

October 2010

HYOGO TIMES



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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 15th of each month to: publications@hyogo.ajet.net

http://hyogoajet.net/wiki/Hyogo_Times

We're also on Facebook!

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS



Konnichiwa,

I am listening to a song called Take Me Out on Youtube by a group called Atomic Tom. It is a great song but even greater because recently their instruments were stolen and the video was of them playing their song on a NYC subway only using Iphone instrument apps. The song reminded me of the miners in Chile and how they survived the ordeal. Recently, as news about how one of the Chilean miners berried underground named his newborn daughter "Esperanza" spread around the world many of my

Japanese colleagues and friends are commenting about how they now know what my names means in Spanish.

And so, the topic of hope has been on my mind. As I watch the leaves slowly turn colors around me and hear about the recent birth of my new nephew, Xavier, back home (see picture) I am realizing that although things change for the worse or for better there is a constant, hope. Then another coincidence as I was google searching another topic at school the other day I came upon the blog of a girl living in Seattle who just graduated from college and was anxious about finding a job in this economy. She posted this quote, "Do not look forward in fear to the changes of life; rather look to them with full hope as they arise." I will heed this advice. I hope you do too.

Ever hopeful,

Esperanza

Prefectural darlings,

Autumn has arrived! You can feel it in the air! You can taste it in the kabocha! You can see it in the kaki trees, barren already of leaves but laden with fruit. And you can smell it in the smoke as everybody burns the leftover nature gomi they have lying around on their farms. If September was the long month, then October is... tell me I'm reading this wrong... the month without gods?? I hear it's because they all go to Shimane-ken. I suppose they flee in fear of the shenanigans perpetrated by JETs all over Japan during the month of October, as we dress-a-travesty and parade around the schools teaching kids about a magical holiday where for one day you can become anything you like and get candy for doing so.

cherry blossom both in beauty and ubiquity. Go on out and do some momiji hunting; take a bike ride around Himeji on the 23rd. It's for a good cause! (end shameless plug).. Impress your fellow JETs with your costume crafting ability and make your way on down to the Himeji Halloween party! (okay really I'll stop with the shameless plugs now I guess..) Hope the cooling temperatures treat you well,

Don't get a cold,

Lemmon

October, really, is my favorite month. Green momiji trees are delightful, and like a promise all through spring and summer. You just know that once fall arrives, they'll burst into their full glory of showmanship, rivaling the



Message from the PR

DAVID NAM
PHOTO BY LAUREN MCRAE

Salutations my fellow associates,

How are we all doing? Hopefully you are all well and enjoying this lovely weather. Is it still autumn? (What season was October again?) Please excuse my rambling. I'm taking shots of whiskey since it's the exam period. Don't worry, it's after school.

By the time you read this, you will all have had fun dressing up for Halloween and generally making fools of yourselves. Soon, however, I believe we'll be getting back into some serious business. In a few days we will all be attending the mid-year seminars once again; getting something done in the process, as always.

I hope you have been satisfied with the services provided by us. If standards have been breached, feel free to notify your friendly AJET staff, so we may better serve you in the months to come. On a more formal note: Hyogo AJET will continue to do its best to provide you with a minimum of two events per month, for your gratification. You're welcome. Now, where did I leave that shot glass? ●



MAIGO IN HYOGO



Can you crack the code and solve the mystery? Where in Hyogo is this crawling crab? Guess the location!

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.

J-Word Play

BY PAUL SCHUBLE

病気になったら行かない医者って
何でしょう？

Answer:

会社

This time our question means "What doctor don't you go to if you get sick?" The answer lies in the reading of 医者 (いしゃ; doctor). If you ignore the kanji and just think of words that incorporate いしゃ, you will no doubt eventually come up with 会社(かいしゃ), which means company. Doesn't translate so well into English, but there you have it.



Kicchiri Kitchen EGGS!

TRAVIS LOVE

I've been sleeping on a lot of spare futons this fall, and one of the things I love most about crashing with other JETs is cooking breakfast the next morning, when they let me. I know some people don't necessarily eat breakfast, and while I'll admit there are times when I too have grabbed a convenience store jam sandwich as I dash for the train, it's almost always nicer to have a leisurely breakfast. The morning is a time of contemplation, for questions ranging from "What are we doing today?" to "Why does vodka hate me?" To that end, here are some relatively foolproof breakfast options to enjoy while you're contemplating.

A note: Unless you are in a dreadful hurry, you always want to cook eggs over medium or medium-low heat. Eggs cooked over high heat can go from tender to rubbery in about two seconds, and nobody likes rubbery eggs.

The Fridge Omelet

3 eggs, well-beaten
1/4 onion, chopped
2-3 green piman peppers,

stemmed, seeded, and
chopped
Shredded cheese
2 Tbsp. butter or other oil.

In a nonstick frying pan, saute the vegetables in a little butter, over medium heat, until the onions are translucent. Set aside. Melt the remaining butter in the pan, and add the eggs. Continue cooking over medium heat, stirring slowly and shaking the pan occasionally to cook the eggs evenly. When shaking the pan does not do anything, turn off the heat. Add some cheese over 1/3 of the omelet, and some vegetables. Using your spatula, flip the vegetable-laden third into the center of the omelet. Then, slide the omelet onto a plate, bare side first, and use the pan and spatula to make the final fold. Season with salt and pepper, and serve with a slice of toast and some sliced fruit.

Serves 1

** You can use whatever vegetables are available, but be sure to saute hard vegetables, (peppers,) or vegetables with high water content, (mushrooms,) before using them in an omelet.

Egg in a Basket

1 egg
1 slice bread
1 tsp. oil or butter

Heat the oil in a nonstick frying pan. Tear a hole in the middle of the bread, big enough for the egg. Put the bread in the frying pan. Put the egg in the hole. Cook over medium heat, flipping when the white of the egg is mostly solid. Cook 1-2 minutes on the other side, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and serve.

** These whip up quick, so if you are one of fifteen people in a house, they work quite nicely.

And, for those who don't have eggs, we suggest Pancakes.

Easy Pancakes

2 cups hotcake mix, ホットケーキミックス
water
1-2 tsp oil

Add water slowly, stirring with a fork, until you reach the desired consistency. Thin batter makes big flat pancakes, thick batter makes small thick pancakes. In a nonstick frying pan over medium heat, heat the oil, and spoon batter into desired sized pancakes. (Don't do too many or they'll fuse together.) When the edges of the pancakes are not bubbling, and dry-looking, flip the pancakes over. Flip pancakes only once. Continue cooking until both sides are golden brown and serve.

If you use Japanese hotcake mix and can decipher the directions on the package, great. If not, mix these together. 5 parts flour / 3 parts sugar / dash salt / 1 part baking powder ●

BY CAITLIN ORR

The Sirens of Titan

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

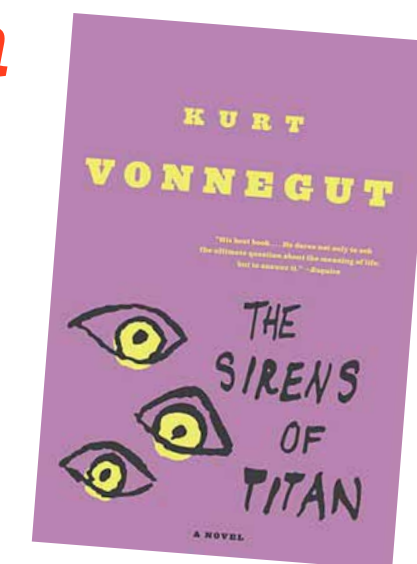
Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., by my known personal standards, is quite possibly the God of creativity and existential thought.....at least as far as putting it to literature goes. Lately, I've decided to 'go back' and read some of his classics. For those who haven't yet already read *Cat's Cradle* please do, as it will make your head spin in all the right ways. I am definitely one who has added "busy, busy, busy" to my list of appropriate responses of the question, "how are you?"

The oldie-but-goodie book of this month for me was, however, *The Sirens of Titan*. A novel in which Vonnegut not only seeks to question what the meaning of life is and why we are here, but also seems to, well, answer it. If you were a fan of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, but weren't quite sure "42" sufficed, then I highly recommend *The Sirens of Titan* as your next plan – though, the latter came before the former and undoubtedly influenced Douglas Adams, there's still a chance some of us read one before the other.

The Sirens of Titan begins with our two main characters meeting for the first time in a fabulously decorated, rich and luxurious house (complete with a magical waterfall): Winston Niles Rumfoord (an astronaut, who, while traveling space wound up in a chrono-synclastic

infundibulum and now can only materialize at infrequent intervals on earth) and Malachi Constant (the wealthiest man of the 22nd century). Rumfoord, as a consequence of being in the infundibulum, now has the gift of seeing the future and relates to Constant the events that will unfold in his near future, including Malachi's travels to Mars, Mercury, and finally to Saturn's moon Titan. (If you are wondering what a "chrono-synclastic infundibulum" is, then you can refer to Vonnegut's own definition which says that it's a place where "all the different kinds of truths fit together" – the effect of being caught in said infundibulum is essentially to become a kind of quantum wavelength.)

The book primarily revolves around a Martian invasion of Earth, but the events leading up to the war and the events afterwards are really the fruit of the novel. I don't feel I am at liberty to spoil much of what occurs as the mystery is part of the experience, but I can say that there is nothing quite like reading about "The church of God the utterly indifferent" to make you question your own humanity. Vonnegut has a history of pushing people to reconsider the obscure belief that humans are somehow the center point of the universe. It's a humbling piece of work, for starters, but it is also one that makes you question your own truths which you hold



relevant in your life. As all the followers of the new religion recall: "Take care of the People, and God Almighty will Take Care of Himself."

The Sirens of Titan was first published in 1956 and was Vonnegut's second novel after *Player Piano*. In his later years, Vonnegut would grade each of his novels, giving *The Sirens of Titan* an A and *Player Piano* a B. His latter works seemed to score higher on his personal scale, though only two made the A-plus group: *Cat's Cradle* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

So, if you are feeling sad and depressed and want to feel happy again, DON'T read this book – but, if you are willing to ask yourself some of the ultimate questions about human existence and get an honest opinion about the fragility of life, then I suggest being brave and reading *The Sirens of Titan*. I do, though, also recommend having a beer on hand to help with the aftermath. ●

Desperate [Japanese] Housewives

BY RIKA SAWATSKY

My mother always told me to never marry a Japanese man, and I wasn't sure as to why until quite recently. Returning to Japan as an adult, I hadn't noticed that Japanese men tried to disrespect me so much as they were simply scared of me. So, to get a better idea of the Japanese housewife's stance on Japanese men, I went and partied with a bunch of middle-aged women.

These housewives are the wild type; they were banned from a local bar because they danced on the counter and mooned other customers. This time, however, they invited me to one of their tamer hangouts at one woman's home. We watched K-Pop on her 102-in. flat screen while knocking back beers and feasting on her cooking.

It didn't take long before the complaints about their husbands came out. I suggested that there had to be something positive about their relationships but received the unanimous response, "That's why we drink, and that's why we're fat," followed by uproarious laughter.

I pushed the matter further. Wouldn't it bother them, though, if their husbands frequented brothels or had affairs? It turned out that our host's husband had had an affair, and she put her all into repairing their marriage because divorce was not an option. Divorce is stacked against a Japanese woman, right down

to the rhetoric. She either "goes away" as a bride or "is sent home" and thus shames her parents. But now, several years after her husband's return, my host regrets not having left him to his mistress. Another woman chimed in, "I don't care if my husband gets kidnapped by his own prostitute." The only thing that bothered these women about their husbands' use of prostitutes was the resultant blow to their finances. They saw a clear divide between seeking physical satisfaction and an emotional affair. They even sympathized for the men who felt pressured to visit prostitutes when out on the town with coworkers.

What really irritated these women was that their husbands were never home when they were needed. During the early stages of their marriages, their husbands would always be out with younger women and coworkers, leaving the children and housework to them. After the kids grew up and the women were finally free to pursue their own interests, their husbands were at home demanding their company because they had become "too old and ugly" for their own friends. These ladies cited other women in the neighborhood for supportive evidence. The usual conversation they overhear at the local onsen goes something like this. "I hate how my husband is home all the time now that he's retired. It's tolerable when he stays in his room, but does

he really have to come out of the room to eat? Kanannwa (unbearable)!" So, was there ever a time that they loved their husbands? No, not really. They were more acquaintances than friends. One woman married her husband because she had lent him 300,000 yen and wanted to make sure he paid her back. Another figured she may as well, but remained in love with her ex-boyfriend for the first ten years of her marriage.

Their sex lives aren't any good either because they find their husbands repulsive. One woman kept shutting her husband down until he gave up altogether. Another tries to get a year's worth of sex over with while intoxicated during New Years. That being the case, I asked if they ever considered having affairs. In a rare moment of seriousness, they all said no because they want to respect their families, even if their husbands don't. No matter how much they dislike their spouses, they want to protect "that family feeling."

During our conversation, our host's husband came home and wasted no time in getting drunk. He claimed that he still had what it took to pick up a mistress, and then passed out on the floor. He would occasionally wake up to pour himself some more sake and show off his bare ass as proof that he was still handsome (he wasn't). Needless to say, our host was mortified. ●

Overseas Voting

BY COLIN FUKAI

Living overseas for a year or longer is certainly a shock to the system. In addition to adjusting to life in a different country one is faced with the details of attending to life back home – friends, family, pets, vehicles, bank accounts, investments, debts, and taxes are but a few of the issues that compete for your attention and time. Lost in the mix is the realization that many countries allow their citizens to participate in elections at home while living overseas.

The rights due to the overseas voter and the rules governing them are wide and vary by country. You may have limits on the amount of time you can be continuously living outside of the country and still participate in elections. There may be restrictions on what elections you may participate in. The process of registering to vote overseas could be as simple as signing up as an absentee voter, or it might be more involved.

In my own case – American citizen – the process has been fairly simple and trouble free. In the USA there is a federal program for assisting with overseas voters, but each state is in charge of running their own elections, and very often

individual counties within those states bear much of the burden for actually holding the election. Rules will vary, but fundamentally an American's right to vote in national, state, and local elections should not be impeded while they are living overseas.

I started by registering with my home state as a permanent absentee overseas voter. This allows me to receive my ballot by mail. Being overseas, I typically receive my ballot a couple weeks before other absentee voters. My state has very complete and informative voter guides available online for every election and I occasionally reference individual candidate web sites if I see a name I do not recognize.

Once the ballot is complete I seal it in a security envelope (provided) and place that envelope inside a return envelope (also provided). Then it is just a quick trip to the post office where I send the ballot back home via air mail. It typically costs something like 200-300 yen if memory serves me correctly.

This year has seen new administrations enter office in the UK and Australia and the looming midterm elections in America have Obama fighting

tooth and nail to maintain his party's majorities in Congress. There has never been a better time to participate in your home country's electoral process.

Below are links to individual sites to help you get started in the overseas voting process for several countries. ●

UNITED STATES
<http://www.fvap.gov/>

UNITED KINGDOM
<http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/>

CANADA
<http://www.elections.ca>

NEW ZEALAND
<http://www.elections.org.nz/>

AUSTRALIA
<http://www.aec.gov.au/>

SOUTH AFRICA
<http://www.elections.org.za>

PEER SUPPORT GROUP: DEMYSTIFIED.

BY ANONYMOUS

You've heard of PSG. You might remember hearing of it at orientation, or seeing the letters on a card or flyer you've managed to retain from some AJET event or other. Google knows this about it: *The AJET Peer Support Group (AJET PSG) is an anonymous and confidential listening and referral service for the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, and can be contacted every night from 8pm to 7am on 050-5534-5566.*

But what is PSG really, and at whom is the service directed? What exactly does "listening and referral" mean? How anonymous and confidential are we talking? And when should one call PSG?

Let me ask you another question. You ever have one of those days where you're stressed out because no one at work or in your area understands you (perhaps literally)? Where you're feeling frustrated with your job, your life, your connections back home, the pressure to make important decisions, or the JETs (or lack thereof) in your community? Did you ever wish there were someone around to just shut up for a second and listen to what you

have to say?

That's one of the evenings to give PSG a ring. There are some big stresses associated with living abroad, with being a JET, and heck, just with life in general. Talking through an issue is a great way to shed some light on it and get a better understanding of your own situation. PSG is not a professional counseling service; those of us who answer the phone are not trained psychologists. As a result AJET PSG's volunteers do not offer counseling, but rather they will listen to you, share PSG's resources, and allow you time to talk though what's on your mind. We're just JETs like you, who are available to listen anonymously to whatever you want to get off your chest, or explore, or even complain about. If you need information, we're here to help you find it, and if you need more extensive counseling help, we can help you find that, too. Our National Coordinator puts it this way: "If you need to find an English speaking doctor, have had a bad day and want to chat, or you just want to talk in English, give AJET PSG a call."

PSG is here to support you: the volunteers are sympathetic and non-judgmental,

and no topic is taboo or beneath discussion. Also, anytime between 8pm and 7am is okay. If something is on your mind and preventing you from sleeping at 3am, PSG runs all night for a reason!

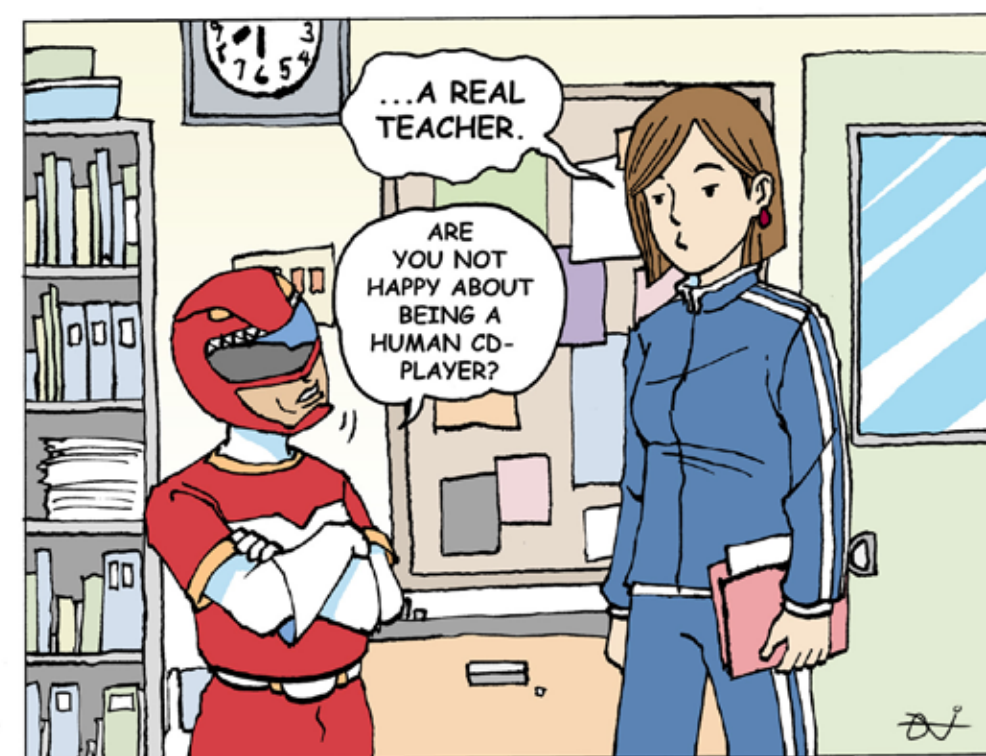
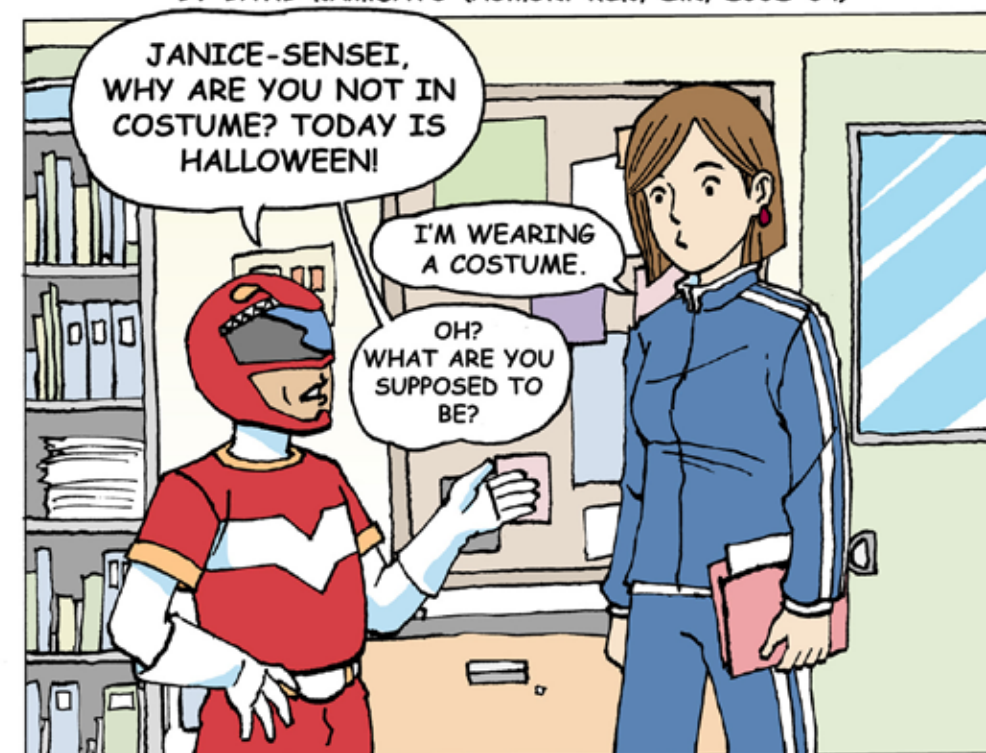
Confidentiality means just that: except in cases where a caller seems likely to harm him- or herself, or someone else, nothing you say goes beyond the volunteer you speak to. You also maintain the added benefit of anonymity—the volunteer on the other end of the phone line doesn't know you from Yuriko's housecat. You are not required to provide any identifying information of any kind as you share what's on your mind. Very night of the year, somebody's there! If you want to say it, we want to hear it.

Recruiting occurs in the late spring and early summer. Would-be volunteers complete and submit an application which is emailed out on listservs to the general JET population. Selected volunteers undergo interviews, then training.

The PSG wiki is a source of information available to all JETs: <http://ajet.net/psg> If you are interested in joining PSG next year, look for the e-mail this spring, or get in touch with psg@ajet.net! ●

Life After the B.O.E.

BY DAVID NAMISATO (AOMORI-KEN, CIR, 2002-04)





Takeno Beach, Hyogo-ken

Takeno beach is situated on the Sea of Japan about 3 hours north of Himeji. It is an amazing beach with clean sand and clear water. It is the perfect place to relax, swim, eat delicious seafood, camp, snorkel and much more!

I went to Takeno with a group of friends and we camped right at the beach. Bentenhama Camp-jo is behind a beautiful swimming beach. The campsite has hot showers for ¥200

and a nice cooking area. Unfortunately there is no rental equipment so it means you must bring everything yourself.

A 10 minute walk east will take you to the city centre where Takeno beach is, another beautiful swimming beach. Here you can find the main part of town which has some small shops, restaurants, minshukus and hotels. There is a hotel which also has an onsen (public bath) with a view of the beach. This

onsen is open to the public and charges around ¥400. During summer you will also find beach huts at Takeno beach which sell food, drinks and some also have places to rest or shower for a small charge.

A 20 to 25 minute hike west will take you to the snorkeling beach. This beach is a little rocky but the water is clear and you will see plenty of sea life. Snorkel rental is available but you must sign up for a snorkeling tour. We had

our own gear so we just ventured off on our own and saw many fish and starfish.

Nearby Takeno is Kinosaki. Kinosaki has a 1300 year old history and is a famous hot spring resort town. Here you can stay in a Ryokan (Japanese style Hotel) which will have its own onsen or you can stroll through the town wearing your yukata and try out some of the many onsens. From Takeno Station you can take a train to Kinosakionsen station which will take about 10 minutes and cost ¥200. A taxi to Kinosaki will take about 20 min and cost ¥3000 each way, this may be an option if there is a group of you and depending on what time you wish to go.

As an Australian sometimes the beaches in Japan aren't quite what I am used to but I was really impressed with the crystal clear waters and clean sand of Takeno beach and am looking forward to visiting there again. ●

CAMPSITE INFORMATION -

Bentenhama Camp-jo (phone 0796470888) is open from July 8th until August 31st, but reservations can't be made.

The campsite costs ¥800 per person per night to camp. There is no rental equipment so you will need to bring your own. Ice, wood and coal are available to purchase at the campsite office.

HOW TO GET THERE -

From Himeji station take the Bantan line to Wadayama, change to a Limited Express train to Kinosakionsen station then take the San-in line to Takeno station. The camp site is about a 20 minute walk from the station, taxis are available though. From Himeji station to Takeno station the price for trains is about ¥3000 and it takes about 3 hours.



INTRODUCING THE HYOGO PREFECTURAL ADVISORS

What is a Prefectural Advisor (PA)?

Prefectural Advisors (PAs) provide support and counseling to JET participants and Contracting Organizations, as well as giving useful information to JET participants about everyday life in Japan. PAs are not professional counselors, but we do receive training from professionals. If the need arises, we are available to provide support. JET participants can consult Prefectural Advisors about any issue (with the exception of illegal activities), secure in the knowledge that their confidentiality will be strictly maintained. No issue is too small or trivial, so please don't hesitate to contact us.

The only instance when Prefectural Advisors are allowed to break confidentiality is if a PA has reason to believe that a JET participant is in danger of hurting themselves or others, or if the JET participant is a victim of a crime, etc. In these cases, the PA will contact CLAIR or the Counseling System Committee for advice on how to proceed. Moreover, as stated above, PAs cannot provide any advice on how to conduct or conceal any criminal activities, nor are they bound to keep confidentiality in the case that a JET participant is engaging in illegal activities or significantly damaging the JET Programme. These matters fall outside the range of what Prefectural Advisors are intended to handle. Keeping these qualifications in mind, we hope you will make use of the PA system.

We're here to help!

Meet Your Prefectural Advisors!



Name: Hannah Starr

Nationality: American

Hometown: Born and raised in the Chicago suburbs. Specifically, St. Charles.

JET Year: Third year CIR/PA

Office: Hyogo Prefectural Government, International Relations Division (this is the office where all of your phone calls come)

Hobbies: I love to read, listen to music, go sight-seeing and embroider/needle felt. I think eating all the delicious cakes in Kobe goes without saying. I also play shamisen, French horn, and piano. If anyone has any book or music suggestions, I'd love to hear them.

Before JET: I went to Lawrence University, a small private

liberal arts college in the frozen north of Wisconsin where I majored in East Asian Studies. I studied abroad in Japan at Waseda when I was a junior and returned to the US for senior year and graduation in June 2008. While in college, I also studied Latin, along with Roman and Greek history; I also played French horn in the band.

JET: Being PA is also only a small part of my job since Hyogo JETs do alright all on their own. My PA duties include fielding phone calls, answering e-mails, and the occasional mediation.

When I'm not being PA, I work with two lovely Japanese women in my office who are excellent at English. One of them is an interpreter and the other a translator; I help both of them out as necessary and get to do my own translation work. I check their work and they check mine. We translate everything from road signs and names of prefectural facilities to letters and conference documents. We also interpret at receptions occasionally. Unfortunately, with three of us, there can be a shortage of work, so I've got a lot more time to dedicate to my PA duties. Fortunately, I don't only have translation work. Sometimes, I get to visit schools or international associations to give presentations or play the token foreigner for whoever wants one.

The Future: This is my third and final (most likely) year and I'm looking to make the most of it. I have no idea what the future after Japan holds for

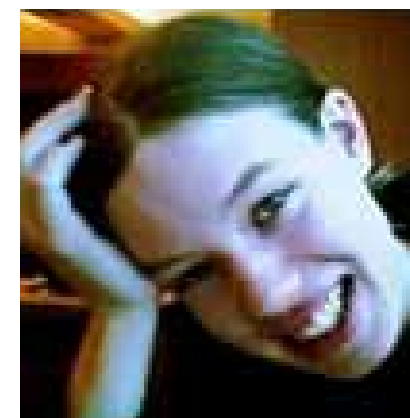
me, aside from returning to the Midwest and my family. Even though this is my last year, I'm looking forward to getting to know you all at parties and other AJET events!

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Name: Elizabeth Snell (Liz)

Nationality: USA

Born: Rochester, NY

Raised: Seattle, WA

JET Year: 1st year CIR/PA

Office: Hyogo International Association, Kobe

Employer: Hyogo Prefecture, International Relations Division

Hobbies: I love reading, traveling, eating, and dance. I'm currently taking kimono lessons!

Before JET: I majored in Japanese at the University of Washington, including spending a year as an exchange student at Waseda University in To-

kyo, and graduated in 2008. I worked as a contract translator for various IT and video game companies in the Seattle area before arriving in Kobe in July, 2010.

JET: I spend most of my time at the Hyogo International Association, where my duties are largely indistinguishable from those of my Japanese coworkers. I do spend some time translating and interpreting, but most of my work consists of event planning, bookkeeping, and paperwork. They're turning me into an office lady!

Being a PA isn't the largest part of my job, but it's one of the most important. I answer emails and help with orientations and conferences. This is my first year as a PA, so Hannah usually takes the lead, but I'm learning a lot from her and will have more opportunities to put it into practice next year.

The Future: This is my first year on JET, but I already love Kobe and hope to be here for a long time. I'm looking forward to meeting all of you!

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<http://www.hyogo-ip.or.jp/en/>



Smile and Stay for a While

BY SIFTON ANIPARE

I'm going to be honest: there are only two reasons why I started a Smile Kids Japan group, and they are selfish reasons. First, I love kids. Without going into details, let's just say I still think like one. That's probably why my first few months on JET were so distressing: 10 000 miles away from home in a school where everyone points and yells "KOWAI!" when I walk by and a men-only apartment building in a really bad part of the city, and you'll find me hiding under my bed holding my Care Bear for dear life. I missed having fun and just goofing around. Strangely enough I

even missed working for AEON Amity (a children's eikaiwa). Yeah, I said it. 55 hours a week running after three-year-olds was tough, but not having a single student be friendly to me was even tougher. The second reason, I got tired of waiting for someone else to start a group. I waited until end of September for someone to start one in time for Halloween, whined for a few seconds when it didn't happen, and then started e-mailing people.

Starting a group is insanely easy, though. With the awesome power of the Internet it was easy to find people who were interested. Turns out we

were *all* waiting for someone to start something! Even easier was finding an orphanage. I went on Google, typed in 児童施設 (orじどうしせつ) – okay, so I cut and pasted it in – and found one in Kobe, an 8-minute subway ride away. They had even already had a big group of foreigners visit them a few years before! Score!

The hardest part was calling the orphanage. My JTEs were always busy, so when Halloween started getting closer, I got so nervous that I just called them on my own. The SKJ website has an amazing script already written out, so I thought I was set. I forgot that the dude on the

phone couldn't see me reading from it, so when he interrupted with a question in keigo I froze. We still managed to narrow down the essential details, but I ended the conversation with "someone who speaks Japanese will call you back." Be prepared for keigo. Just saying.

Then came what I thought would be the hardest part: the first visit. Halloween was an easy theme to use – lots of game ideas, perfect excuse to bring candy and dress up as characters kids like – but still, I was absolutely terrified. I had already proven to the orphanage that I couldn't speak, and despite being the "leader" it was my first visit too, so I couldn't very well ask the other members, "um...what do we do now?" But I wanted to stay strong and be brave like a shoujo manga heroine, so I walked in there with my ninyou costume and Hello Kitty ears held high and hoped for the best. It was my first fun day since I had left Tokyo. All we did was enjoy each other's company, JETs and kids alike. Even the staff played with us! The kids were some of the friendliest people I have ever met. One of them asked to touch me and stroked my cheek. I was accepted – and in Japan! It was a fantastic feeling.

After three hours the orphanage manager led all the kids in thanking us for coming and we took a big group photo together. She told us, "please come back anytime." "Even for dinner?" I joked. She said yes. (Haven't

called her bluff yet.) A couple of months later we came back for Christmas with presents and gingerbread houses, and they had made thank-you cards for everyone who came on Halloween. We even made the local news!

To everyone out there who wants to start their own Smile Kids group, please do so. Even if you have organizing things and you think no one else will want to join and you can't speak Japanese, let alone on the phone, as I did. The orphanage we visit in Hyogo is full of friendly smiling faces who really do appreciate that people are coming just to spend time with them. According to the manager, they will likely stay there until they graduate high school, and then they have to get jobs and find their own apartments. They are sweet, bright kids who were dropped off one day and haven't been visited by their families since. They might not be able to tell you in English, but your orphanage will love it every time you take time from your own weekend to be with them and they will miss you every time you go. Google 児童施設 if you haven't already. These kids are WAITING for you!

Oh yeah, and don't forget your camera.

For more information check out <http://www.smilekidsjapan.org/>. For updates on the Hyogo Smile Kids Japan Group join the face book group "Smile Kids Japan (Kobe/Hyogo JET group)!" ●





Matsuri Mania, Date Disaster and Onsen Overexposure

My older brother, Derry, who is now a four year JET convinced my younger brother, Leonard, and I to sign up to the program after we both graduated last year. Here are some of my adventures from my past year in Japan.

Matsuri in Ehime with my brothers

My brothers and I took part in two intense festivals (matsuri). My younger brother and I didn't know what to expect. After we awoke at 2AM in some farmers house we were handed funny looking outfits and ninja shoes to put on. My older brother had a smile on his face but wouldn't tell us what was going on. We were then led into the barn where we met an army of festival diehards lighting dozens of lanterns on a huge shrine. It was like we were gearing up for war.

We started wheeling the two wheeled two-ton wooden shrine down the street in the dark to the meeting grounds where over 200 shrines were also gathering at 3AM. As we chugged down sake along the way and did crazy maneuvers, we 'luckily' managed to break one of two wheels on the shrine. People get injured and often die at these festivals. So when our wheel broke in the first two hours, we were relieved to

be out of the all day 20km festival. This meant no more pushing and running beside the huge wheels. Instead we partied all day.

The next day we took part in a different style of matsuri. The shrines were much bigger and it took about 150 men to wheel and sometimes lift over their head in a challenge ritual. I'll never forget it. There were about twenty of these shrines side-by-side in a football field. The idea was to clash the shrines into each other with 150 men lifting them over head. Again, this is all very dangerous. I got a sense of what war must feel like in the middle of that festival with no way out even if something did go wrong. To top off this unforgettable day, our shrine owners gave my brothers and I the privilege of riding in the top of the shrine all the way back through the town after the festival. We kind of stuck out a bit. We ended up in the national newspaper and saw ourselves on TV later that evening.

A first date experience

Dinner at a restaurant followed by a walk around "Namba Park" (a shopping mall in downtown Osaka) sounded fine for a first date with a Japanese girl. On the roof there is a beautiful

garden area with over-hanging trees and park benches nicely built into the place. We sat and started chatting. About five minutes into the conversation directly behind her I noticed a woman on her knees blowing off another Japanese guy who was standing up about a good two meters away from us!! My date couldn't see this of course and so I was left stuttering and speechless. It was only my second month in Japan so I thought maybe this was normal. I tried to go back to talking but then he sat on the park bench facing us and her on top of him also facing us. They were riding like there was no tomorrow. We were too shocked to move. We didn't want to disturb them and besides it was clear she was about to get off. I later learned it is strange to see folks even kissing in Japan!

Just Another Day in Japan

Last October I was kayaking down Kushida River in Mie Prefecture with four Japanese kayakers. One of them spoke English. It was twilight and we were a little lost and unsure where to exit the river to the car park somewhere above us in the valley. As the last one to get out of my kayak, I found myself trying to catch up with everyone climbing up the very steep bank in the

dark in head-high bushes. I caught up with one guy who had taken a wrong turn and looked a bit lost. With his lack of English and my lack of Japanese we were like two lost monkeys just grunting and pointing. We decide to walk towards the light at the top of the valley. As we got closer to the light I quickly realized we had hiked up to the back of a women's onsen! No doors. Just wide open to the wilderness. To make things better or worse, my Japanese friend couldn't see anything because he was wearing prescription-tinted goggles and he kept walking towards the women staring right out into the darkness at us. With a monkey grunt and a pull of his arm just feet from the women I saved us from who knows what kind of situation that would have ensued. It turned out we should have been about 300 meters upstream. But where's the fun in not being lost every now and again.

Stayed tuned for more crazy Moe Adventures with Moe Kelleher in the next Hyogo Times. In the meanwhile check out his blog! moekelleher.blogspot.com ●

Kicking It in the Canyons

EMILY LEMMON

It was my first AJET Shikoku raft trip, and I had an absolute blast. My traveling companion and I decided to take Friday off and make an extra-long four-day weekend of it, so I can't speak to the transportation experience of the other riverbound JETs. But the three of us north Hyogonians spent Friday night at the Happy Guest House, an affiliate of Happy Raft, where we cooked ourselves breakfast-for-dinner and enjoyed the company of some Germans (who assured us we were in for a real, albeit chilly, treat) and some adventure guides employed by Happy Raft.

Saturday morning, dressed in the only-pairs-of-long-pants-we-brought (we didn't anticipate the immediacy of fall in such a southerly place as Shikoku), we met up with the rest of the Hyogo group (there were thirteen of us in total) who had apparently slept in the vans which had carried them to Shikoku. Saturday was our full day raft tour, so we sipped on the provided tea and then suited up in our provided wetsuits, helmets, and lifejackets. One raft seats six to eight people or so, and we were sharing the river with several other Happy Raft groups, as well as some boats from other companies. The rafting guides were from all over the world, but there was a predominance of Japanese, Australian, and New Zealander guides. It was a lot of fun to talk normal speed (and often curse-word-laden) English in the visible middle of nowhere Japan. The bus trundled us downriver to the load-in point. The guides explained that this late in the

season, the water level is far below what it is in July, and while this makes some of the rapids more technical and less "fun," it also reveals some awesome rock formations usually covered by the water. In any season, though, the waters of the Yoshino river are an astonishing clear-green; I could have spent all afternoon just taking in the scenery.

But that would never do! The wind was strong and actually managed to push us upriver if we remained inactive, so there was paddling to be done. In calm areas, we went swimming, tried boat stunts under direction by our adventure guide, or attempted to pull other JETs out of their boats.

Lunch was an all-you-can-eat bagel buffet, after which the sky unfortunately clouded over and left us all shivering in our various soggy forms of footwear. Some more paddling warmed us up, though, and by the end we were climbing the cliff face to jump into the river. Some JETs may or may not have faceplanted off the highest possible jumping rock. My own jump was only like 12 meters or so, which I assure you was Scary As Shit.

That afternoon, we all bus-napped back to Happy Raft for some tea, snacks, and slideshow before setting out more or less en masse to find an onsen to clean and warm us up. From there, we drove to that night's accommodations, which surprised me both by being on some ridiculous mountain roads barely accessible to even my kei-SUV, let alone the buses we later saw, and by being perhaps the most kick-ass place I have ever stayed.



Due to some misunderstandings, the owner of the beautiful log cabin had expected us the night before. We drove up the narrow, winding switchbacks and joked about how this place better be worth it, and on our arrival, we were presented with plates and plates of meat (from the meat cows) and vegetables for our grilling, and half a wheel of homemade gouda cheese. There was fresh milk in the fridge for the morning, too (from the milk cows). And a flatscreen TV, and a karaoke machine; beer cost extra, but we were just glad she had some, because we were NOT going back down that mountain to get it. The lodge slept the 12 of us comfortably, and because of its layout, is better suited to groups of about that size.

Day two was the half-day canyoning excursion in the Musasabi canyon. I had never been canyoning and did not even know what "canyoning" was. Canyoning, it turns out, is awesomeness distilled to a crystal clear purity. We suited up in extra layers of wetsuits (against the chill) and scrambled down over the rocks to begin treating the waterfalls as waterslides. We jumped, slid,

and ziplined our way through part of a gorge few people get to see. More rocks, and trees, and moss, and of course, ridiculously awesome waterfalls and crystal-tinted water.

Canyoning is sort of a one-person-at-a-time thing, so the groups for this are much smaller than for rafting. Our JETs had to split between the morning and the afternoon canyon trips to fit into the other bookings with Happy Raft.

I definitely want to go again, perhaps with more careful planning, and maybe in the higher summer when it's warmer and the waters are high. Happy Raft gets a thumbs up from this happy camper.

Happy Raft one and a half day combo tour (rafting and canyoning): 23,500Y per person
Happy Guest House accommodation: 3,000Y per person
Leben Lodge (includes dinner and breakfast): 6,500Y per person (+ 500Y per beer) ●



REMEMBER, REMEMBER, THE MO IN MOVEMBER



BY CHIP BOLES

Still gaining mass public awareness, Movember is a phenomenon that first reached this writer in the fall of 2007. I had recently moved to Japan on JET, and a follicularly-gifted Mo Bro of British descent opened up the wonderous world of socially-inappropriate yet socially-aware facial hair to me.

But assuming you haven't had such a lucky introduction, the Hyogo Times is there to fill in the gaps. So...

"Mo's + November = Movember? Let's break this equation down.

Mo's?

Your friendly neighborhood Mo may be known by a number of names:

-**'stache** (seen on young dudes, a larval-stage of the mature Mo)

-**tash** (from England - thanks, BBC)

-**Misplaced Eyebrow**

-**Nose Neighbor, Mr. Tickles, The Soup Strainer, The Cookie Duster, The Pushbroom, or Dr. Fuzzenstein**

(names courtesy Ned Flanders)

...and include an all-but-infinite variety of shapes and styles, including:

-**The Bandit**

-**The Hitler** (widely considered the most evil of all Mo's, heretofore referred to as "The Chaplin")

-**The Handlebar** (all innuendo intended...)

-**The Horseshoe** (prerequisite for cowboys)

-**The Zapata** (Viva los Bigotes, muchachos!)

-**The Walrus** (think the

Granpa on Life Goes On)

-And... **The Selleck** (known far and wide as the ultimate Mo, the Mo that MMost Mos aspire to Molt into)

+ November?

The "vember" in Movember is, of course, from our beloved 11th month. Why choose then to grow the Mo? October is international Breast Cancer Awareness Month, focusing on health issues affecting women. The following month of November makes sense for raising awareness of dude's health issues, especially prostate cancer.

Why the Mo?

After years of being a suspect choice in personal grooming, certain groups of young men sought to reclaim the moustache, to take ownership of its bad connotation and use its attention-grabbing powers for the forces of good. Like the unmistakable-yet-widely-copied Pink Ribbon of Breast Cancer Awareness, the Mo is a particularly appropriate badge for health issues affecting men.

The idea is

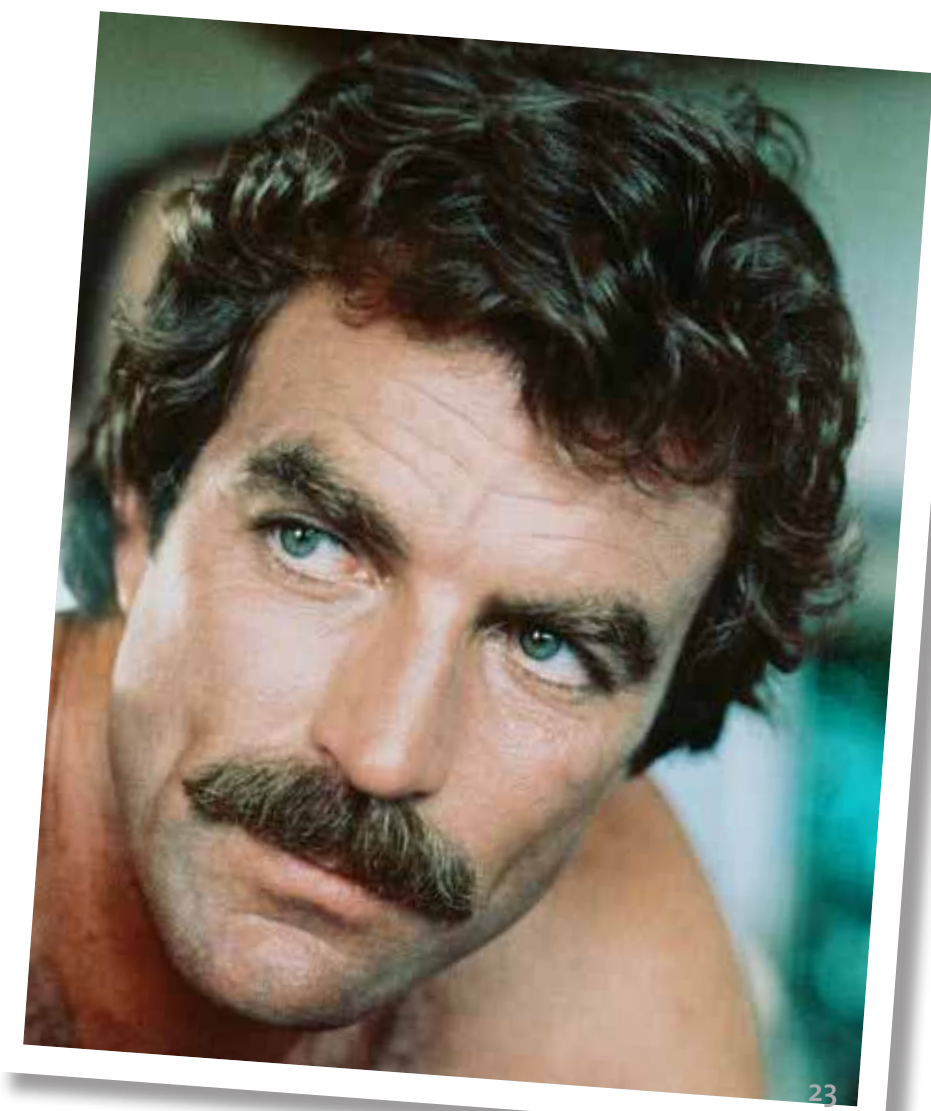
1. A Mo Bro (any dude participating in Movember, usually a heretofore clean shaven fella) inexplicably

begins growing a moustache.

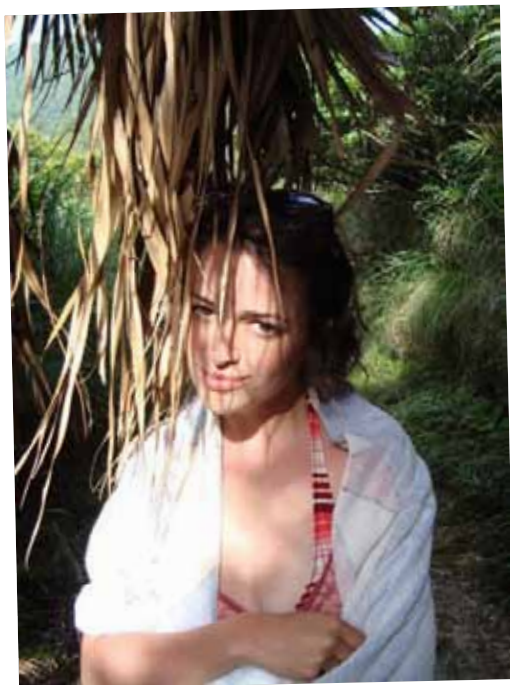
2. Bewildered friends, loved ones, and coworkers naturally ask "What's up with the stache, dude?"

3. Our brave Mo Bro then explains about Movember, how it is a month-long effort to raise awareness of things like regular prostate checks, hopefully increasing the likelihood of these curious listeners acting on this awareness.

In any event, I hope that this basic introduction has made any uninitiated reader more comfortable with the increase in November Nose Neighbors. All are welcome to participate in Movember - including the Mo Sistas in our lives. After all, we all have men in our lives that we love. Movember is really for all of us. ●



GETTING TO KNOW RANDOM JETS



FAVORITES

Food: Peanut Butter on rice cakes... and coffee? (It can be eaten, I suppose)

Sports: Cycling, Hiking, Poker, Billiards

Music: Folk, Jazz... Hip Hop

TV Show: Bored to Death

Movie: Twisty ones

RANDOM TRIVIA

Most Proud Achievement: Receiving my University Scholarship

Best life experience: Thus far, probably coming to Japan

Motto to live by: "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler" ~ Einstein

I remember when... I used to go Mackerel fishing with Papa-Joe on Sundays

What are you drinking? Pfft... Hahahaha! Coffee

Who would you like to meet? I would like to have met Kurt Vonnegut

Best thing about Japan so far? Tokashiki Island in Okinawa, and Sesame seed dressing

Interesting Fact about me: I genuinely love mathematics

TEACHING:

My top tip for teaching: Getting students to *use* English is easier than getting them to *learn* English. So keep it simple, but keep it interesting.

When the class is TOO QUIET I... this... NEVER... happens

(o.o); some of my students are much too forward... but if it did, maybe I'd do a little dance

Bribery for students.. YAY or NAY? For anything other than participation marks, I say Nay. Except maybe around Christmas time, I might hand out a few Canadian stickers as prizes. Haha, I especially love their reactions when I hand them to them... kind of like, "What exactly am I supposed to *do* with this?"

Funniest Story involving a student: When a san-nensei student asked me what my bra size was... hahaha.

THE BASICS

Name: Renell Blaza

Please call me: Renell

School and Location in Hyogo: Kenno High School, Kakogawa.

How we know you: I'm the dude, playing the dude, disguised as another dude.

Birthday: Let's just say I'm an Aquarian.

Born and raised: Born in the Philippines, but raised in New Zealand.

Family: Mum, Dad, two sisters and a brother.

University and Degree: Waikato, English and Media.

Other jobs that you have had: Full-time Restaurant and Bar Manager while I was a full-time student. Yeah that didn't work out so well.

Travels: U.S.A, Japan, Australia, Philippines, and most of New Zealand.

Hobbies: Is Procrastination a hobby?. I've just started snowboarding, and will hopefully start learning to play the guitar soon. I also like Art and writing short stories, but I haven't done any since arriving in Japan. Staying another year? Probably.

FAVORITES

Food: Way too many to list.

Sports: NFL, Rugby, Rugby League.

Music: Pearl Jam, Tool, Rage Against the Machine, Incubus, Soundgarden. I could keep going and going...

Shop: Ummm, don't really have one. Does Amazon count?

TV Show: House, The Office (the U.S one - blasphemy I know!), Entourage, BSG (geekiest show on Earth, but I loved it haha)

Movie: Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.

RANDOM TRIVIA

Most Proud Achievement: Winning a National Poetry Reading competition. Yeah, I was shocked too. Graduating uni after changing majors 3 times. I'm still having second thoughts.

Best life experience: All my travels - especially road trips with my high school friends. Watching my younger brother and sister grow up.

Motto to live by: I know it's cheesy, but "you only live once" usually does the trick. It gets me exploring and trying new things. If that doesn't work I usually just say "f**k it" and then go do whatever it is.

I remember when... I almost got hit by a car. It happens in Japan on a regular basis.

What are you drinking? Me drink? Never.

Who would you like to meet? Myself in 20 years, so I could give myself advice on what to do next. It will probably be "stop procrastinating".

Why should we elect you President of the World? You shouldn't.

Best thing about Japan so far? Everything. But if I had to choose it would be meeting new people.

If it was my last day on earth I would... Spend it with my family.

Interesting Fact about me:

I had my mouth taped shut during class when I was 4 years old for talking too much (probably deserved). My Mum (yes I spelt that correctly) upon finding out unleashed hell on the school. I love you Mum. Haha. I got an apology, and the teacher even kissed me on the cheek. Weird huh? Sadly, I never learnt my lesson and spent the rest of my school life talking and answering back to teachers. I then come to Japan to teach and get placed in one of the most noisiest, "genki-est" schools in

Japan. Karma's a bitch.

TEACHING:

My top tip for teaching: Don't be shy and open up. When students see you are not afraid to make a fool of yourself it usually makes them a little braver.

When the class is TOO QUIET I... get really loud and stupid.

Bribery for students.. YAY or NAY? YAY! Whatever works!

Funniest Story involving a student: Scaring a student so bad they ran across the room screaming and nearly in tears. Gonna try and step it up a notch this upcoming Halloween. Muahaha.



Oppai Volleyball



Warning: This month I will be talking about knockers. A lot.

I have a celebrity crush on Ayase Haruka. The only problem is that although her commercials and modeling are entertaining, I cannot stand most of her films and dramas.

おっぱいバレー (*Oppai bare*) is the rare exception. Usually referred to in English as *Oppai Volleyball*, the title does not have an official full translation, which is awesome for me because I can make one up myself. I choose *Big Breasts Volleyball*. *Big Breasts Volleyball* answers one of the most important questions in life: How fast do you need to travel to make cupping the wind with your

hand feel like squeezing a boob? According to one character, the answer is eighty kilometers per hour, or one hundred for a C cup. I have tested his theories. It works.

Big Breasts Volleyball is all about breasts and six junior high school students attempting to see their first pair. They are abysmally bad at volleyball and they use this weakness to trick their new coach (Ayase Haruka) into making a very motivating promise; she will show the team her breasts if they can win a volleyball game. She underestimates their desire to see their first peep show, as they work extremely hard to make their dream come true (chanting “*Oppai oppai!*” with every step).

Big Breasts Volleyball follows a formula similar to the one used in every high school dramedy (see *Swing Girls*, *Rookies* and *Waterboys* for further reading). These films always focus on a group of social outcasts that attempt a sport or activity with embarrassing results. The students have big dreams, however, and train hard to win a competition of some sort. There is always an eccentric teacher or coach and a last minute addition to the roster that proves to be a ringer. Should they fail in the end, the

characters will have matured past the *need* to win; they are proud to have progressed far enough to even have a chance at winning something. The genre is a bit stale (unless you love training montages).

Big Breasts Volleyball skips the last step, which is the most refreshing thing about the film. The students never really learn anything from their experience and this actually breathes life into a tired genre. They practice hard and become decent enough to beat the backup squad of the best team in their region (“Mediocrity At Last!”). Unlike in most teen dramas, however, they cry like babies when the best players then take the court and destroy their breasty dreams. In the end, they do appreciate the progress they made under their new, sexy coach; they tell her so by chasing down her departing train with a sign that says “Thanks, Oppai-sensei!” and volleyballs shoved under their shirts. The boys are not proud they managed to take a game in spite of losing the match. No, these boys just wanted to see some rack.

You know what, I would too if my coach was Ayase Haruka. Thanks for watching! ●

GIVE IT A TORA-I

BY ANDREW TAMASHIRO

Due to my placement (the northern countryside) and my main means of transportation in Japan (a tiny car), I tend to venture into areas that are less than convenient for the non-driving JETs in my hunt for a great bowl of ramen. I would hardly expect someone placed in Himeji or Akashi or Sannomiya or wherever to spend the time and money to visit many of the ramen joints I do, no matter how hearty a recommendation I could put forth. In something as subjective as food preference, especially in the realm of ramen where there are so many micro-varieties presented, it's naïve and even a bit silly to think anyone would read one of my poorly written articles and be suddenly filled with the desire to try a tiny ramen restaurant in Tanba, or Yabu, or any of the other places I'm sure remain removed from the general consciousness.

As such, this month I managed to visit a ramen place both highly recommended and convenient to any JET in Hyogo. It's Hakata Heavenly Ramen—Tiger and Dragon (博多天神ラーメン 虎と龍), a teeny tiny hole in the wall just off Miyuki-dori on the doorstep of Himeji station, in an alleyway across the street from the Forus/フォーラス building, to the right of the signal, if your back is to the station.

If you are not familiar with Hakata ramen, or Kyushu ramen in general, it is considered the origin of pork bone *tonkotsu* ramen. Many varieties exist therein (Kita-kyushu ramen, for example, is different than Kumamoto ramen),

but each are based on the same soup, with Hakata's version being perhaps the most famous. Chains like Ippudo are based on this style.

At first glance, T&D seems an absurd operation. A clear plastic curtain demarks not only the entrance, but the entire front wall, not an uncommon sight in the world of tiny Japanese restaurant. Peel back the curtain and you stumble upon a 7 person counter and 3 small tables, mere feet from the pulsating heat of the soup stock and stove. As I had gone in early September, Himeji was a nice 34 C or so, meaning inside was sweltering. I can see how this style would work wonders on a cold winter day, but it's horribly uncomfortable for warm weather. The cook and his 2 waitresses move about a well-organized but small kitchen, seemingly oblivious to the temperature.

There are a number of choices to be made at Tiger and Dragon, but the first is how you want your soup. Choosing the thick, *kotteri* soup or lighter, *assari* soup will drastically change your experience. My companion and I decided to split and went with one each. I also opted for the extra fatty, *toro toro* pork, a decision I would live to regret. A side of fried rice rounded out the order. The cook works quickly, and soon two steaming bowls were set before us.

Both the *kotteri* and *assari* styles of Tiger and Dragon's ramen are good. The noodles,



soup, pork, and other toppings all work well within this bowl to form a synergy of sorts. Even the thicker soup goes down surprisingly easily, though one would be hard pressed to polish off a full bowl without feeling a bit overwhelmed. Surprisingly, though, the fried rice actually rises above the ramen, with a hint of garlic complimenting the tender pork bits and fluffy egg. If there's a can't-miss item on this menu, it's the fried rice.

Tiger and Dragon offers a well made bowl of ramen, interesting atmosphere, and a pretty good value. It's address is Ekimae-chou 61, Himeji City, Hyogo - 兵庫県姫路市東駅前町61. ●