (although Japanese men are still curious to try it out). And, if a woman asks a Japanese guy out too soon, she could be trying to recruit him to the latest shinkoushyuukyou cult. Japanese men also fear the wrath of a foreign woman scorned, post-breakup. But, some men simply lack the confidence to approach the foreign girls they like, putting the ball in the girls' court. Others are just not interested, period. However, under the right circumstances and timing, a foreign girl could supposedly get any Japanese guy she wanted if she does the chasing.

So, for those guys who want to pick up a Japanese girl, be confident, nice, outgoing, feign ineloquence, and flatter her. Girls, flaunt your figure and chase after the guy you want. Just don't be too hasty.

As for myself, I was hoping for a more didactic interview with my survey participants but got the question, *jyubunn moterunchau-no?* instead. My answer—*zenn-zenn*. So, back to the ossans of Yashiro in the meantime!

Next month: What it's like to date a member of the Yakuza. ●

Do you have any questions you want addressed regarding love & relationships with Japanese people? Send them to rika.sawatsky@gmail.com to have them answered by Japanese people in next month's column.



BY WHITNEY CONTI

Nagano is the kind of *inaka*, country side, which attracts artists, alpinists, and a culture based around local food and landscape. However, the prefecture's English tourism information is limited and often too general. The result, when it's not ski season, is many tourists wandering around Nagano city's Zenkoji temple wondering how to access this illustrious outdoors and culture from the heart of an altogether so-so city.

Because the prefecture can take over 6 hours to span by train, the best way to approach Nagano is by region and day trips. Below is a flash summary of Nagano's best areas for contemporary art, hiking, forests, ninjas, alps, jazz, Edo architecture, Tokyo-centric outlet shopping, and even Japan's largest wasabi farm.

North : Ninjas, shrines, *soba*, and cedar-lined trails & forest reserve...

Togakushi

North : Wild monkeys relaxing in natural hot springs (small hike in)...

Jigokudani

North : Hokusai woodblock prints, cobbled streets, wine, galleries...

Obuse

North : Zenkoji temple, painter Higashiyama Kai, best jazz bars...

Nagano City

Central : Castle, shops, modern artist Yayoi Kusama, Nag's best city...

Matsumoto

Central : Wasabi Farm, glass blowing, galleries, *soba* making, hiking...

Azumino

Central S: Mountains, camping, trails...**Kamikochi Natl. Park**

Central E: Most ski mountains, summer mountain biking: **Hakuba**
Central W: outlet shops, Tokyo-ites, outdoors, Yoko/John's Getaway...

Karuizawa

South : walk/hike between Tsumago and Magome Edo period postal towns...**Kiso Valley**

Best Summer Festivals:

Art: May 29-30 **Matsumoto Craft Fair**: One of Japan's biggest craft fairs.

Music : August **Ueda Joint** : Ueda Castle. Live art, music, skateboarding, food.

Dance: August **Matsumoto Bon Bon**: 3 hours of dancing through the city.

Most of the areas and trips highlighted above are best accessed by car, though there is public transportation. Without



a car, however, the best all-in-one play area of the Alps and Nagano culture is Matsumoto city and the surrounding Azumino, Kamikochi area.

Matsumoto City, Azumino Country side, & Kamikochi Alps

Matsumoto City:

Matsumoto is a small, stylish city packed with book shops, university students, cafes, sweets, and historic landmarks like Matsumoto Castle. The best area for strolling is *Nawate Doori*, nicknamed "frog street" for the large frog statue beaoning the narrow street entrance. The pedestrian-only walkway is a collection of Japanese knick-knacks, antiques, and food stands especially popular for *taiyaki* (fish-shaped pastries) and *sembe* crackers. For foreign food cravings, Bakery Street Café has the only

Reuben sandwich in Nagano-ken.

For arts, Matsumoto is the hometown of controversial artist Yayoi Kusama, famed for her influential role in New York City's 1960s art world and pop art movement. As the centerpiece of the Matsumoto Museum of Contemporary Art, there is an entire floor dedicated to Kusama's pattern-centric, phallic-covered works. To find the museum entrance, just find Kusama's two-story polka-dotted courtyard installation.

Azumino Valley:

From Matsumoto, sampling Nagano outdoors and local culture is only a half-hour train ride away at JR Hotaka Station. From the station, which is the heart of Azumino, there are inexpensive bike rentals to explore the Alps entrenched valley known for its glass blowing studios and galleries. However, accessing the nooks, crannies, and organic farms and cafes of Azumino can really only be done by car (or taxi).

By bike from Hotaka station, you can cruise to Hotaka shrine's in-house bakery, Tokoji temple's giant orange *geta*, *soba* houses, and Hotaka's most popular attraction, the Daoi Wasabi Farm. As Japan's largest wasabi farm, Daoi has wasabi chocolate, beer, mayonnaise, and soft serve ice cream. From Hotaka Station to the wasabi farm, you also pass by KonaKona *soba* house. If you don't have time to make your own *soba* buckwheat noodles at this half work shop/ half restaurant, KonaKona's *tempura*, Japanese pickles,

and house *soba* are always fresh, local, and delicious.

For a short hike, particularly during cherry blossom season, the Sakura Trail of Azumino's Mt. Hikarijyouyama is easy and offers views of the entire valley and Alps range. For information and access to all of the above, just stop into the tourism info center next to Hotaka Station.

Kamikochi National Park

If your main interest in Nagano is hiking or the outdoors, you may as well go straight to the longer hikes and backpacking trips of Kamikochi National Park (上高地), Nagano's Japanese tourist epi-center for good reason. Day hikes and backpacking trails are well-kept, but can be extremely crowded during peak season or the weekend. Access from Matsumoto is easy because private cars are not allowed.

Nagano is not a metropolis, but it is a vibrant confluence of outdoors, local culture, and arts. If you have limited time to visit the prefecture, plan ahead a little because to access some of Nagano's most unique features can take transport time after you get into the *ken*. For more information on Nagano, visit the Nagano guide at www.yomoyamamagazine.com or the new prefectural website English website: <http://www.go-nagano.net/>. Or contact Nagano JETs!

[Ed: Whitney Conti is a Nagano JET and the editor of Yomoyama Magazine] ●



Photo Sensei

LESSON ONE: CHOOSING YOUR CAMERA

BY ADAM SCHELLENBERG

Is your photography like a delicious bean filling on your tongue, or like a Pocky stick stabbed into your eye? If it's of the Pocky variety, maybe you're just using the wrong camera for the right job.

Choosing a camera is a lot like choosing a *katana*. Do you get something showy to impress your guests, something long to kill poisonous *mukade* centipedes, or something small and sharp for personal use in case you embarrass your family or company? There is no one correct answer, just as there is no one do-it-all camera, but there are good choices and WTF choices. What camera is right for you? It totally depends on your photographic goals. Let's explore . . . Together!

Beginner/Entry Level Amateur

If your goal is to take cell

phone pictures so you can show your friends how cute the doggy was, you probably fall into this category. Even the most non-technical among us have likely taken hundreds of photos over their lifetime and have some idea of how to frame a shot and push a button, and hence, some cell phone photography can turn out pretty *daijoubu*. Photographer Chase Jarvis published an entire book of photos he made on his iPhone, his motto being, "the best camera you own is the one that's with you." That's true, and if a cell phone is all you'll be using, I recommend a 3G or later iPhone, as it's super simple and the apps available for the phone can greatly and easily improve your photography.

Recommended Cameras: iPhone 3G or newer (PRO-TIP: wait until June for the iPhone 4G).

Amateur Photographer

When you've decided a cell phone camera isn't enough, your next step is the compact point and shoot. Compact cameras have improved substantially in the Heisei era and can produce smooth, saturated images only achievable on DSLRs just five years ago. Compact cameras excel in their mobility, functionality, and Facebook friendliness. If you want something that's simple, able to get those *izakaya* shots, yet still able to capture that *combini*, *sakura*, or drunken salaryman, this is the choice for you. Photographers who want more camera than a compact are making a conscious effort to improve their craft beyond the ordinary.

Recommended Cameras: Cheaper: Canon PowerShot SD940 IS. Pricier: Canon Powershot S90.

Advanced Amateur/Hobbyist

The old people with the massive cameras at the festivals - they belong to this club. If you want striking images, get the right tool to make them. You're ready for a DSLR: a digital single lens reflex camera. DSLRs provide photographers with the maximum amount of picture controls as possible. The community of DSLR owners has grown substantially in the last number of years, and there is plenty of new and used gear to be had. Don't be fooled into buying a hybrid compact point and shoot, your DSLR should come with a fully removable lens, or two if you're lucky. Keep in mind digital technology moves Shinkansen-fast, and even the higher end DSLRs of just a few years ago don't compete in terms of image quality with the entry

level DSLRs of today. For your best bet, plan on buying a Nikon or Canon DSLR; you won't find a pro using anything else. Budget between ¥50,000 to ¥1,600,00 for a new DSLR, and if your budget allows, try to give yourself a little room to grow.

Recommended Cameras:

Entry Level DSLRs: Nikon D5000 or D90, Canon T1i or T2i (Kiss X3, Kiss X4).

Prosumer (Professional/Consumer): Nikon D300s or D700, Canon 7D or 5D Mark 2

Remember this above all else: it's not the gear that makes the photo, it's the photographer. Good tools make the job easier, and some low-level cameras have dramatic limitations, but a good photographer can make a stellar photo with almost any camera they hold. The important thing is the get a camera of some sort in your hands, go out and start taking pictures that make the Emperor proud.

Bonus – PROTIPS:

1. Don't buy the extended warranty - buy a good case for your camera.
2. Don't buy your DSLR from Yodobashi Camera - for the best price try bhphoto.com/adorama.com
3. Try to get lenses that say

VR or IS—these lenses make handheld shots much sharper.

4. Make your first lens a 50mil F1.8—this lens is incredible for the price (You'll be amazed).
5. Pentax, Olympus, and Sony sell far fewer cameras than do Nikon and Canon. ●

Send your photo questions tagged with Photo Q&A to: adamjacobphoto@gmail.com





CONBINI

{ for FAST, EFFECTIVE,
CRAVE-INDUCED RELIEF }

BY RAENA MINA

I'm sure, as for most other *gaijin*, it is hard not to notice the impeccable efficiency of Japanese customer service. Sure I sometimes can get annoyed with the nasal-high-pitch-in-succession chain reaction "*irashaimase*" and "*gorankudasai*" in retail stores and the super fast mouthful speeches at the checkout counter; but I don't think anyone masters customer service like the Japanese, particularly when serving food. At a restaurant, the efficient "ping pong" button literally brings your food with a push of a button. The food never takes long to be served, even at sit-down restaurants: I guess

serving people's dishes as they are ready and not all at once is one reason, but that's another article altogether.

This brings me to a discussion I had recently, when dining at a local *inaka izakaya* with some Japanese friends. A conversation of Japanese food and Western differences brought about the topic that most *gaijin* are amazed at when first coming to the Land of the Rising Sun: *jidohanbaiki* (vending machines) and *conbini*! Don't deny it. I know despite the higher prices, we *gaijin* love what Japanese *conbini* have to offer. Now I've travelled to quite a few places, and seen my share of convenience stores, but

am I wrong in saying that Japanese *conbini* are the best? And is it really just Japan that offers the hot drink vending machines? I was so surprised the first time I learned you could get hot coffee or tea, and even hot corn soup from a vending machine, that if I was Japanese I would probably have let out a "ehhhhhhhhhhhh, sssugggoiinaaaaaa!" They have ice-cream vending machines, ones for vitamin drinks, and of course we cannot leave out the all-time favorite: sake/beer and cigarette vending machines, often a dozen of them lined up in a row offering a wide selection for your perusing pleasure. Maybe some of you

even had the chance to see a battery vending machine, ramen vending machine, and we all wonder about the "Fact or Fiction: Used panties" vending machine. After some net surfing, I found Japan has the highest number of vending machines per capita: one for every 23 people. I'm not surprised. Even in the *inaka* you can find a vending machine corner amongst the rice fields. Seems "so Japanese," and yet I'm sure that the low crime rate and low vandalism help to maintain the vending machine culture.

Despite my love for vending machines, the true apple of my affection is the *conbini*. Seven Eleven, Lawsons, Family Mart, Sunkus, Daily Yamazaki and Circle K all offer a selection of products, that although higher in price, cannot be found at the local "supa" which adds to the *conbini* novelty. In Japan tastes and flavors all change with the season, and it's exciting to see the new flavor of the month for Kit Kat, Calpis, Pocky, café lattes and gum. The constant changing of flavors and new products keep us coming back to the *conbini* for more. I can probably stay at a *conbini* 30 minutes no problem, just checking out the new products. Aside from paying your bills at a *conbini*, and buying concert tickets, there are even specialty *conbini* like Natural Lawsons, for the organic health-conscious, and

Lawsons 100, where you can buy produce and grocery items at low low prices. In Japan, *conbini* are never more than a stone's throw away, yet I'm sure we all have our personal faves. Because, let's face it: not all *conbini* offer the same products. I hope I'm not the only one who has been craving for a certain coffee drink or snack, only to be disappointed that "nani nani" *conbini* doesn't carry it. I asked my Japanese friends which *conbini* was their favorite and of course they said: "it depends what you want." They all swore that for bread, Seven Eleven takes it. I actually agree: when it comes to food, like the fried goods, *oden*, *onigiri* and *bento*, which of course they warm up for you, there is often more in amount and in selection at Seven. Seven also takes the cake for hard liquor in my opinion. One woman was

talking about her favorite and rare ice creams she used to eat when she was at university. Having checked it out for myself, I can also say Daily Yamazaki has a better selection of ice cream. Personally, I like the wide selection of iced café lattes and yogurt drinks that Family Mart offers. Many of you are sure to have your favorites as well. But of course it all depends on location as well as what time you go. Thanks to the sheer amount of *conbini*, if you can't find what you want in one, there's always the competitor across the street, or the same one 2 minutes away. After living in Japan we seem to have become spoiled by the *conbini* culture so much that it has completely changed the meaning of *convenience*, something maybe we will all miss once we return to the Western World. ●



Inside JET: *The Inside-Insiders*



[Editor's note: This is the second in a three-part series. The final instalment will appear in a future issue of the Hyogo Times.]

BY EMMA NICOLETTI
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYAN PARKER

The inside-insider.
An inside-insider is the exact opposite of the outside-outsider.

That is to say, an inside-insider is a person who knows the spoken and unspoken rules of the culture they live in. They know the best thing to say, the best gifts to give, the best way to act in the office, or on a date, or on the train. They know the best restaurants, and the best way to get there. They know what is cool and what is not. Of course some inside-insiders

slavishly follow and protect these rules, while others break or bend them. However, the important point is that the inside-insider knows the rules.

Tea ceremony club: The case of observing inside-insiders.

Yuka's English was amazing. She had gone to Perth for two weeks over the summer holidays on an exchange program and returned with a keen desire to master English conversation. We already met several times a week at OC2 class and at ESS club, but these encounters centered upon me telling Yuka and the other students about Australian culture. Yuka considered this a little one-sided, and wanted the chance to help me learn about a Japanese cultural tradition, so she invited me to attend tea ceremony club with her.

Sitting on the *tatami* uncomfortably perched on my knees, I watched the tea ceremony members' esoteric rituals: they dragged themselves across the floor with their knuckles, they moved from *seiza* to standing with balance and poise managed by some trick of the foot hidden under their billowing skirts; they twisted and folded various cloths and moved them in set patterns over the many tea making tools. They helped and corrected each other when they forgot a move in their delicate dance, and skilfully accomplished innumerable feats that were a complete mystery to me. I looked on in silent fear of being asked to participate directly. The dance was difficult, the teacher looked quite strict, and where was Yuka?

After 30 minutes, the teacher handed me a silky red cloth with one instruction, "fold." Terrified, I followed her moves carefully, but I kept missing some crucial point, and no matter how much I tried, nor how much she pointed, my cloth never ended up right. Five minutes later, as we were ready to give up, Yuka, panting, entered the room. She adroitly performed the greeting ritual with the teacher and came over to me. "I'm sorry, I had to do cleaning, and see a teacher. What do you think of tea ceremony?" "Umm," I hesitantly replied, "It's beautiful, but it seems quite difficult. I don't think I can do it." Never deterred, Yuka said, "Of course you can. Let me explain it to you." Yuka watched me fold the cloth, and with a few precisely chosen English words, I was able to execute the fold correctly.

Every week for the next six months, Yuka carefully taught me about tea ceremony, its various procedures and its history. She shared with me a little piece of Japan that was special to her. A year and a half after Yuka retired, new first year students joined the club. I was now the *sempai*, and the teacher asked me to instruct the tenderfeet how to correctly fold the cloth ...

On dating teenage boys: The case of "Been there Done that" an inside-insiders dating advice.

Natsumi and I normally met for informal conversation in the staff room, but for some reason this time she wanted to meet in a more private room. We made our way over to the audio visual room. Natsumi closed the door tight



behind us and took out her phone.

Natsumi loved Korea. Her favourite singer was BoA, she'd learned how to read Hangul, and as a child she regularly wrote to a Korean pen friend in English. Recently she'd begun engaging with Korea in the most modern of ways—via an internet chat room. While she was mostly interested in forging friendships, she also thought Korean boys very cute, and wasn't above a little chat room flirting. She'd exchanged email details with one boy, and after a couple of pleasant introductory emails was shocked when in his third email he inquired: "Are you good at sex?"

Natsumi stretched her arm across the table and showed me the offensive message, declaring: "Korean boys think Japanese girls are easy. I don't want to talk to them anymore."

Not long ago I was a teenage girl interested in dating young men too. I once swore that I'd never care about a man again after being ignored by a boy who'd kissed me. Possibly only a few weeks later, another denied me a second date because I'd

failed to put out on our first. But eventually I found a guy whom I considered (and still consider) a good person, who treats me with respect and with whom I always have a good time. I shared the wisdom of my teenage experiences with Natsumi:

"He may think that Japanese girls are easy, but he probably thinks that Korean girls are easy too. In Australia we have boys from many ethnic backgrounds, and some of them don't respect girls even from within their own group ... but some do. Don't give up on all Korean men just because you met a bad one first. Just be careful when meeting any guy, and remember that you have the right to say goodbye if you don't like the way he speaks to you or the way he treats you."

Natsumi has since rejected another Korean boy, and one Japanese boy as possible romantic pursuits. She has good and bad things to say about boys, but with each encounter she seems to have a better idea of the kind of guy who might suit her best. ●

SOMENDAKI CAMPSITE

Tohori, Hyogo-ken



Camping is a great way to experience this wonderful country, and since most campsites in Japan are very well-equipped, it makes it easier for you to relax and have a good time.

My friend planned for a big group of us to go camping together in early summer. The weather was perfect and there were about 20 of

us, so it felt like a big party in the woods. On a Saturday morning we headed to the Somendaki campsite, situated about a half an hour walk from Tohori station on the Bantan line. (From Himeji station it takes only 20 minutes to reach Tohori station.)

We were lucky enough to have some friends with

cars to help bring all our food and equipment but we could easily have done without them. All you really need are food, drinks and cooking equipment, as everything else can be hired or is available at the campsite. If you like the creature comforts, you should consider bringing a mat and sleeping bag too; but the campsite has blankets for hire which can be doubled up as a mattress as well as for warmth. Tents are also available for hire and they look like old-style army-issued blankets; triangle- shape with no zips, but they can sleep 2 people comfortably. If the weather turns bad there is a big one room lodge which can be used. Somendaki is equipped with restrooms

but no showers. And there is a nice cooking area with sinks, benches and open fires which just need a mesh grill for barbequing.

Somendaki campsite is a nice place to relax with friends and enjoy the outdoors, whether it be

with a big or small group. If you are feeling energetic there are nearby hiking trails which connect to Mt Masui and Mt Hiromine.

Campsites in Japan are generally very well equipped, but if you are after "real" camping,

it may not be for you. However, if you don't have all the equipment but you enjoy camping it really opens up a lot more travel opportunities and it allows you to experience a different type of travel which can also be very cost-effective. ●



HOW TO MAKE A RESERVATION

For any campsite it is recommended to make a reservation, especially during the summer months. However since most people go camping in summer, the other 9 months of the year you could have the place to yourself.

Somendaki campsite can be contacted on 0792644373 between 10- 5pm

COSTS

Train from Himeji to Tohori:
¥230 each way

Weekdays to camp is
¥220 per person per night
Weekends to camp is
¥260 per person per night
Tents ¥500 each
Blankets ¥100 each

For information on other campsites throughout Japan, please visit:
<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/rtg/pdf/pg-8o4.pdf>.
For environmental reasons some campsites don't allow fires so please check beforehand.

GETTING TO KNOW RANDOM JETS



THE BASICS

Name: Eric Lord

Please call me: Eric.

School and Location in

Hyogo: Ashiya International Secondary School, Ashiya.

How we know you: Hyogo's resident Hanshin Tigers superfan.

Birthday: February 8th.

Born and raised: Montreal, Canada.

Family: Father Bob, mother Carolyn, and two younger brothers, Steve and Thomas.

University and Degree:

Concordia University, majored in Italian.

Other jobs that you have had: Bagel roller, bartender, *eikaiwa* monkey.

Travels: Mostly inside Japan. Been to Korea, going again this spring.

Hobbies: Baseball.

Staying another year? Yep.

FAVORITES

Food: Hokka Hokka Tei.

Sports: Baseball, ice hockey.

Music: 90's Canadian alternative rock – Moist, Our Lady Peace.

Shop: Uniqlo for the win.

TV Show: Futurama.

Movie: *Shawshank Redemption*.

RANDOM TRIVIA

Most Proud Achievement:

Surviving a fistfight with a genuine member of the yakuza.

Best life experience: Living in Japan. International experience is so necessary these days.

Motto to live by: It's impossible to mess things up so badly that you can't fix them again.

I remember when... I could remember when.

What are you drinking?

Broken Down Golf Carts, or draught beer from a Koshien beer girl.

Who would you like to meet? The Dalai Lama.

Why should we elect you President of the World?

That would be a terrible idea, seriously. Ask anyone.

Best thing about Japan so far? The challenge. It's impossible to find a comfort zone in this country – it's always throwing you curveballs.

If it was my last day on earth I would... Book a flight home.

Interesting Fact about me: I'm half French-Canadian.

TEACHING:

My top tip for teaching:

Stay focused on the job we're here to do. It's really easy to forget that we're in this country to teach English to kids.

Bribery for students.. YAY or NAY? NAY – fear is the ONLY motivator. ;)

Funniest Story involving a student: I'm at basketball practice one day and one of my Filipino students, John, is wearing a mesh sleeve like Kobe Bryant. I ask him if he's trying to be Kobe, and he says "Nah man, Kobe's trying to be like John!"

THE BASICS

Name: James Kath

Please call me: James

School and Location in

Hyogo: I live in Shingu (between Himeji and SPring-8) and work at Tatsuno Kita and Tatsuno High Schools.

How we know you: You might not?

Birthday: May 8, 1987

Born and raised: Evanston, Illinois, USA (just outside Chicago)

Family: Parents and a younger sister

University and Degree:

Northwestern University: Physics, Integrated Science, Japanese

Other jobs that you have had: Teaching biology, molecular biology research, astrophysics research, biophysics research (see a trend?)

Travels: Scotland, Italy, Mexico, Australia

Hobbies: Reading, hiking, anything on two wheels

Staying another year? Nope, science calls ...

FAVORITES

Food: A Chipotle burrito and a 312 beer would hit the spot right about now.

Sports: Cycling

Music: Sufjan Stevens, Clap Your Hands Say Yeah

Shop: Bookman's Alley, a used bookstore back home

TV Show: *Flight of the Conchords*

Movie: *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Dr. Strangelove*

RANDOM TRIVIA

Most Proud Achievement:

My research advisor mailed a bound copy of my senior thesis to me in Japan, which made me feel pretty warm and fuzzy.

Best life experience:

Honestly, the most memorable things are the stupid stuff I've done with friends. Last year we did Critical Mass in Chicago, which was fun.

Motto to live by: Embrace complexity. Avoid clichés like the plague.

I remember when...

we would talk to our girlfriends/boyfriends on corded phones for hours.

What are you drinking?

Lots and lots of tea.

Who would you like to meet? JP.II. He was a bamf.

Why should we elect you President of the World?

There haven't been enough white, male presidents in the world yet.

Best thing about Japan so far? I love how beautiful the *inaka* is, and the fact you can see lots of stars.

If it was my last day on earth I would...

plant a sequoia.

Interesting Fact about me:

I'm a goy who sets off Jewdar.

TEACHING:

My top tip for teaching:

Pick interesting topics and use team/pair work often.

When the class is TOO QUIET I... am grateful.

Bribery for students.. YAY or NAY? Nay, I teach way too many students and would feel guilty giving food to just a few.

Funniest Story involving a student: During my first lesson, I was talking about Chicago and Barack Obama. I was trying to get a student to tell me that Obama is the US President, so I told him he is kind of like Abraham Lincoln, who we talked about earlier. The student asked me in Japanese, "What, is Lincoln also black?"





ぐるりのこと。 6月7日、シネマライズ、シネスイッチ銀座ほか
 © 2008「ぐるりのこと」プロデューサーズ 全国ロードショー!

All Around Us (*Gururi no koto*)

BY J J CAPPA

The gold standard of depressing Japanese movies is undoubtedly *Grave of the Fireflies*, a Studio Ghibli film that was inexplicably shown in theatres as a double feature with the cheerful *My Neighbor Totoro*. Based on true events, the film tells the tragic story about war orphans that starve to death after the firebombing of Kobe during WWII. The film is not merely heart wrenching; it is heart destroying. *Grave of the Fireflies* left me a zombie-like human shell that afterwards felt unbothered by the death of a four-year-old child in *Nobody Knows* and laughed at kids trapped under the iron fist of Japanese education in *The Family Game*. However, this review is not about *Grave of the Fireflies*. This month, I instead urge you to watch the film that might have usurped its “most depressing movie ever” title, director Hashiguchi Ryosuke’s *All Around Us* (*Gururi no koto*, 2008).

All Around Us is about a shotgun wedding. There is no ceremony and the characters only allude to the true circumstances of the marriage once or twice, but it is a critical feature of the story. Although they might have been a loving couple as art students, Kanao and Shoko probably would not have gotten married if Shoko had not become pregnant. Kanao wants to live life at his

pace (including cheating) and be treated like “the king of the castle.” Shoko, on the other hand, wants to wrangle in her free-spirited husband with a curfew and scheduled sex nights. Hashiguchi makes it clear that the two lost the connection that brought them together in the first place; they just don’t get each other anymore.

All Around Us is also about coping with the deaths of young children, in particular the infant daughter that forced Kanao and Shoko into their shotgun wedding in the first place. (Aside: I highly recommend that if you are the parent of young children or an expecting future-parent, save this one for about a decade and **never take your children to Akihabara.**) The baby’s death sends Shoko into a deep depression and Kanao witnesses horrid cases about children being murdered on a regular basis as a courtroom illustrator. We’re talking cannibalism horrid. They both seem like they will never recover and be happy together or even apart.

This month I must admit I am encouraging you to watch a very emotionally taxing film. Nothing about the first three paragraphs have made *All Around Us* sound appealing whatsoever. The main character is a lousy husband



and a cheat; his wife loses her child then her mind; murdering *otaku* shamelessly testify about stabbing elementary school children or eating preschoolers. Have I forgotten that the purpose of this column is convincing you to actually watch the movie? No, not exactly. The first time I watched *All Around Us*, it was a challenge. I barely made it all the way through because the content was just *too heavy* (even for a manly man like me who was growing a sweet beard at the time). However, a few months later something brought me back to the film. I literally had a craving to watch it again.

All Around Us is not really about shotgun weddings or the loss of a child. The second time around, I realized that *All Around Us* is about understanding another person and developing a connection with them. Without the shotgun wedding these two probably would have never lasted long enough to get married. Without the loss of their child, they would have never needed to figure

out why they were together; the answer would have simply been, “for the baby.” Instead, Shoko goes to therapy, together helping her get well again and as she recovers the movie itself brightens; the colors literally become more vivid and the music cheerier. Simultaneously, Shoko and Kanao finally come to understand each other and perhaps fall in love, truly, for the first time.

Giving *All Around Us* another chance was a great decision because as difficult as the first half can be, the second half is nothing short of inspiring and uplifting. Even the performance given by (male actor) Lily Franky as Kanao alone makes the movie worth watching; it is the best acting I have ever seen. Please give *All Around Us* (*Gururi no koto*) a first chance and maybe a second one as well.

Thanks for watching! ●



UMEDA MEN

BY ANDREW TAMASHIRO

My cousin and her husband were passing through Osaka last weekend, and I am always looking for a reason to make the 2 hour-plus trip down from the land of cows and *onsen* to the hustle and bustle of the nation's third largest city. We headed down the night before and hit a few bars to relax from the week. Anytime I'm out drinking until 3 in a city, I ALWAYS have a craving for ramen afterwards. That doesn't mean I want a full serving with *gyoza* on the side to add food coma to my alcohol-induced collapse, but the steamy, salty stuff always seems to help blunt the impact of the inevitable hangover.

After the bar, we hit Yousukou (揚子江), an extremely popular place in Umeda. They've got a couple branches in the area, and this one was packed to the gills. It's a tiny place, just a round-ish counter that seats maybe 15 if you pack in. On this night, it was full of red-faced salarymen, young construction workers, and feathery-haired hostess types. After a 7 or 8 minute wait, we plopped into newly opened seats and ordered the basic ramen.



Known for its *assari* taste, the *shio* broth is perfect after drinking. The *chashu* was nothing to write home about, and the noodles were fairly average, but that soup will clear your head and open your eyes. I'm not typically a fan of lighter soups, but it was perfect for the situation. If you ever have the chance, give it a shot. The fried rice also looked delicious, and the serving was gigantic.

The next morning around 10, we ventured into Nishimatsuya (西松家). It's a 24 hour joint that serves *tsukemen* as well as *ramen*, and does each in 4 flavors (*shio*, *shoyu*, *miso*, *tonkotsu*). It also allows you to choose the spice level of your *miso* soup, how many pieces of pork you want, and a number of other options. My companion chose the *tonkotsu* ramen and I got the *miso tsukemen* on the recommendation of the chef. Mine came first, a pile of 200

grams of cooler-than-room-temperature noodles topped generously with *negi*, *menma*, and my 2 slices of *chashu*. The soup was burning hot, a layer of oil preventing the steam and heat from escaping until I dipped my spoon in to taste. My first mouthful of noodles was fantastic, the springy, starchy noodles holding the flavor of the broth well from bowl to mouth. The pork was fatty, but firm, yet I was left unhappy with the flavor combination as the *miso* overpowered a somewhat subtle pork.

The tonkotsu ramen was just ok. A layer of tiny chunks of fat used to be a far more welcome sight, but as my tastes move in the direction of better strained bases, I don't look forward to slurping it down as much as I used to. Nothing about it jumped out at me: a very average entry. ●

Kicchiri Kitchen: Madeleines



BY TRAVIS LOVE

As the rainy season and the rainy day blahs set in, I would normally love to invigorate my coworkers with cookies, but every batch of cookies I've shared with a Japanese person has been turned down for being *too sweet*. (As if there was such a thing.) Many of my first-years, who claim "My favorite food is sweets," would probably run screaming from a proper chocolate chip cookie. And the last thing I need to do is give my grumpy old pair of vice principals sugar headaches.

So what to do? If you look at restaurants around Japan, you'll notice that almost every bakery or cake shop (cakery?) is French. Many of the cakes and

omiyage-cookies you'll find are French-inspired things. French cooking somehow lies very close to the Japanese palate, so it's no surprise that French baking fits the bill nicely.

Perhaps the most famous French cookie is the Madeleine, which owes its fame to Marcel Proust. Proust describes the Madeleine as a dry, crumb-producing thing – and he's a rotten liar. The proper Madeleine is moist, lightly flavored, fluffy and spongelike. And if you do as written here, you will put bakeries to shame. While tradition dictates a shell-like mold pan, which you can probably find for 2,000 yen at a good kitchen shop, you can also bake Madeleines in the little foil cups / cases you find

for 100yen. Just be careful not to let the bottoms scorch.

Madeleines

4 eggs
180 g butter, melted
180 g (3/4 cup) sugar
180 g (1 1/4 cup) weak flour
薄力小麦粉
2 teaspoons baking powder
Pinch salt
Vanilla essence

1. Whisk together the eggs and sugar, for about 3-5 minutes, until the mixture is thickened slightly.
2. Add the baking powder, salt, and flour, and whisk together.
3. Whisk in the melted butter until smooth. Add vanilla essence. Chill, covered, in your refrigerator / freezer while your oven heats up.
4. Spoon to about 1/2 to 2/3 full into buttered Madeleine tins or foil cups. Bake in small batches for about 8-11 minutes at 180°C. Cool on paper towels or a wire rack.

Alternative: For a delicious twist, add two heaping tablespoons of cocoa powder and a couple of splashes of triple sec / Cointreau.

Makes about 3 dozen ●

Questions? Comments? Suggestions for future columns? Send them to dr.t.love@gmail.com

English Sensei Spirit Pocket Edition

Get your kids speaking English with Procedural Language

BY MATTHEW STOTT

Hi gang! Just time for a quick tip this month. Are you looking for ways to get your students speaking more English in the classroom? Of course you are! You've no doubt learnt by now from bitter experience that simply urging them to "speak English" doesn't work. The problem is that while they may have the necessary lexis and grammatical knowledge for the speaking situation you're about to throw them into, they don't necessarily know when to apply it. This is where procedural language comes in.

Procedural language is simply the language students need in order to complete the task. Suppose you're (wisely) having the students check each other's

work in pairs after completing a worksheet or a set of textbook exercises. You could just let them do it in Japanese, but that would be missing a golden opportunity. So here's what you do. On the board, write the following phrases, and (this is important) have the students repeat them after you:

What did you get for question [1]?
I think it's [].

Notice the underlining? Marking the emphasis is crucial in giving students a visual sense of how to pronounce the phrases. Drilling the phrases gives them a chance to test-drive them and become comfortable with them before they "take them out on the road," so to speak. Placing square brackets around substitutable

content allows students to modify the phrases as needed. Now all you need to do is set the students pairchecking.

Provided you keep the phrases short and simple enough, you can use procedural language to prepare students for just about any speaking situation, from self-introductions to conversations about daily routines. As often as not, it isn't defiance or lack of know-how that keeps the students deathly quiet: it's a lack of confidence. Giving them the necessary procedural language is one way of boosting that confidence. Why not give it a try?

Got a lesson plan or teaching idea to share? Send it to publications@hyogo.ajet.net ●

We Want Your Stories!

...and pictures, and opinions, and poems,
and artwork, and essays, and....



Submit by the 20th of each month to:
publications@hyogo.ajet.net