

November 2008

Contents

Messages

4.....	From the Editor
5.....	From the PR

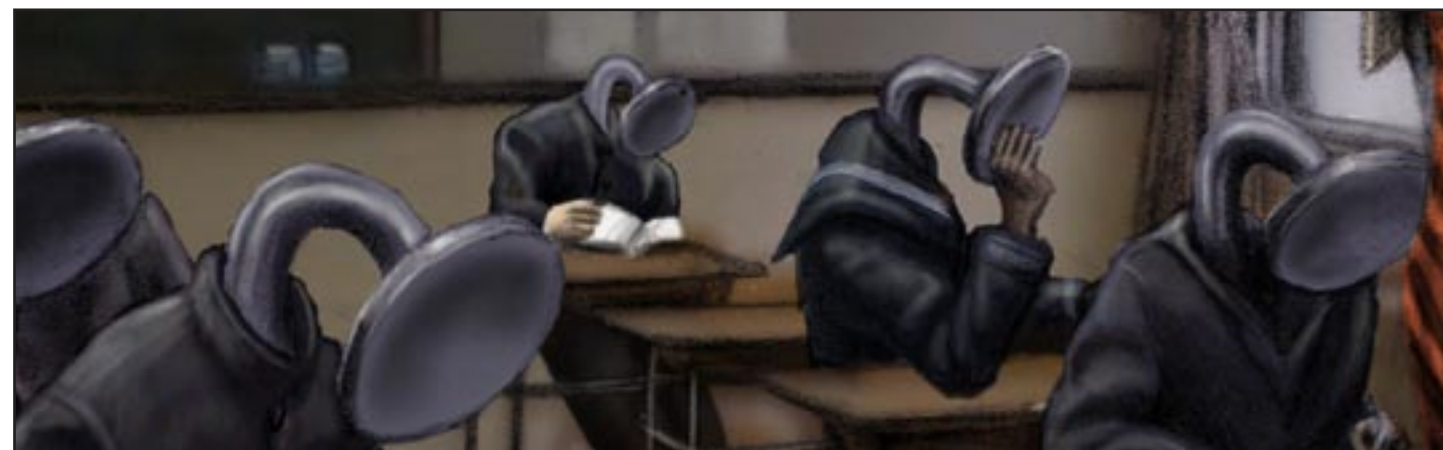
Every Month

6-7.....	Recipe of the Month: Mac 'n Cheese
8.....	Wheel Of Jeopardy!
14-15.....	Best of the Block
16-17.....	Getting to Know Some Random JETs
18-19.....	Better Know a Ken: Iwate
20-21.....	Travel Japan: The Mysterious Kobe Alien-Military Keyhole
22-23.....	Love & Relationships: To All the Gaijin Girls

Features

9.....	Life After JET: <i>A Week in Kevin's Shoes</i>
10-11.....	Life After JET: <i>Looking Back from Tokyo</i>
12-13.....	Three Concerts, One Week
24-25.....	The Family Visit
25.....	Comic: Japanese Staring Contest
26-27.....	Let's Enjoy English!
28-29.....	Rafting and Canyoning in Shikoku
30.....	Restaurant Review: Kobe Ramen Ramentary

On the cover...



Cover art by Chip Boles

I think of this month's image as more of a question than a statement. I heard about Japanese education before I came here and have since seen many varied examples of teachers, their styles of teaching, and the seeming effects on the students. Teaching styles differ between higher and lower level schools, between older and younger students. I don't know when I heard the phrase "the nail that sticks up gets hammered down," but it led to this image. I'm still figuring out if this is true, and if it is, how, but I am also slowly seeing how this is true of my own home's culture. I guess that's cultural exchange.

Hyogo Times Staff

Editor: Ann Chow

Design Editor: Jeff Morrice

Contributors: Chip Boles, Joy Feddes, Robert Hollands, Lisa Lerud, Wang Hui Ling, Brenda McKinney, Maeve O'Connell, Matt Pluimer, Joseph Schott, Kevin Shannon, George Sherriff, Lester Somera, Matthew Stott, Andrew Tamashiro, Jeff Weese and James Williams.

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

Submit by the 15th of each month to:
submit.hyogotimes@gmail.com

Visit us online at:
<http://hyogoajet.net>

From The Editor...

Konnichiwa everyone! I trust that you all had a fantastic Halloween weekend wherever you celebrated it! (Judging by the photos on facebook, everyone seems to have had a good time!)

You are probably gearing up for the slight drop in temperature before we come face-to-face with that season in Japan no one wants to think of — winter. At least the leaves are changing colors in the right season this year!

Since it's getting cold, I always think laughs are a great way to keep warm, and I can guarantee you will definitely laugh (fine, chuckle, if you're not the laughing type) when you read Lester's piece on why we should be teaching English (or any other foreign language for that matter) at an early age instead of waiting until a person's cognitive abilities for language and speech starts dying off the minute they hit junior high school. Included with it is a great elementary school lesson plan.

And he isn't the only one this month! Our PR, Daniel, was found hiding under a waterfall (read the rafting article) and he's also got some tips on teaching! Great stuff for newbies or if you think you've gotten stale at doing the job because you've been here so long you've started speaking English and understand it as if it were an actual language.

For those of you who are not planning to stay on JET, we were lucky enough to get two articles from former JETs

— one from the former editor, Kevin Shannon, and one from the Sherriff of Nottingham. While Kevin went back home to Ireland, George stayed in Japan and is working as a salaryman in Tokyo. Since we have all received, or are about to receive, our re-contracting papers, both articles will give you some insight on life after JET regardless of whether or not you've figured out if you want to stay or go or if you know what you're doing after JET.

However, if you're re-contracting — and even if you're not, you still have a good seven months before you leave — we have a new Love and Relationships writer, so you can occupy your free time with finding love here! This month's is a little heavy-handed in the discussion for girls looking for J-boys, but it's entertaining nonetheless. Maybe the guys might see why the foreign female population is falling for the native nihon-jins, eh?

Anyway, keep hammering away at the keyboards; send



something, anything, to submit.hyogoytimes@gmail.com by the 15th of each month! It won't be long before you start wondering why there's a line out of KFC on Christmas Day again.

Happy Reading!

— Ann Chow

And From The PR...

Welcome to the cold season, Hyogo-ites! That chill in the air means that winter is only just around the corner, so I hope you're all breaking out the heaters, blankets, and warm clothes.

Not that it's all cold, grey, doom and gloom, however! If you can drag yourself away from watching those addictively bad TV dramas while lying comatose under your kotatsu, winter brings with it many unique and awesome entertainment options — skiing, snowboarding, yuki-gassen, the Hadaka Matsuri, and "Mr. President" to name a few. So let's get ready to make the most of it!

On a slightly more serious topic, this month I wanted to write a little bit about teaching. A lot of ALTs come to Japan without any teaching experience, and to be honest we don't really get any decent teacher training when we arrive. In my first year here I learnt a lot about teaching from various sources, so I thought I'd pass on a few tips ... I hope they help!

The Basics

Planning: Talk to your JTE well before the class to work out what they want to do and what you need to prepare. Make up a lesson plan as if you aren't going to be able to take the class and someone completely clueless has to give your lesson.

Icebreaking: Try to start each class with a warm-up activity or, at the very least, a conversation, to help genki up the students.

Humour: Wherever possible (and appropriate) use humour in class, or at least keep the mood light. It really doesn't take much to amuse the students — fooling around with Japanese, over exaggerating, using gestures or making jokes at your own expense always seems to work and creates a great teaching environment.

Error-friendly: The students are pretty scared of making mistakes, so always be supportive when they do. Let



them know that in your class they can (and are expected to) make mistakes as it's a natural part of learning a foreign language.

Taking it Further

Achievement: Most standard one week lessons don't give the students much chance to get a good sense of achievement using English. Consider designing some multi-week lessons at the end of which the students will produce something like a short story or a poem. Seeing they have created something with English will really boost their motivation.

Relevance: Make your lessons as relevant

as possible to the students' lives. If you can choose topics, try to create a balance between topics the students are interested in (hobbies, music, English slang, and so on) and more practical ones (speaking on the phone, travel, food, directions, time, etc.).

For activities, try to use pair or group work as much as you can. It's much more rewarding for the students (provided they stay on topic) and they are naturally motivated to learn about each other.

Creativity: Use and encourage as much creativity as you can in your classes. It has to be relevant, of course, but the more fun an activity is and the more it allows the students to think for themselves, the more the students will enjoy class and learning. Check out ESL websites and AJET books for ideas.

2-way teaching: Let the students teach you something (culture, slang, etc.). This will show that you are interested in them and will get them more involved in the class.

Ok, that's all for this month. Remember to keep an eye on the Yahoo Group for details of upcoming Hyogo AJET events. Until next month, take care, teach well, and party hard!

— Daniel Carter

Recipe of the Month:

Good old Mac 'n Cheese

By Robert Hollands

As an American, I often find myself laden with shame for various reasons. As a foodie *and* an American, the source of greatest embarrassment is my country's conspicuous lack of a unique food culture.

Imagine, if you will, standing in front of a classroom of Japanese students, being told that you're now expected to give a brief presentation on "famous American foods." Sure, we have some obscure regional dishes that, while delicious, have nowhere near the international appeal of hamburgers and hot dogs. The trouble is, hamburgers and hot dogs were originally German! So what can you say?

The closest we come to real, honest, uniquely American food is on Thanksgiving. Every fourth Thursday in November, families all over the country sit down at the nice dining table they never use any other time of the year to sample otherwise-neglected autumn fare like pumpkin, squash, sweet potatoes, cranberries, corn, chestnuts and the like.

These are the things that grow in our very own soil, and these are among the things the pilgrims

most likely ate that first Thanksgiving!

But America could never hope to escape its melting-pot destiny, and although most of us continue to stuff ourselves with more traditional fare, things like Szechwan green beans, Hawaiian salad, and even pakoras or hummus are managing to charm their way onto more and more Americans'



Thanksgiving tables every year.

We simply cannot resist the exotic flavors of a food culture that, while not unique in the purest sense of the word, is perhaps both the greatest beneficiary of and testament to our truly diverse cultural mosaic.

With that in mind, I present you with this month's recipe: The Best Macaroni and Cheese in the World (I really couldn't think of a better title). The dish, with its modest Italian origins, has come to occupy an immovable place right there next to the turkey and stuffing, but the addition of baked bread crumbs gives this classic a Southern American twist. I have prepared it for guests several times in the past, and it never fails to impress.

Be warned: the fat content is outrageously high, so I would seriously think twice before making this dish more than once or twice a year (though you'll be tempted otherwise). I've had no trouble finding all the ingredients at the local grocery store, but I can't speak to their availability in more rural parts — but believe me, this one's worth a grocery shopping trip to the big city.

To those of you without conventional ovens — and I assume that means the majority of you — this recipe works just as well without the final step of baking the bread crumbs onto the pasta. If you feel like experimenting, however, you could try filling small ceramic, glass, or aluminum bowls with the pasta, sprinkling with bread crumbs, and individually baking each one in a toaster oven.

Enjoy!



The Best Macaroni and Cheese in the World

Ingredients:

- 7 oz/200g uncooked elbow macaroni noodles
- 1/4 cup butter
- 3 tbsp all-purpose flour
- 2 cup milk
- 8oz/230g package cream cheese, softened
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 2 tsp country-style Dijon mustard
- 2 cups cubed cheddar cheese (half-inch cubes)
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- 2 tbsp melted butter or margarine
- 2 tbsp fresh chopped parsley

Directions:

- Heat oven to 400°F/200°C.
- Cook noodles according to directions; drain.
- In a large saucepan melt 1/4 cup butter and stir in flour. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally until smooth and bubbly.
- Stir in milk, cream cheese, salt, pepper and mustard.
- Continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until sauce has thickened (3-4 mins).
- Stir in macaroni and cheddar cheese and pour into a large casserole dish.
- In a small bowl stir together remaining ingredients; sprinkle over macaroni and cheese.
- Bake for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown and heated through.

Note: 1 cup means 1 American cup, or 237 mL.
A Japanese cup is 200 mL

WHEEL OF JEOPARDY!

Time for the H.T. Quiz: Gearin' up for Fall edition! By Joy Feddes

1 Your favourite seasonal treat is:

- a) The new flavour of chu-hi.
- b) The new flavour of Kit Kat.
- c) Whatever fruit doesn't cost 300 yen now.

2 What reality TV show do you want to be on?

- a) America's Next Top Model, because I can be unbelievably catty, cry on a whim and am FIERCE!
- b) Survivor, because you should have seen my apartment when I moved in.
- c) My reality is like TV already.

3 The best accent you've come across on JET is:

- a) Canadian. Not as sexy as French, but close, eh?
- b) Irish. I just see leprechauns dance before me when they open their mouths.
- c) Japanglish. I like the challenge of deciphering words like "ebrybahdy."

4 Thesaurus + Japanese band names = funtimes:

- a) Phatpantywaists (Radwimps).
- b) Smacks of Grouse (Bump of Chicken).
- c) The Ultimate Secretion (Maximum the Hormone).

5 The greatest sleep-related challenge you face daily is:

- a) Getting out of bed, or off the floor.
- b) Making sure I don't snore when I sleep with my eyes open at my desk.
- c) Waking up sooner than 10 minutes before you have to be at school.

6 What do you wear to school?

- a) I bought some sweet polyester track pants to better fit in.
- b) Uniqlo.
- c) What I wore yesterday — the



beauty of having multiple schools.

7 How are you staying healthy in this time of germs?

- a) A healthy diet of pudding and icecream bars.
- b) I invested in Purell.
- c) I choose to be sick and infect you! Ha!

8 Sweet potato:

- a) How sweet it is!
- b) I fucking hate potatoes.
- c) Ice cream... mmm.....

What your answers mean:

Mostly As: I can see my breath in the mornings, and then I cry a single tear, which freezes on my face. OK, it doesn't but I can see my breath, and mostly As, it's just the beginning. When I can see my breath in my apartment, come on over, and let's cuddle. Better yet, give me a puppy and a kitten and I'll cuddle with them. Unless you have a sexy Canadian accent, in

which case, also send me poutine.

Mostly Bs: How are you on a Japanese keyboard? I have a hard time switching back and forth, but I finally found the apostrophe key (yea shift -7!) and the fun of typing in Japanese still gives me unreasonable pleasure. What gives you unreasonable pleasure? I also get it from reading Dr. Seuss books. Go find some nonsensical rhyming and chuckle to yourself, because the people in your staffroom already think you're crazy.

Mostly Cs: In the recent Canadian election, billions of dollars were spent and nothing changed. Was I surprised? Do you care? Not really to both. Too bad. You've read it and have been informed whether you wanted to be or not. Mostly Cs, if you can think of a funny pun joke, please send it to me, if for no other reason than to get me to stop talking about Canada, and I might think more highly of you.

Life After JET:

A Month in Kevin's Shoes

By Kevin Shannon

And just when you thought you'd gotten rid of me...

Yes, I'm back. Like a mouse to the proverbial cheese, I just couldn't stay away. Having been back in Ireland for two months now, I thought I would try and enlighten you as to how my life after JET has been (despite what those strange fourth- and fifth-year JETs say, it does exist).

I thought the first few weeks were going to be very tough as I tried to re-adjust to Irish life. Surprisingly though, it didn't seem so bad. At least not at first, when I was able to just chill out with my family and unpack.

Everything was the same as before I left and it seemed easy to slip back into where I had been a year ago. But I wasn't the same as I was back then. I changed. I'd been a teacher. I'd been a geisha. I climbed Fuji on a supply of gummi-bears. I fought with hundreds of semi-naked men for a magic stick! I'd done a million other things that would change me forever. So how



did I now fit into Irish life?

Well, I wasn't sure and, to be honest, I'm still not sure. I currently have a temporary job and am looking for something more permanent, but it is difficult. Not just because of the infamous recession, but because I'm struggling to feel enthused by what is offered to me.

Why would I want to commute for three hours every day when I used to just hop over my back wall into the school? Why would I want to spend eight hours a day on a phone in an office when I used to make kids laugh and smile for a job?

But gradually acceptance is sinking in. I remind myself of why I chose to leave. I don't let myself create an unreal memory of Japan and JET. The year as a whole was wonderful but the whole year wasn't wonderful. There were good and bad moments, just as there are good and bad moments back in Ireland (e.g. football: good; weather: terrible).

I could spend all my time look-

ing back at the good times in Japan but it is time to go on and make some better ones. There is much more potential here. I don't need to find an English teacher when I want to book a bus or when I get a bill in the post. My job opportunities aren't limited to English teacher or English phone staff. I can do anything and go anywhere.

Leaving Japan without a job or plan is a bit of a leap into the unknown but it is exciting and challenging. It focuses your thoughts and forces you to take charge of your own life. Life after JET is my life and I can do what I want with it. It is a nice feeling.

However, whatever you decide to do after JET, I can assure you that Japan will never really leave you. Even when you're not expecting it, Japan will appear, and before you know it, you're re-living that time your teacher's father was showing you his fake breasts... {Design Editor's note: And boy-oh-boy were they glorious! Miss ya bud!}



Life After JET:

Looking back from Tokyo

By George Sherriff

George Sherriff spent one year on the JET Programme and currently lives and works in Tokyo. This is the first of two articles by George, with the second piece to come next month, dealing with how he went about getting a job in Tokyo.

Having completed my solitary year on the JET programme I wanted to write an article with hindsight. While still being in Japan I have yet to experience the 'reverse culture shock', yet rest assured moving from my palatial suite north of Himeji to a shoe box in Tokyo at quadruple the rent certainly provides its own shock, but more of that next time.

Sometimes the worst thing for JET is being on JET. As a foreigner in such a homogenous society you are more liable to being affected by group mentality than you would be at home. When friends reveal how bad their school is, or the fact that they have half the Amazon living under their tatami, group mentality is certainly affected for the worse regardless of your personal situation.

This was certainly true of re-contracting season, which couldn't have come at a worse time. Having returned from the paradise of Thailand to find the water in my sink frozen, my kerosene heater slowly nursing me into a state of comatose (before inexplicably bursting into flames) and months of inactivity to look forward to, the decision was seemingly easy. Circle the 'no' and job done.

I didn't want to be a teacher in the future and thought a year away would be enough. I spent far too much time doing nothing and could feel my brain slowly melting away. Day to day life reminded me of being a three year old except I had just about managed to use the toilet. Communicating with strange hand gestures and a series of grunts was frustrating to say the least, not to mention what all that rice was doing to my bowels. Yet when that form was put in front of me it was surprisingly hard to do.

There were many reasons for this. I could challenge any man, woman or beast with the speed at which I could write www.facebook.com. However

this provided me with a window through which I could see my mate's lives back in England. Whilst of course I missed getting hammered in the same run down bar, Hussein's kebabs and crap weather, I realized that I really wasn't missing out on anything. Same places, same faces and I knew they would still be there whenever I went home. Now don't get me wrong, maturity is still yet to be tackled but being able to say I was off to Tokyo for the weekend had an appealing advantage to just going 'down the local.'

Living in Hyogo (Sorry Jeff this doesn't apply to you) is an amazing location especially for visitors. When friends came to visit, Hiroshima, Miyajima, Kobe, Nara, Kyoto, Osaka and of course Himeji castle were all within day trip distance. Maybe my experience would have been altered had I been put in some middle of nowhere Inaka town. There is that saying and although it's f**king annoying, there is of course some truth in it.

Yet thinking that the grass was always greener on the other side (note there is no grass in Tokyo) resulted in

finally saying no to another year. Reflecting upon the decision with hindsight I am not sure what more you could expect from a year abroad. One of the most surreal moments of JET was swimming in crystal clear water under coconut trees in Thailand on Christmas day, whilst getting paid by the Japanese government. Certainly helps you forget about Turkey and Stockings.

Drinking sake under a castle surrounded by cherry blossom, or having young Japanese students telling you they love peace, whilst standing next to the A-bomb dome are some of the many other lasting memories I have. In addition I was also lucky enough to go to Hong Kong, Macau, Okinawa, get a diving license, see some of the world's best bands, whilst ensuring a free place to stay in most major speaking English countries around the globe.

The student lifestyle carried on as soon as it was realized that sleeping off a hangover in the school toilet was not going to cause an issue. Even after all this I managed to send money home, mainly due to the fact that the amount of rent I paid was pitiful. Then there are the other JETs. There were certainly many that made my experience more amazing, there were others that gave me hangovers never to forget, and then there were the Irish...



The local people were also there to ensure my experience was ever fruitful. Just think for one minute about all those random strangers that have helped you since you have been here. Put aside the fact that you 'look like Rooney' and remember the old women bringing you dinner, families inviting you into their homes or random strangers telling you how great your Japanese is having just stuttered 'konnichiwa'.

I will always remember a house party I had last year. No precautions were taken to reduce the sound and yet the next day I received a letter apologizing for having to mention that some friends and myself were making noise, signed by 'yours truly the Sleepy Grandpa'. A far cry from the abusive threatening letters we used to get from neighbours at university!

Last but not least was the opportunity to teach in a Japanese high school and meet some really great people. My last few months on JET were amazing, and it is not until you leave do you realize that you have actually made a small difference — despite what you may think during the year.

Being able to join club activities and witnessing the dedication to which these were performed puts schools at home to shame. Rather than going down the park with a bottle of cider to batter each other and abuse old people, I always thought Japanese students conducted themselves with more purpose. Having said that sports day was akin to a scene from the Red Square with the principle doing a remarkable impression of Stalin, so maybe the balance isn't quite right here either.



George "internationalizes" with the locals.

My leaving ceremony is one of the best memories I have and if only this could be shown to you in January I think the re-contracting rate would be significantly improved. Being up on stage and having students present you with gifts they have bought whilst making speeches in English made it, well, difficult to maintain the stiff upper lip.

Being here in Tokyo I have met English teachers that work for faceless organizations where you are put into a booth for hours on end and paid next to nothing. I often visit Shinjuku and walk past the Keio Plaza Hotel and it still amazes me how much money is thrown into the JET Programme. Flights, hotels, houses. Comparing the amount of holiday to teachers at home is futile, but comparing it to the three hours of nenkyu the teacher next to you has taken in the last six years and you're laughing.

You can't blame JET for the school you are assigned to, but as a programme I think it's pretty special. A few of my friends at home laughed at the thought of teaching English in a Japanese school, instead choosing to pursue big money careers in city finance. Two of them just got made redundant and one of them even emailed me asking about JET. All I am saying is, come January think it through. (Next month — finding a job in Japan after JET)



Matt mentioned Radiohead, and that gives me, the design editor, the right to turn this into a Thom Yorke tribute piece. Read the HT fine print.

Three Concerts, One Week

By Matt Pluimer

In the span of eight days between Sept. 24 and Oct. 1, I was lucky enough to see three entertaining concerts. Besides chewing a big hole in my wallet, these concerts showed me not only the different ways in which music can be shown and performed, but also gave me a little insight into Japanese culture at the same time. So let's jump right into it.

September 24th: The Pigeon Detectives

The Pigeon Detectives are a band on the rise from Leeds, England, who are quickly emerging on the British scene. They were playing at a small, live house called Shangri-La in West Umeda — and I gotta hand it to Shangri-La, the bar is right in the middle of the dance floor. Well done, sirs!

I heard about their show through

my friends and went to even though I had never listened to a single song of theirs before. Shangri-La had maybe about 30 people attending, but the band put on a show as if the place were filled to the brim.

Luckily, being the only foreigners trying to finish our drinks outside, the lead singer asked us to show them to some local bars. We got to go backstage, hang out, have some drinks, and hit up East Umeda with the band. We even had a pack of about 10 Japanese female fans following us wherever we went. About 10 minutes after getting our drinks in a new

bar, a head would pop in the door, see us, and the next minute there would be the same group of people from the concert hall. All in all, it was a great and interesting night.

September 29th: The Faint

The Faint is a band that's been around for



about 10 years and has a pretty big cult following in the US. Hailing from Omaha, Nebraska, this band's music can be pretty dark at times, but still pop-ish enough to be played at a party. I listened to them throughout college, but hadn't heard their new album yet.

The concert was held at Club Quattro in Shinsaibashi. Club Quattro is a medium-sized venue that is



a national chain, so I heard about this show through my normal internet sources. I've seen shows at this place about five times before, and I always get drunk on Wild Turkey while I'm there.

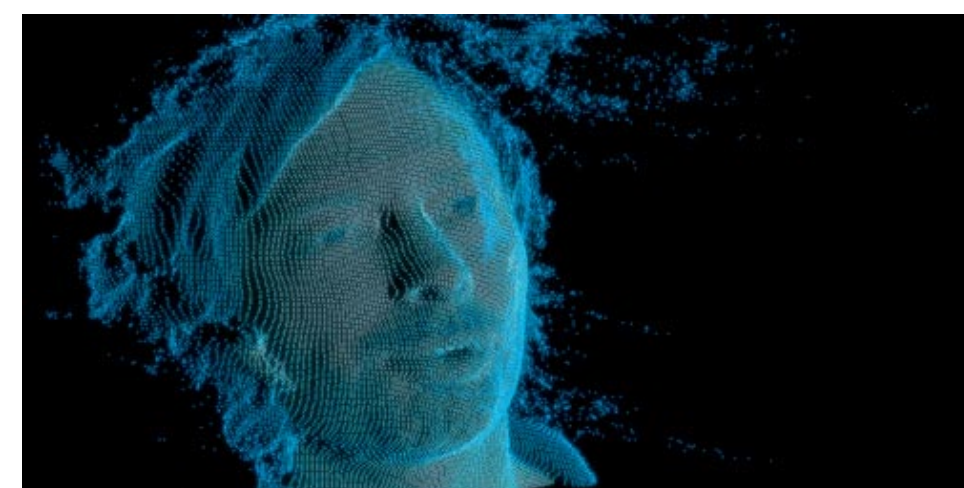
This time was no different. Half the venue was closed, but there were still 100-150 people there, and the energy level was great. There was a good Japanese opening band called Damage that opened for them and is worth checking out — kind of a dance-y version of Linkin Park.

The Faint took the crowd to another level, and played a lengthy set and an encore. Some people may have even seen me dance for a little while during the show — that's how pumped/drunk I was.

October 1st: Radiohead

Who hasn't heard of Radiohead? They've been around for over 15 years and my personal favourite for about the last 10, and were on my "Must see before I die" list of bands. I know pretty much all of their songs.

So, I was absolutely pumped to see this band the minute I bought the ticket... about two months in advance. The concert was held at the Osaka Central Gymnasium, which is in the middle of nowhere. It was my first time going to this place and I didn't know what to expect. Usually when big-time bands come to play, it's



at Osaka Castle Hall, but this place was just as big and had better acoustics for a stadium that seats several thousand.

So, I did my normal pre-concert tradition and had a few beers/chuhi before entering. However, I didn't want to miss a minute of the show, so I went in right as I heard the band coming on stage. I was a little disappointed

when it was two DJs coming on to play, but I was downright outraged when I learned that they didn't sell alcohol in the venue! Homey, don't play that. But I bit my lower lip and waited in anticipation.

I wasn't

disappointed. Radiohead was just as good live as they are on their albums, and their light show was just breath taking. They played two encores — over two hours of total playing time. Hearing Thom Yorke's voice live was better than I imagined, and I left the concert hall feeling as if some kind of catharsis had happened to me. I could only imagine how much better it would've been with a few beers.

Overall, I thought each concert showed me a different side of music and showmanship. With the Pigeon Detectives, I got the small crowd, underground feeling. With The Faint, I got the feeling of being in a dance party where everyone in the audience was enjoying every second of the performance just as much as me. With Radiohead, I got the large group experience, and was exposed to some of the best live music I've experienced to date. Despite each one being completely different, I can honestly say I liked them all equally.



The Best of the Block

By Brenda McKinney

Hello fellow Hyogo-ites! I hope all of you are enjoying the fall and that those of you who just arrived in Japan are starting to feel at home.

While the big festival season has now been replaced by the more localized moving-shrine season (you've probably noticed the taiko drums echoing around town...), we've got a few additional fun events for you to check out.

I also want to extend a big THANK YOU to everyone who participated in the National AJET Surveys. We're still busy preparing for the Opinion Exchange meetings with CLAIR (and MEXT & MOFA) in Tokyo next month, but we couldn't do it without your help! These surveys (and the corresponding meetings that follow them) are truly the one way to have your opinions and feedback about the JET Programme heard directly, so if you missed out on this round, I hope you are able to fill out the next batch of surveys in March.

Thanks again for checking-in on the HT and let me know if you have any upcoming events. Also feel free to email me at block6@ajet.net if you're heading to Kyoto/Shiga one weekend and are wondering if there is anything going on... the BEST of the BLOCK only covers so much! Cheers!

What's Happening Around Hyogo Prefecture

Hyogo Martial Arts Festival

November 3rd is Culture Day, a nation-

al holiday, so why not spend the free day off school getting to know more about Japanese culture? Come for the free workshops in judo, tai-chi, karate, shorinji kempo, kendo, or aikido and stay for the master performances. Late applications (walk-ins) will be accepted if there is space available in the classes, but please contact the Prefectural Martial Arts Center directly as soon as possible to register (budokan@hyogokenritsu-budokan.jp). The public workout sessions will be from 10:00 to 11:30.

Izushu Castle Festival

Come see what is going on in Tajima outside of the Ultimate Frisbee season at the Izushu Castle Festival in Toyooka City. The festival program includes a Daimyo's procession (featuring a spear-bearer handling performance). The festival takes place around Izushi Castle, a 30 minute bus ride on the Zentan bus from JR Toyooka Station, on November 3rd. For more Information, please call 079-652-4806.



If You're Hanging Around Shiga Prefecture

**"Eigo-de Hiking" in Omihachiman

Get to know both the JET and Japanese residents of the Shiga-ken community while spreading the international spirit on this group hiking trip. The list of participants is already around 60 people and includes everyone from infants to elderly residents!

The hike will be held in Omihachiman on November 8th (from 9:30 AM) and is being organized by the Shiga PA and AJET.

Please email block6@ajet.net or check out Shiga's site on ES-Lwell.com for more information or to sign up!

Lake Biwa Forever!: Free Father-Son Photography Exhibit

The Lake Biwa Museum is now featuring a temporary exhibition of photographs taken of the Omi region (old name for Lake Biwa region) during the Showa ('26-'89) period. Mr. Ohashi, a local resident, took pictures of the daily lives of people, festivals and fishing techniques between 1955 and 1965, and his son recently returned to each location and took new photographs, thus detailing the changes in the landscape and people's lives over two generations.

The exhibition will be showing until November 16th. (www.lbm.go.jp/english/exhibits/special.html).

Lake Biwa Autumn Leaves

While you're in the area for the Lake Biwa Museum exhibit, why not explore a bit and enjoy the fall colors? Lake Biwa is Japan's largest lake and Koto (along the east side of the lake) has a very calm, rustic atmosphere. If you can't make the "Eigo-de Hike," stop by Omihachiman City, which was once the key traffic junction linking the ancient capital of Kyoto with the northern and eastern parts of Japan. There are also many historical ties to this city, with relics of wharfs (from a time when many people left from Shiga for different parts of the country, as well as for places in Asia) and once-prosper-



ous merchant houses.

Further east from Omihachiman, Higashiomi City (including Eigen-ji and Hyakusai-ji Temples) is also famous for their beautiful mountain leaves, which begin to change color in November. It's worth a day-trip!

Over in Kyoto Prefecture

The Famous Maples at Zenrin-ji Temple

Zenrin-ji is the head temple of the Jo-shu Seizan Zenrin-ji Sect of Buddhism. The temple, which has more than 1,100 years of history, is well-known for its beautiful garden, filled with many maple trees. In late November, the temple welcomes many guests to visit these

trees during their Autumnal Special Exhibition (Nov 10-30), from 9:00 to 22:00.

Nightview at Kiyomizudera

Located in a scenic place which overlooks the Amida-

mine and Inara mountains in the south, Kyoto City in the west and Atago and Arashiyama Mountains in the far distance, the beautifully-colored leaves are a bonus to the spectacular view from Kiyomizu. Come take the opportunity to see the scene at night (18:30 - 21:00), from middle to late November. The temple is located about a ten minute walk from Gojozaka Bus stop and night admission is 600 yen.

Flea Market at Toji Temple

Nothing to do during the long weekend (Nov 22 - 24)? Why not spend the weekend getting to know Kyoto and finding just the right unique holiday gifts for friends at home at the Kobo-san Flea Market, held at Toji Temple on the 21st of each month. Deals are better if you get there early and be sure to bargain hard!

Also Close by...

Osaka: English Rakugo

On November 6th, come to central Osaka for a free Rakugo (traditional Japanese sit-down comedy) performance at the Osaka Municipal Lifelong Learning Center. More information at www.osakademanabu.com/umeda



Getting to Know Some Random JETs

❖ **Name:** Lisa Lerud.

❖ **Please call me:** Lisa.

❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Awaji Shima (the best island in Japan!). Seven schools - I don't think anyone really wants me to name them all.

❖ **Birthday:** October 22.

❖ **Born and raised:** Honolulu, HA-WAII!

❖ **University and Degree:** University of Southern California: business entrepreneurship.

❖ **Travels:** Most recently, Argentina.

❖ **Hobbies:** Soccer, shopping, watching American College Football (Go Trojans!), scrap booking.

❖ **Staying another year?** Maybe.

❖ **Favorites:**

Food: Pizza and okonomiyaki.

Sports: Surfing, snowboarding and wakeboarding.

Music: Hawaiian, alternative, country.

Shop: In Japan, Loft!

TV Show: *Grey's Anatomy*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Ugly Betty*, *Brothers and Sisters*.

Movie: *The Big Green* (super old soccer movie), *Elf*, *Enchanted*.

❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Playing college soccer.

❖ **Best life experience:** Living here in Japan.

❖ **Motto to live by:** *Ride all the rides.*

❖ **Who would you like to meet?** Oprah.

❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** I wouldn't be a

good world president. I'd rather run my own company.

❖ **Best thing about JET so far?** The great people I've met (especially my fellow Awaji-ans!).

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET I...** get pissed. Especially when a sannensei pretends to not know questions that an ichi-nensei answers in a heartbeat.

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Definitely YAY. Although some students are "too cool" to actually collect their stamps for their stamp cards.

❖ **Funniest story involving a student?** I was playing tag with an elementary student and I swear I barely tapped him, and he fell down and twisted his knee.



❖ **Name:** Lester Somera.

❖ **Please call me:** Lester, Les.

❖ **School and Location in Hyogo:** Nakagawa, Yamaguchi, Touga Elementary schools, Asago.

❖ **How we know you:** The only Guamanian JET in all of Japan, apparently (Guamish, if

swimming.

Music: Bloc Party, Cat Power, Hieroglyphics, Interpol, Lupe Fiasco, RHCP, She and Him, Stereolab.

Shop: Amazon.com.

TV Show: *Dexter*.

Movie: *High Fidelity*.

❖ **Most Proud Achievement:** Devising a senior year sched-

you prefer — *even though it's incorrect, Mellen*).

❖ **Birthday:** I share a birthday with 2Pac and Adam Smith.

❖ **Born and raised:** Assorted (East Lansing, MI; Victoria, TX; Manila, Philippines; Yigo, Guam; New Orleans, LA). Citizen of the world and frequent outsider.

❖ **Family:** Standard nuclear.

❖ **University and Degree:** Tulane '08, sociology BA.

❖ **Other jobs you have had:** Research assistant, desk jockey.

❖ **Travels:** All over. I blend in with native populations very easily. Except here.

❖ **Hobbies:** Developing bad habits.

❖ **Staying another year? *sucks teeth*** Chotto... give me some time to think about it. Leaning towards yes though.

❖ **Favorites:**

Food: Mexican, Cajun, Italian, Thai, Indian.

Sports: Basketball,

ule with no courses before noon. I am a callow and under-achieving youth.

❖ **Best life experience:** Seeing the world (ongoing).

❖ **Motto to live by:** *Rarely is the question asked, is our children learning?*

❖ **I remember when...** It was all about the music, maaaaan.

❖ **What are you drinking?** Coffee. Or an Abita seasonal... I miss New Orleans.

❖ **Who would you like to meet?** People who know what the word "defenestration" means.

❖ **Why should we elect you President of the World?** You really shouldn't. Vote for the other guy.

❖ **Best thing about JET so far?** All the holidays.

❖ **If it was my last day on earth I would:** go back to Jacques-Imos in New Orleans to have some alligator cheese-cake.

❖ **Interesting fact about me:** I was benevolent enough to write this on short notice. {Editor's note: Yes, you were! Arigatou gozaimshita!!!}

❖ **My top tip for teaching:** YouTube is the key to internationalization.

❖ **When the class is TOO QUIET I...** I work at elementary schools. This never happens.

❖ **Bribery for students...YAY or NAY?** Yay! My kids fucking love stickers!

❖ **Funniest story involving a student:** I was bumping *Stillmatic* in the English room in between classes, and one of my fourth-graders strolled in, heard the music and started dancing and scratching to the beat. Good thing she didn't understand a damn word Nas was saying.

Better Know a Ken: Iwate

Story and photos
by Wang Hui Ling

Part 12 in our ongoing 47-part series highlighting the lives of JETs living in other prefectures. Yes, we blatantly stole the idea from Stephen Colbert's 434-part *Better Know a District*. If you know someone living in another ken, have them send in their story and pics to submit.hyogotimes@gmail.com.

One year and two months from the time I first stepped foot into Iwate Prefecture, I still feel that I do not know enough about this place that I currently call "home." Every day, there's something interesting I would learn about the biggest prefecture in Japan after Hokkaido.

Why, it was just in September that I learnt at the annual Local Culture Day that my town, Sumita, used to have gold mines. In fact, Iwate is regarded as one of the oldest producers of gold in Japan. The activity ended a long time ago after all the gold had been dug up.

In July, a farmer friend told me that the huge funnel-shaped metal containers sometimes seen by the side of the roads are actually machines that automatically separate white grain (rice crops) from their husks.

And did you know that at 2,038 metres tall, Mount Iwate is the highest point in the mountain ranges of Tohoku, and perfectly scalable in two days? A group of fervent ALTs and their friends will tell you how they do it every year.

Many of my friends from home



who came to visit me asked me what kind of prefecture Iwate is. If I had to name one characteristic, I would say that it is a rice-planting prefecture. Everywhere I turn, two things will never leave my sight — rice fields and mountains. Up until now, I believe that the tough, mountainous terrain prevents Iwate from making use of the huge land area it enjoys to expand its economy.

Both my mum and a friend were the ones that told me Iwate has an interesting brand of rice called 'love-at-first-sight' rice. They saw it on TV in Singapore on a travel programme. What? I had never heard of it. Later, I found out that the name is *Hitomebore*, meaning 'Love-at-first-sight' in Japanese, the brand of one type of rice grown and sold in Iwate. The rice must be good

enough for a travel show to be introducing it overseas.

Apart from rice, Maesawa in Iwate also boasts some of the best beef in Japan. Locals proudly claim that Maesawa beef is better than Kobe beef. The beef is so popular that there is an annual festival about the animal.

The Maesawa Ushi (cow) Festival takes place around October and attracts tourists all over Japan. The festival even has a mooing contest, where participants moo like a cow and the best 'mooer' gets, what else, but Maesawa beef as the prize. Last year, one of our very own JET ALTs won the top prize and even appeared in a variety show on national TV.

Other famous foods that Iwate has to offer includes the cold Morioka reimen, a ramen-like dish that has transparent noodles instead

of the yellow kind, and Wanko Soba, where one waitress serves only one customer at a time. The waitress stands next to the customer with a tray in hand, and putting down one dish containing only one mouthful of soba. The customer has to wolf down the mouthful of soba as fast as possible before the waitress continuously puts down bowl after bowl. This stops only after the customer makes a gesture that he wants to stop eating. Another authentic local dish, Ja-ja-men, is white noodles with a huge serving of special miso paste.

A famous omiyage from Iwate is senbei, a round-shaped rice cracker that comes in different flavours. The most common ones contain different types of nuts. Other exotic flavours include apple senbei, squid senbei, and almost-every-type-of-seafood senbei.

Like all other prefectures, Iwate has its fair share of festivals and places of interests for locals to enjoy and indulge.

One of the best places for hanami (sakura-viewing) parties is Tenshochi in Kitakami, which may not be as famous as Akita's



Kakunodate, but certainly does not lose out in charm and beauty when the sakura trees are in full bloom.

Geibikei and Genbikei are two gorges, both located in Ichinoseki, as different and as beautiful as Oirase Stream and Lake Towada in Aomori. Genbikei has deep, narrow valleys with steep sides, and Geibikei is the more popular one with a boat ride down the calm river flowing gently through the deep valley.

Ryusendo Cave in Iwaizumi Town is designated a Special

Natural Monument and one of the Top 3 stalactite caves in Japan. Roukando Cave in Sumita Town is a huge limestone cave with a waterfall of 29 meters high.

Beach lovers will like the Goishi coast and the Sanriku coastline, and winter sports lovers can find their places in Geto Ski Resort and Appi Ski Resort. Hiraizumi Town is a huge temple complex that is working towards inscription into the World Heritage list, and the many onsens in Hanamaki will give those in Akita a run for their money. Having summited Mount Iwate a few days ago, I can say it definitely ranks as one of the top places of interest for hikers.

As for festivals, the Hanamaki Festival in September ranks as one of the best with parades of deer dances and sometimes more than 150 portable shrines. The Japan Taiko Festival in Rikuzentakata features taiko-performing groups all over Japan.

The Ofunato Summer Festival with the lovely fireworks is a more modest version of the Omagari Fireworks Festival in Akita, but beautiful nevertheless, and close to home!



Travel Japan

The Mysterious Kobe Alien-Military Keyhole

By Matthew Stott

It was a balmy evening an *in-sufferably humid* evening in August 2007, when Emma and I decided to escape the blast furnace that passes for our apartment in the summertime and explore the streets of Tarumi.

With no clear destination in mind, our journey soon brought us to the foot of a gigantic mound, appearing suddenly and incongruously amidst towering apartment complexes typical of Japanese suburbia.

The mound was covered in grass, surrounded by a ditch and fenced off. We were unable to make a closer inspection, but the singular appearance of the landform led us to one of two possible conclusions: either it was some kind of suburban water storage or treatment plant, or we had stumbled upon a joint alien/US military underground facility, established for the purpose of conducting genetic experiments on the local population in preparation for the inevitable colonisation of the planet. (What other possible verdict could one reach?)



Intrigued, we returned to the site the following morning. What had looked positively otherworldly the previous evening looked even more so in the cold light of day. We had found Goshikizuka Kofun, an ancient megalithic tomb rising out of the summer grasses like a conical pyramid, and one of many scattered

entire period of Japanese history is named after these remarkable structures, built between the third and seventh centuries, and serving historically as tombs for members of the Imperial family and other important personages. The largest and most impressive is Daisen Kofun, the burial place — so tradition has it — of Emperor Nintoku in Sakai, Osaka Prefecture.

In fact, an Like Daisen, Goshikizuka looks,



when viewed from above, like a giant keyhole (albeit much smaller than its Osaka cousin) with a high, conical rear section and low, square-shaped front section. Unlike Daisen, which is heavily wooded, surrounded by three moats, and — being the tomb of an Emperor — blocked off to the public, Goshikizuka (the “five colour hill”) looks very much as it would have at the time of its construction between the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

Covered in over two million stones and crowned with a ring of terracotta vessels known as haniwa, the place seems completely out of context here in suburban Kobe. It would be more at home, methinks, on the pre-Christian Salisbury Plain, with druids sacrificing a virgin in the centre of the terracotta ring. At any rate, it is a terrible shame that such a striking and important site should find itself tucked away — discarded, almost — amidst Tarumi’s drab condominiums.

After the building of the JR and Sanyo Railways partially destroyed the *kofun* (lit.: “old grave”), the Ministry of Education, Hyogo Prefecture and the city of Kobe jointly funded its restoration in the 1960s and ’70s. (For an interesting contrast, across the road from Goshikizuka there is a comparatively untouched smaller kofun, covered in grass.) Though the project failed to recover two-thirds of the square front section of the mound, which originally ran all the way to the sea, Goshikizuka is still the largest *kofun* in Hyogo, at 194 metres in length and 18 metres at its highest point.

At one stage, a museum was planned for the site, but since the Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995, that has been unlikely. In its place at the foot of the mound is a tiny hut staffed by a friendly old gentleman who, while he can offer no information on any alien/military conspiracy



connected with the facility (sorry to disappoint you), will provide you with written information in English on the history of the tomb and its restoration.

Also on display in the room are computer-rendered models of fifth century Goshikizuka and its local geography, as well as relics discovered during excavation work. From the hut, a stairway leads to the top of the mound: a vantage point offering one of the best views of the Akashi-Kaikyo Bridge that you can get without being in an aircraft.

Goshikizuka Kofun is about 10 minutes’ walk west from JR Tarumi Station, but getting there is a little tricky. Head north towards the Jusco building, head west to the traffic lights, cross the road and head north past the little shrine until, on your left, you reach a red pedestrian walkway. That walkway is marked with a sign that says “Goshikizuka Kofun,” though that won’t help you much unless you can read kanji (*Ed. Note* — 五色塚古墳). Fortunately, the path also happens to be marked with keyholes, and if you follow these, you should have little difficulty finding the *kofun*.



Love and Relationships:

To all the Gaijin Girlies

By Lub and Lub

This one is for the Gaijin Girlies... Guys, you can just skip ahead to the next article.

This is my first submission to the *Hyogo Times* and I'm not sure how many Hyogo peeps it will apply to. That being said, I feel like unless I get this topic out of the way first, then the rest of my creative juices (yes I said juices) will not flow.

When I arrived here in Japan, all wet between the ears and ready to shape the young and eager minds of Japan's youth, I didn't look twice at Japanese guys (J-boys for those in the know). I mean, quite frankly, I liked my men to be men! Give me a 6-foot tall strapping hunk of man flesh!

I wanted someone who could protect me from stampeding horses or, god forbid, stampeding cockroaches! Not these guys who spend



four hours primping their hair and wearing more pink than me!

After a couple of months, ever so slowly, things began to change. It started with the cute guy at the 7/11, then the handsome guy with the shoes playing with his band in Tit Park, and then there's the moment when you first hear these words come out of your mouth: "Oh he's sooooo pretty!!...."

Oh how times have changed! Who are these beautiful gods of all things fashionable, with their smooth faces and deep, dark eyes?! Yes, that's right — I am obsessed with J-boys!!

Now one may think that I consider myself to be blessed as here I am in Japan with so much eye candy that my corneas will get cavities (ok, I know that's lame :-b). Well, here I am one year later since I became single and my bed still sleeps one (and not for lack of trying!).

Don't get me wrong,

Japan has been a great place to be single. It has really helped me find myself, I have been having a blast and all that other stuff, but everyone likes a bit of attention now and again, and quite frankly I want someone to take me to KFC on Christmas day!

So ladies, I have decided to share with you some of the things that I have learned about dating those elusive J-boys.

Fortune Favours the Brave

The best ones are the quiet ones. I've found the best J-boys are generally shy. In Japan, there is a negative image associated with a guy hitting on a girl (they call it Nampa). It's kind of the Japanese version of being a dirty "player." So unfortunately the only way you are going to get them to talk to you is if you do the talking first. It's time to be brave, check your hair, march over there and introduce yourself!

The Blonde Factor

Now this one cuts both ways. Blonde hair is considered very attractive in Japan, so fellow Goldilocks rejoice! That's the good news, now here's the bad. A lot



of J-boys often don't believe foreign girls like them. This is further compounded by the fact that they have a stereotype of us as being very dominant and pushy and therefore the spectre of a blonde foreigner can really set a J-boy in a position of insecurity.

Location, location, location

When you go hunting for your very own J-boy you must choose your hunting grounds wisely. If you just want to get hit on and a little attention then go to a club... e.g. Club Pure, (Osaka) where there is nampa galore. It'll be just like being at home.

If you are looking for that spe-

cial someone then I suggest that you sign up for a language exchange partner, join a club (and fall in love with your instructor), hang out in the hallways at karaoke (lots of cute drunk guys to talk to), or sit next to someone studying English in a café.

There are also the gaijin bars and pubs but these are pretty hit and miss. Anyone you do meet there will probably be able to speak English (a plus) but in my experience they are usually populated by the usual drunken ALT's and old salarymen.

Your Friend is my Friend (as long as he's cute)

In Japan, it's common to date your co-workers. However if the 50-year old men at your school don't appeal to you, then your best bet is friends of friends. Try to build up your Japanese social network, get your J-

friends to bring their J-boy friends out next time; you never know who you could meet.

Also in Japan they have a special kind of dating called Goukon. These are basically group blind dates, where a group of girls and a group of guys all go out together for dinner/drinks. Kinda like speed dating but without the time limits. This is a great pressure-free way of making new friends/boyfriends.

Know a little Japanese

And by this I mean the language, not the little old lady down the street. If you can pick up some basic nihongo, it will allow you to start a conversation with a cute Japanese guy, hopefully your luck will be in and he will be able to speak some English in return, but then again, who needs language when you have beer?

Now of course all of the above things are generalisations and as the JET motto goes "every situation is different." But I hope I have given you some insight based on my personal experiences about dating in Japan.

If any girls (or boys) have some success stories, or just some entertaining stories about dating in Japan, please send them along. We would love to hear them. Also if you have actually managed to stick with me and read this article the entire way through, get a life! Just kidding! But seriously if you have and you have any questions please send them along and maybe next issue we can do a bit of an Aunt Aggie (Dear Abby) thing. Good hunting ladies!!

Lub and Lub xxx



The Family Visit

By Maeve O'Connell



Last September, I experienced what every JET will probably experience at some stage during their time in Japan — The Family Visit. Excited as I was to see them (them, in this case, being my two younger brothers, Frank, 21 and Fergus, 16), I was a bit worried about a few things.

There were the obvious concerns — death-pit gaijin traps, getting lost for days in the Tokyo underground, mukade attacks — but what I was most worried about was that they would come all this way and have a less-than-spectacular holiday.

This led me to think a lot about the day we had planned to spend at my school. Of course, I wanted them to come, to see where I worked, how cute the kids were, and basically, to understand why I stayed on the second year. The thing was, it was their holiday and I didn't want them to be nervous or spend time worrying unnecessarily.

Since coming to Japan, I have become used to speaking in front of

groups of kids (and adults) who have no idea what I am on about and think I'm kind of nuts, but my brothers were definitely not used to that. Japan was completely new to them and they are not really public-speaking kind of boys. They were afraid of awkward silences, not being able to understand the students, and just feeling out of place.

Luckily, the JET gods were kind and the day went brilliantly. It started with an introduction to a group of smiling teachers at the morning meeting. Two extra chairs were put beside my desk and the kyoto-sensei had written "Welcome Mr. O'Connell!" in huge letters on the whiteboard behind his desk. Omiyage were exchanged and the three of us were ushered off to the meeting room, which was to be our base for the day — off to a good start straight away! The teachers had set up the timetable specifically so all the kids would have the opportunity to meet the special guests.

I work at a small school, which also

happens to be very new. We have only 40 kids in each grade and only two grades in total, so it was possible to do this in un-intimidating groups of 20 at a time. We were on duty first class, so about halfway through it, two students came down and escorted us to our English room, where the boys were greeted with twenty excited little faces and a huge round of applause. They took to the superstar status straight away.

Each class followed the same routine — two kids would come down to get us, the boys would be applauded for just being themselves, we'd have some introductions and then the kids would ask their pre-prepared questions. We got all the usual ones — "What is your favourite Japanese food?", "Can you use chopsticks?", "Do you like anime?", and "Do you play computer games?" (after which there was a nice intercultural bonding moment over *Final Fantasy*).

They also got a few more unusual

questions — "Do you have a strong grip?" (which inevitably led to an arm wrestle), "What is your favourite insect?", and "Do you like pigs?"

Once the class loosened up and the kids felt more comfortable, they broke out the love and relationship questions. "How many girlfriends do you have?" "What girl in the room do you like?" "When was your first love?" The boy who asked that last one surprised us all a little when he happily revealed that he fell in love for the first time at the age of four.

Besides the classroom visits, the boys spent time with the kids in a couple of other ways. Before lunch, Fergus joined the second grade kids for a Phys Ed. lesson. Despite having never played, his teammates seemed impressed with his softball abilities, which they put down to the fact that he plays tennis. From our seats in the shade, Frank and I could hear shouts of, "Good catch!", "Nice throw!" along

with the occasional and very intense "Focus!!" from a boy who didn't really seem to know what it meant but liked to shout it out randomly all the same.

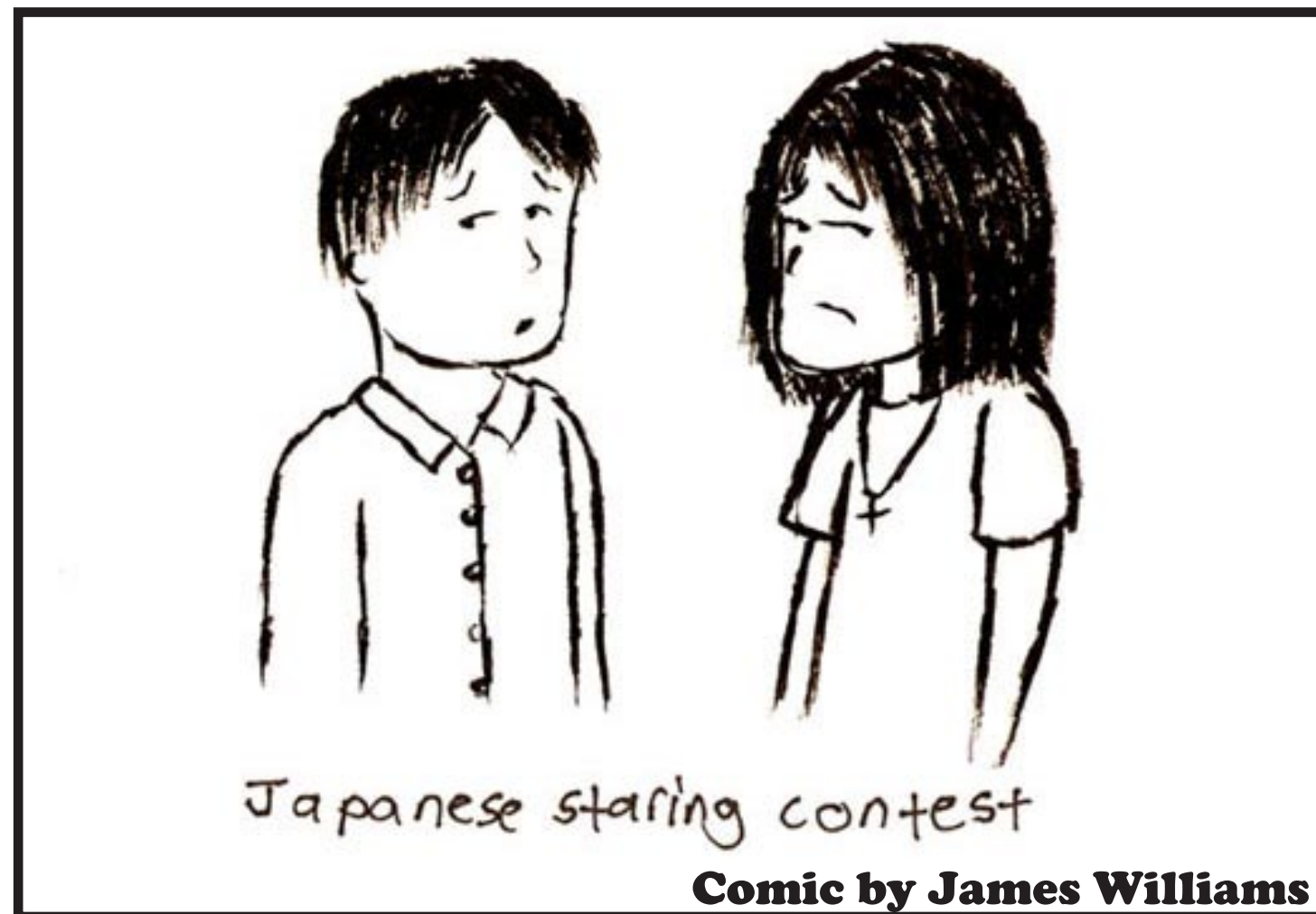
At lunch time, they were given a crash course in shogi, with a set my JTE had given them as a gift. One of the boys decided that there was only so much he could teach us in the short twenty minutes we had, so the next day, he took it upon himself to draw out diagrams and write instructions, in English, for my two brothers to take home with them. As a thank you, Frank and Ferg wrote him a letter and gave him some stickers. Judging by the look on his face when I gave it to him, they pretty much made his year.

All in all, it was a great day. My brothers loved the kids and they, in turn, loved meeting new people, especially Fergus who is very close to their own age. They really enjoyed comparing schools, and thought it was great that they studied a lot of the same sub-

jects, and had about the same amount of homework.

Two months on, some of them still come into class grumbling about how they wished they lived in Ireland and had three months of summer holidays. They thought Frank was incredibly cool when he told them he was in a band and showed them his CD, and Fergus incited near hysteria when he produced an English version of *Death Note*.

My JTE was happy to see the kids practicing their English. My kyoto-sensei was happy because he loves English and loves to see the students interacting with international visitors. I was just happy because everyone else was so pleased. By the time it came to go home, the whole day was beginning to feel a bit like a Disney film. Two days later, as he was getting ready to leave, Fergus summed up the whole thing by saying it was his best day in Japan, and I have to say that so far, it is one of my best memories too.





By Lester Somera

I went to get a haircut the other day, and wandered into a Himeji salon staffed by stylists who looked as though they moonlight as nightclub hosts in their off-hours. As is customary at such establishments the world over, I started chatting with the barbers about life while one of them (“Genji,” according to his nameplate) cut my hair.

Unfortunately, we didn’t share a language proficiency, which made communication a bit difficult. One of them resorted to pantomime to ask me about the number of Japanese girls I had slept with since arriving in Hyogo: “Eto... eto... you... Nihonjin

jousei... eto, eto... *thrusts index finger into cupped palm* sekkusu, wa-karimasu?”

I was surprised to then learn that the questioner was only 21. I would have thought that some of the younger city-dwelling kids would have retained some of the material from the English classes that they were forced to struggle through since first grade. After all, how hard could it be to construct a crass sexual question if you’ve had twelve years to learn how to do it? In my first-year Japanese class, all we ever did was try and figure out how to say obscene things.



This week, though, I had an epiphany. After I completed a lesson for my fifth-graders about ba-

sic subject-verb-object agreement, I started chatting with my JTE about how it went. He told me that it was fun and the kids enjoyed it, but that it wasn’t important to teach the kids about English grammar in elementary school. I flipped the f*ck out (Only on the inside, though. I guess I’m truly assimilating...) and suddenly understood.

Conversations with other JETs who teach at elementary schools reveal that this seems to be a common thread in the Japanese school system’s philosophy about early English instruction. This line of thinking asserts that for the first six years that the kids are exposed to English, we should make the class fun by playing games to develop their enthusiasm for the language, but we shouldn’t try to challenge them to actually learn the foundations of the language, because that’s difficult and it might discourage them — save the challenging material for when they’re apathetic teenagers.

Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy my job and it’s a great feeling when I

hear one of my kids correctly pronounce the word “dribble” without being prompted. However, I think that once they hit the fifth grade they should start on basic grammar, so it is rather infuriating to hear teachers severely underestimate their students’ capacity for learning a foreign language and insist on making English ‘fun’ to the exclusion of actually teaching them.

In the aforementioned fifth-grade class, the homeroom teacher went

up to the board while I was teaching and insisted it was “very difficult.” Twenty minutes later my kids were stringing together sentences six or seven words long, while the teacher looked on, dumbfounded.

The whole point of this diatribe is that if the foundations of the English language (how to assemble a sentence) were emphasized strongly enough in elementary school, then kids wouldn’t have such a hard time later on with language exercises that

aren’t rote memorization. Even if elementary school ALTs are only supposed to be there so that the kids can hear a native speaker’s voice, we could at least try teaching them basic structures. They’ll have an easier time of it in junior and senior high, and maybe our future Genjis will be capable of uttering a couple of English phrases when confronted with foreign customers or, at the very least, be able to ask them, “How many?”

Subject-Verb-Object Lesson/Game (5th/6th grade level)

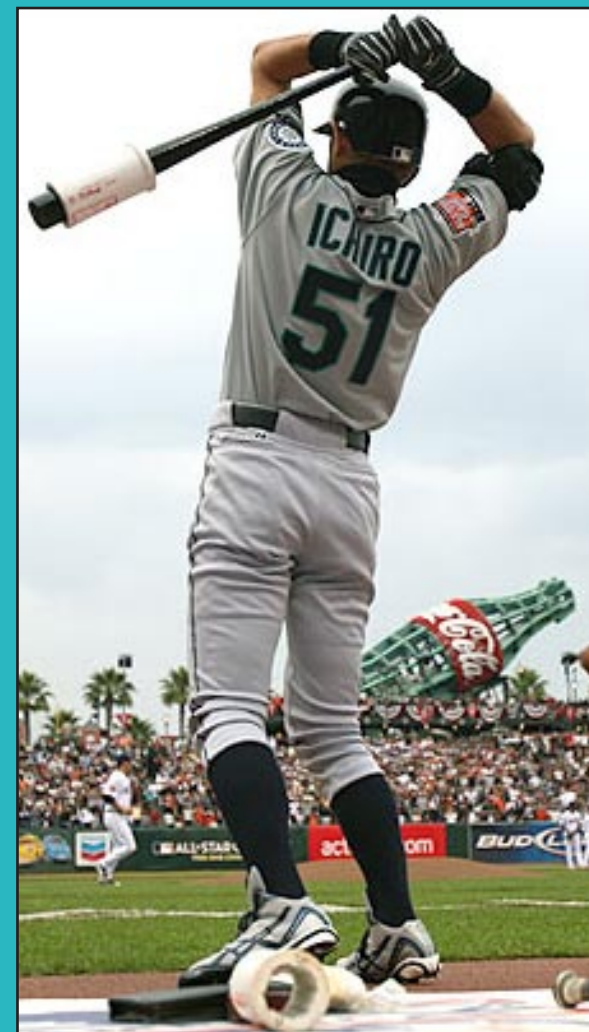
This should be done after the kids have done a sports lesson, because they’ll need to have a small vocabulary of verbs related to sports (pitch, rebound, throw, shoot, block, etc.). You’ll need flash cards with the words, a computer, and a projector. You’ll also need to download sports videos from YouTube to display on the screen. Fortunately, there are tons of them available, and most of the popular videos are going to be of spectacular sports plays, so it won’t be hard to keep the kids’ attention.

Drill them with the flash cards first, then set up the board like so:

The basketball player _____/s the basketball.
The soccer player _____/s the soccer ball.
The baseball player _____/s the baseball/a home run.

Plug an action verb into a blank, then ask them to say each component of the sentence separately (subject is しゅご, verb is うごき and object is なにを). Ask them to say the whole sentence, then change the verbs in each sentence and repeat. Practice this for about ten to fifteen minutes. It is very important that everyone understands how the structure works before the game starts, so emphasize what each component in the sentence does (I had pictures of Thierry Henry, Tracy McGrady, and Ichiro as reference points for the subjects) and do a quick speaking drill before you fire up the projector.

Split the class into teams. Then have the representatives come up, two at a time. Play a short clip on the screen of a player doing an action (say, a Hanshin Tiger hitting a home run), then call on the first person to raise their hand. That person then has to give you the full sentence (The baseball player hit a home run) to get their team a point. If it’s correct, then the pair has to say it together. Repeat the sentence for the class, get everybody to repeat it, then call up the next pairs. This works very well with small teams because the kids don’t have to wait very long to go again and will stay engaged. As the game goes on, they’ll get much more comfortable with the basic S-V-O structure and you can use it as a springboard for future lessons. It’s worked great for all the classes I’ve tried it in so far.



Rafting and Canyoning in Shikoku

By Joseph Schott

This fall, sixteen brave, good-looking JETs set out for adventure on the Yoshino River in Shikoku, Japan. It was Hyogo AJET's annual rafting and canyoning trip with the friendly and bilingual staff of Happy Raft (www.happyraft.com/en).

You might be thinking, "Sixteen people packing into two vans for a trip in the wilderness? And they're all really, really good looking? I've seen horror movies that start out this way." Indeed, as you might gather from the picture of our dear editor's terrified face, the trip ranged from the serenely beautiful to simply scary. Ever gone down a five-story waterfall on a rope? It's fun!

We stayed overnight in a cabin, and set out the next morning for the river. The tour guides supplied all of our equipment: a wetsuit, a fleece shirt for warmth, a windbreaker for protection from the cold, a helmet, and of course, the paddles and the rafts. Then we piled into the rafts in teams of six or seven and set off.

Our guide had us take on the first



series of rapids macho-style, i.e. no raft. This was so we wouldn't panic and would know how to act if we fell out of the boat during some of the more intense parts. I was glad we did because water in the rapids is true to the term and moves fast! The first idea is to keep your legs up and forward so that they hit the rocks instead of your head. The other idea is not to drown. The first idea is supposed to help with the second, but it mostly just takes experience.

After that, we got back in the rafts and took on some more challenging rapids. I will say with a note of pride that our raft was the only one of the six boats on the river to fully capsize, catapulting our editor somewhere in the river, and trapping me underneath. I don't know whether someone tipped them off that we were a group of JETs, but the guides did an excellent job of helping us have a great time without hurting ourselves.

The following day was Canyoning, which is composed of two steps. First, they drive you to the top of a mountain. Second, you go down the mountain. Like anything else, the fun is in the details! Although we started the trek hiking along a trail, we soon came to a waterfall. I was immediately impressed

by how clear the water was. I had never really seen natural spring water like this and didn't realize how cold it would be when I jumped into it. Hint: summer is peak season and therefore more expensive, but you probably won't need two wet suits to stave off hypothermia either.

The first major event was going down a natural waterslide. From the top, it was eight metres down, or about two stories. There is no water tension to speak of when falling into water with a waterfall, and the human body tends to just shoot straight down to the bottom. For this reason, it's important to be very careful when jumping into waterfalls. Somehow, our guides had tested this spot (who knows how) and found that the pool below was deep enough to be safe. I'm a fairly trusting person, so I went for it.

Flying down a wall of smooth rocks with so much water was a truly unique experience. I shot into a deep, cold space between gigantic rocks, the water completely submerging me. My eyes were closed, I was totally disoriented, and the noise was intense. Picture being in a bathtub and another bathtub full of water is dumped on top of you. My hands shot out and found the rock wall



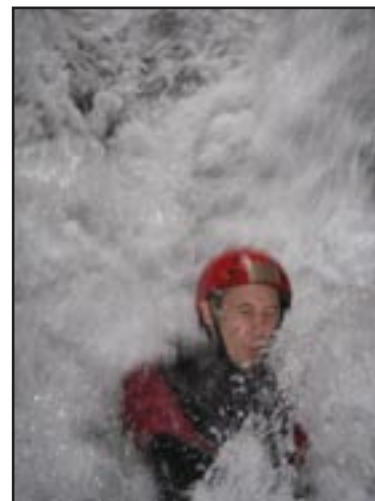
in front of me. My body regained buoyancy, I rose back up, and climbed out sputtering on the rocks.

The second major stop was a zip line that crossed a huge gorge. We volunteered our brave editor to be first, as she was the lightest and least likely to break the rope. We watched as she took the handles of the mechanism in her hands, and held our breath as the guide let her go. But something was wrong...

She had come off the cliff kind of weird and her legs shot up in the air over her body. In this position, she had trouble gripping the handle bars, and suddenly slipped off of the line, with perhaps 10 metres of air between her and the sharp rocks below. Then, the rope that the guide had carefully and discreetly tied to her harness caught, and she was left suspended by her waist, whizzing across the canyon. The guide on the other side caught

her and set her down on the ground. Once he was sure he was okay, he snapped one of the better pictures of the trip.

The Hyogo AJET rafting trip won't come around again until next fall, but you can go down to Shikoku whenever you want! Once the weather warms back up, I recommend checking it out for rafting and canyoning. This trip was absolutely one of the coolest experiences during my time here.



Going...



...going...



...gone!



A Hyogo Times Restaurant Review:

Kobe Ramen Ramentary

By Andrew Tamashiro

Kobe Ramen Daiichiasahi

神戸ラーメン 第一旭
Kobe City, Chuo-ku,
Motomachikoukadouri 1-112
兵庫県神戸市中央区元町高架通
1-112

<http://r.tabelog.com/hyogo/A2801/A280102/28002742/dtmap/>

I had visited this spot back at my orientation in September, but didn't take pictures. I was also running around in 85-degree heat in a shirt and tie, so I wasn't really relaxed and able to take in the food the way I wanted.

It's a fairly large restaurant, probably able to seat up to 35 people. Their menu is prominently displayed out front, with Ramens A, B and C, only differing by the amount of pork included. A comes with no meat, B with five or six pieces, and C with about 10 pieces. They mean it when they say *oomori*.

The default soup base is shoyu, thinner and lighter than my typical choice, but it wasn't bad. It lacked the depth and punch of a fattier broth, but still provided a nice backdrop for the rest



of the bowl. The noodles were nice and hard, just the way I ordered them, and bamboo shoots, bean sprouts, and green onions topped with a nice dusting of pepper rounded out a bowl of above average, but not great ramen.

The meat, despite a large amount of fat, wasn't as tender as I had hoped. Seeing the centimeter-wide strip of fat that lined each piece had me salivating at the thought of soft, juicy pork, but alas I was mistaken. It was somewhat tough, and I resorted to pulling the fat off the pieces of meat before I ate them since they

were serving no purpose. The veggie toppings were nice and crisp, and the pepper gave the bowl a nice kick. I'm not usually one to add pepper, but I was

glad for it here.

I also ordered a half-sized fried rice, which came with shreds of pork amongst the veggies. This had to be one of the oiliest plates of fried rice I've ever had. There was visible grease moving about on the plate as I finished my serving. It was fairly decent, but the slipperiness of the dish was astounding even for a dish that relies on oil. I finished it, of course, but I felt like I should have been rubbing it down with napkins first.

One of the more interesting things I saw was a takeout menu that included the ramen. I've seen meat, fried rice, gyoza and other side dishes available for takeout, but can't recall ever seeing the ramen included.

Kobe Ramen is pretty good, but I'd do a few things differently next time. I'd skip the meat toppings in my ramen, and probably opt for something other than fried rice as a side. The gyoza looked decent, and the ramen can stand on its own without chashu.



LOVELY JUBBLY

Mens and Womens
Hair
Color
Perm
Extensions
Make up
Kitsuke

20%
discount
for
JETs!

For appointments, contact Ayame at
ayame@lovelyjubbly.jp or **079-233-1186**



THE PLACE TO GO FOR HAIR...

Just 5 minutes from Himeji on the Sanyo line at Shikama Station! Lovely Jubbly is where it's at for perfect style, Western products and extraordinary service... all in English! What could make this a more enticing deal?

How about a 20% discount on all services!*

*products not included

