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hyogo times

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Fitting In

Nishinomiya Shrine: New Year Festival



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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:
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Message from the Editor

Hello everyone!

It's February! And have we got an issue for you. Love and recontracting are the hot buttons of this frozen month, draggin' all those resentments and fears, both love and work-related, to the surface! But how else can you work on them? This month's issue is full of things to educate, edify, and supply you with distraction, even including some great advice on coping with Valentine's Day! Learn from our new column, *Big Things on Little Awaji*, how important and easy it is to do good in the world. Kick back with some classic (and not so classic) V-Day movies! If Valentine's Day isn't your concern, check out our bangarang regulars like *Travel Japan* and *Love & Relationships*, now welcoming Culture back into the mix with an invitation to onsens. Warm your tummy with ramen (check out the new Restaurant Review), or homemade tonkatsu (in Kicchiri Kitchen)! Get lost with *Maigo*, and find out what your PAs can do for you. Let our funny page make you giggle, whether you like silly *Engrish*, or prefer more highbrow *wordplay*.

As fast as we're growing, we do still have a couple of open slots if you are interested in writing for the **Hyogo Times**! Particularly *English Sensei Spirit*! Won't somebody please think of the children? There are other positions as well, mostly negotiable, and they include a lot of regional correspondents, as well as book reviewer. As always, we are of course interested in one-shot features about anything that interests you!



And, since it's decision month for JET life, I am also aware of my impending retirement from the position of editor. Every great monarch must consider the issue of succession. We've had a good run, ever since I seized power in that almost bloodless coup last year... So if you are interested in inheriting the post, drop me an e-mail and keep your ear to the ground.

For all you writer types, remember that 1725 words a day makes a FebNoWriMo!

Have a great month, Hyogo, and hit a demon with some beans for me!

Lemmon

Message from the PR

Happy February, Hyogo!

As classes come to a screeching halt and students bombard you with tear-stained yearbooks to sign at 卒業式, you'll find that this month is a very good month to run around the country – breathe in that fresh winter air! Make snow angels! Kiss your staff room kerosene heater goodbye! You heard me. >:)

On the isle of our HAJET neighbours of the north, the 63rd Sapporo 雪祭り (Snow Festival) runs from Monday February 6 to Sunday February 12. If you've been getting scammed in the snow department this winter (as I have...) you will not be disappointed. Downtown Sapporo streets will be lined with massive ice and snow sculptures, but the Otaru Snow Light Path Festival is just a train ride away, too. Many JETs will also trek up to Niseko, which is said to have the best powder skiing in the world. Only one way to know for sure, right?

Next door in Okayama on Saturday February 18 is the weekend of the infamous 西大寺はだか祭り, better known as the Naked Man festival! 9000 men all over the country will head to Saidaiji Temple to spend several hours running around in the freezing cold with nothing but their fundoshi and the awesome power of わっしょい to maintain their spirits and fight for a holy stick that will grant them good fortune for the year (and money, they'll win a ton of money, too). The 9,000 dudes are the highlight of the festival but it is an all-day event! Head west to Saidaiji early in the day to see a few taiko performances,



traditional matsuri dances and the kids' version of the main event.

Warning: don't forget your kairo.

And on a side note to the movie geeks, second Christmas has finally arrived – with the 84th Annual Academy Awards! Good luck Gary, you beautiful bastard!

...That's all there is this month, right?
No wait, I knew I was forgetting something:
Happy Leap Year!

Sifton

Message from the Online Editor

Dear Hyogo,

Now that we've reached the end of January, we are about exactly half way through the JET year. It's always an interesting time of year, reflecting on the six months past, deciding whether to re-contract (or should I call it, "reappointment"), and setting goals for the future.

Whether you're leaving this year (which I am) or staying on for another, how about making a resolution to try a little harder at school? It's not that difficult actually, and it'll make you feel better come July that you did your best.

I'll give you some ideas. Here are a few things I've tried that have worked pretty well:

- ◎ Make an English Club bulletin board in the hall somewhere. You can put up pictures, write about what you do in the club, etc.

- ◎ Start your own English column. Write an easy to understand page each week on a topic related to your home culture (or anything). You can put it on your bulletin board or better yet have someone upload it to the school website.

- ◎ Plan one fun (that is, fun for YOU), special lesson. Pictures, video, music, games... basically anything other than the textbook. The more ridiculous the activity, the better.

- ◎ Make an effort to speak to teachers and staff more. Even if it's just good morning or おつかれさまでした they'll appreciate it. You can also take a trip to the office once in a while – you never know when these people will come in handy.

- ◎ Give the English teachers (or everyone) some random omiyage. Special occasion not necessary.

- ◎ Set up a fish tank, a beetle enclosure, a bonsai, or something along these lines by your desk. You are guaranteed to get a lot more interest.

- ◎ Help out with school cleaning. They probably don't require you to help, but your effort will be greatly appreciated and very much noticed.

- ◎ Walk over once in a while and ask the English teachers if they need help with anything. Chances are they won't, but they'll appreciate that you asked.

You can do whatever you want. The idea is to make more of an impact at your school, so that in the future you can look back and feel great about all you accomplished. And getting more involved with things you enjoy will make your time at school more fun.

Good luck and I hope you have a productive second-half of the (JET) year!

Jonathan

Hyogo Prefectural Advisors

Hello, Hyogo Times readers!

Liz and Ben, your friendly Hyogo Prefectural Advisors, are here to introduce ourselves in this mini-column. We hope this article will give you a better idea of what being a PA is all about and what we do on a daily basis.

Who Are We?



I'm a second-year CIR from Seattle, USA! I work at the Hyogo International Association, where I mostly do event planning. Being in Japan is a great opportunity for me to satisfy my crazed desires for traveling and food to the fullest.

During my free time, I study tea ceremony and Japanese dance.

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Ben

I'm a first-year CIR from Milton Keynes in the UK. I work at the International Relations Division of the Hyogo Prefectural Government as part of the English translation team. I spend most of my time translating, proofreading, and giving presentations about the UK at schools and community centers.

I feel really lucky to live and work in Hyogo and believe it has all the best things Japan has to offer – great food, friendly people and plenty to see and do. In my free time I enjoy travelling and doing Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu.

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What We Do

We're here to provide information if you have questions about everyday life in Japan, give advice if you have an issue at work, or just listen when you want to vent!

Many JETs around Hyogo contact us with questions on a variety of subjects or just to talk about a particular issue. Some of our most frequently asked questions are on *nenkyu* and other types of leave, housing issues, finding a doctor, the pension lump sum refund, visas/immigration, etc.

We usually receive about 3-5 inquiries per week. Some questions are easy to answer, but others require time, thought, research, and the occasional phone call to CLAIR! We always exhaust every source of information at our disposal before referring you to someone else.

Lots of info is available in the Hyogo Living Guide (http://www.hyogoajet.net/wiki/Meet_The_PAs), so please make full use of it. We are also working to make the Living Guide better and more complete, so please let us know if you have suggestions!

Our PA duties are the most important part of our jobs. We are here for all of you, so please feel free to contact us anytime! Please remember that we are completely confidential (except in the case of criminal activity or self-harm) and we are not affiliated with the BOE.

Looking forward to hearing from you!
We'd like to know how you're doing.



Maigo in Hyogo

This temple's rock garden was designed to represent the beach where a teenager was killed in single combat. His death is one of the most famous in Japanese history. His killer renounced his samurai life soon after and became a Buddhist monk. This place has some serious education going on...any guesses?

Hehe...

Life After the B.O.E.....

By David Namisato

Get Life After the
B.O.E. the Book!



On Valentine's Day, Brandon-sensei came to the shocking realization that he wasn't as popular as he had initially thought.

David Namisato is an illustrator in Toronto, Canada, and a former CIR (Aomori-ken, 2002-04).

David's recent projects include children's picture book, *Fly Catcher Boy* written by Rebecca Kool and published by Gumboot Books, *Gabe and Allie in Race Through*

Time, a time travelling Canadian history comic appearing in *Kayak: Canada's History Magazine for Kids*, illustrating *Archie* characters for trading card company *5finity Productions*, and of course the monthly *Life After the B.O.E.* comic.

www.lifeaftertheboe.com

洒落

Paul Schuble's

I-word play

ここより下
にいる生き物
ってなん
でしょう？

Answer: 以下 (いか; squid)

The riddle asks, "What creature is below here?" Not a lot to go on, I know, but if you focused on the idea of "below" (下), you may have thought about that kanji's 「か」 reading, which may then have lead you to think of いか. This is a play on words, as 「以下」 (いか; down, below, or under) has the same reading as the word for "squid."

Mmmm.

Travel Japan!



Tateyama Kurobe
Alpine Route.....

Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route

In April, when the snow has melted away, there is one place you can count on for a mountain of snow. The Northern Japanese alps are the steepest and considered by some to be the most beautiful in Japan. The Alpine Route, as its highest point, has an altitude of 2,500 metres. The route can be accessed from Tateyama in the north and Ougizawa station in Nagano Prefecture.

Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route lies upon the border of Nagano and Toyama prefectures. For any that get a thrill out of tunnels, this is the perfect trip for you. The electronic trolley bus will take you through the tunnel, the thickest point of which took over a year to cut through. No less than 9 modes of transport will take you the length of the Alpine Route, including the cable car, electric trolley bus, and ropeway.

Throughout the open season (spring, summer, and autumn)

you might be lucky enough to see the nationally protected bird, the snow grouse, which has reportedly existed since the ice age. Its feathers change colour with the seasons. Martens also roam the region, so you may be lucky and spot these cute ferret-like creatures.

The highlight of my trip to the Alpen Route last year was seeing the Snow Walls, which are 18 metres tall at their highest. Take a stroll down along the snow walls, but don't forget to rug up, it's pretty icy up here!

You can even see snow in Murodo! Ehem... sorry I mean Murodo. Murodo is the highest point of the "Alpen" route. In the spring season it is covered in snow, and you can walk out to the lake and hot spring across the snow too, just make sure you bring non-slip shoes. Murodo also boasts some of the earliest Autumn Colours in Japan, which start to turn in late September. And not

unlike the inhospitable terrain of Mordor, Murodo has its very own Jigoku-dani (Hell Valley) where you can witness the gas and hot water spewing from the ground.

Winter sports can be enjoyed up here earlier than the rest of Japan, as Mt Tateyama is completely covered by snow in November.

During the summer months, you can enjoy hiking, mountain climbing, and also enjoy a cruise in a 'pleasure-boat' across the waters of the Kurobe Dam. Walk along the walls of the dam, and you are looking at one of the largest dams in the world. Water is discharged from the dam from late June, and you can often see rainbows in the mist.

As impressive as the Alpine route is, I recommend not neglecting the surrounding areas! If you should decide to pay a visit in Golden Week,

you can also enjoy the Tonami Tulip festival. Fields upon fields of tulips of many shapes and colours (including black) and even tulip flavoured ice cream (tulips taste like musk apparently!) Get your photo taken with the Tulip Princesses, and mascots. The park smells divine, and you can easily lose hours walking through the different exhibits of not only more than 450 kinds of Tulips, but also local produce. Try the black pork, it's delicious! Tonami Tulip Fair is a 15 minute walk from JR Tonami Station.

On the eastern side of the Route, you aren't far from Matsumoto castle. On the western side lies the famous Takayama in Gifu prefecture, and the much loved 'little Kyoto,' Kanazawa, perfect stops for a tour of the region.

So, since one does not simply walk into Murodo, (at the very least you will have to take the cable car and Highland bus

from Tateyama station) how does one get there? The Thunderbird Express will get you to Toyama from Osaka Station (from ¥8,000, unreserved seat), and then you can take the local train from Toyama station to Tateyama (60 minutes @ ¥1,170 pp).

¥10,490 will get you to Kurobe Dam for a day return ticket, or you can pay for the legs of the trip as you go. Hotel Tateyama (in Murodo) is the highest Mountain hotel in Japan, so it's a great option to take your time to explore. Should you come out the other side (in Nagano) you can take the Train from Shinano Omachi to Osaka using the local train, Wide View Shinano and Hikari Shinkansen for ¥10,540 (taking just over 5 hours). By Car, it takes roughly 6 hrs to both Toyama and Shinano Omachi Station, and plenty of parking is available at both ends of the Alpine Route.

So why not head over to this beautiful and often neglected area of Japan? Rich in history, nature and transport technology, it's well worth the trip.

To see further details of the Alpine Route prices, check out: www.alpen-route.com/cn/Access/img/pdf02.pdf

Map of the route: www.alpen-route.com/english/map/index.html

More info: www.alpen-route.com/english/

Jess Grigg

Tonkatsu (Fried Pork Cutlet)

Ingredients

(serves 4)

- ④ 4 pork cutlets
- ④ flour for dusting (komugiko)
- ④ breadcrumbs (panko)
- ④ eggs, lightly beaten
- ④ a little salt and pepper
- ④ some salad oil
- ④ cabbage, cucumber, and tomato
- ④ Tonkatsu Sauce
(とんかつソース)

Step One

Make small cuts in the fat of the pork cutlet.

Step Two

Tenderize the pork on both sides by hitting it with the back of a knife.

Step Three

Put salt and pepper on both sides of the pork.

Step Four

Dust the pork with flour, dip in the egg and then the breadcrumbs.

Step Five

Deep fry the pork until it is golden brown.

Step Six

Serve on shredded cabbage with tomato and cucumber.

Step Seven

Pour Tonkatsu Sauce over it as you like.

Step Eight

Serve with rice and miso soup.

Lauren McRae

A simple but
Delicious
Japanese
favourite

English corner



Anyone remember Clone High?
Remember that movie George
Washington Carver and Gandhi made?
Because it looks like their characters
opened their own clothing store...

or beer store...

or both.

Participate!

Hyogo Times is currently looking for writers to contribute to the following sections:

- ④ Web Design Manager
- ④ English Sensei Spirit
(column writer)
- ④ Illustrator
- ④ Current Events
(column writer)

- ④ Settsu regional
correspondent
- ④ Harima regional
correspondent
- ④ Tajima regional
correspondent

Contact us today at
publications@hyogo.ajet.net

Not-Your-Average Valentine's Day Movies

I'm not big on Valentine's Day.

Even if I'm in a relationship, it's not my thing. I'm not big on people walking really slow while holding hands and not letting anyone pass on the sidewalk, and I'm not big on people complaining to everyone and their mother about *a)* their significant others not getting them [insert irrational demand here] or *b)* not having a significant other to get them [insert irrational demand here]. Conversely, I LOVE chocolate, so I try to keep my mouth shut. Without Valentine's Day, the distance between Christmas and Easter candy-selling peaks is that much more painful.

As much as I would love to spend tons of money on an expensive club entrance fee and painful shoes and make a fool of myself on the dance floor, I prefer to curl up under a blanket with some popcorn, some chai, and a good movie. We know all the classic choices that would be good for this time of year – *Amelie*, *Love Actually*, *Brokeback Mountain*, yeah yeah – but if your skin

crawls when you hear the words ラブストーリー like mine does, fear not. There are lots of good movies to watch for Valentine's Day, with or without a significant other. Here's a list of recommendations to make you appreciate the love you do have in your life, be it from family, friends, your bromantic partner. You can also scroll all the way down for something that will make you grateful to be single (we all know in Movie Land, life can always get worse*).

Have a Good Laugh!

Cashback (2006): (Photos below) Sean Biggerstaff (Harry Potter's Oliver Wood) breaks up with his first real girlfriend. To get over his insomnia, he gets a job at a 24-hour supermarket with a mishmash of crazy personalities. If only work were always this entertaining.

Coming to America (1988): On his 21st birthday, an African prince named Akeem (Eddie Murphy) decides he doesn't want to go through with his arranged marriage. He'd rather travel to

America to find his real queen. Appropriately, he starts his search in New Yorks – in Queens. Get it? Get it? (Don't worry, Eddie was still funny back in 1988.)

Muriel's Wedding (1994): there are only three things 22-year-old Muriel (Toni Collette) wants to do: listen to ABBA, get out of her podunk town, Porpoise Spit, and get married. Well, maybe four – do something about those so-called friends she's been taking crap from since high school. What are the odds she'll do all four by the end of the movie? You might be surprised! O.O

"Family," aka tear jerkers

Joy Luck Club (1993), **Imitation of Life (1934 or 1959)**, and **The Color Purple (1985)** are all good choices. Nothing like the undying bonds between mothers, daughters and sisters to tug at the heart strings. All of these movies have longer, complicated plot lines than the others on this list because they run through at least a couple

of decades, but I can assure you they are all amazing. Just be sure to have lots of tissue and a phone to call home after because... I can't describe them...they're just so...I'm sorry.

Homies over Has Eye Candy!

Y Tu Mama Tambien (2001): Diego Luna and Gael Garcia Bernal as hedonistic teen slackers on summer vacation take a beautiful older woman on the road trip of their lives. Fantastic story telling against the gorgeous backdrop of Mexico. (Warning: some parts of the movie are sexually graphic. Make sure your TV is turned down when the movie starts.)

The Good Stuff

Fatal Attraction (1987): You saw this one coming, didn't you? Michael Douglas learns the hard way that one-night stands aren't so easy to get away with when Glenn Close won't (can't?) take no for an answer. A messed-up

movie that really makes you think...and jump out of your skin every now and then.

Valentine (2001): Four Friends start to receive morbid valentine day cards from someone they all rejected when they were younger. The stalker is counting down to Valentine's Day – the day of revenge. David Boreanaz to the rescue! Cheesy teen horror flick, but still...come on! David Boreanaz! :D

The Crush (1993): Before Alicia Silverstone was a cute fashionista playing match-maker with all her friends, she was 14 and madly in love with Cary Elwes – you know, before he was trapped in a bathroom with a chain around his ankle. But he's such a good guy, he knows better than to reciprocate or take a "schoolgirl crush" seriously. Big mistake, man. BIG mistake.

Laura (1944): Everyone was crazy about Laura (Gene Tierney), she was young, intelligent, beautiful, and found murdered in her own apartment. Detective McPherson

(Dana Andrews) is hired to investigate the case of the woman with whom every man

fell in love. Being a diligent kind of cop, McPherson is committed to questioning every suspect, searching every nook of Laura's apartment, staring at her portrait every day... yep. ^_^

This is one of my favourite movies to watch on Valentine's Day. Yes, it's in black-and-white, and yes it's mad-old, but it's still quite a thrill ride. Just when you think everything is all wrapped up in a pretty little bow, sh*t gets real.

**(No matter what your relationship status is, enjoy the moment. If you find yourself grumbling this month, keep it in mind that life can always get better. But count your blessings now because WOW, can it get worse. I mean, just look at some of those last movies. People are crazy.)*

Happy Valentine's Day, and to all a good night!

Sifton Anipare



Ramen Tarou

Ramen Tarou is easily my

favorite and most frequented ramen shop. It has everything that a diner looking for a quick casual eat could want in the search for ramen goodness – a bright space, a menu with large pictures, satisfying ramen with amazing ingredients, and of course, FREE kimchi to snack on before your meal or to add to your dish.

My first venture into *Ramen Tarou* came at the recommendation from a woman that I had met at church. It was my second weekend in Kobe, and a friend and I wanted to avoid the anxiety of navigating the countless restaurants, fast food joints, and konbinis nearby Sannomiya station. I enjoyed it so much that it's become one of my regular restaurants, and it's not difficult to see why. At first, the menu was slightly intimidating with its many pictures of different

bowls and prices, but upon further inspection one can decipher the components of the different dishes pretty easily. Like many ramen shops, *Ramen Tarou* offers your standard salt, soy, and miso ramen, as well as vegetable and curry varieties. From my experience, the dishes come with less soup and noodles than one might expect, though every bowl comes with plenty of toppings.

What makes *Ramen Tarou* special, however, would have to be its Tomato Ramen, "Top" Ramen (上らあめん), and "Tarou-san" (たろちゃんらあめん) Ramen. The Top and Tarou-san Ramen are my two favorite ramen dishes, the former seeming to be a smaller version of the latter (i.e. including one half of a soft boiled egg as opposed to a whole soft boiled egg). The cubed stew meat in both

of these dishes adds tender and flavorful salty-sweet bites, bringing these dishes to a level of quality that I have yet to see at most other ramen restaurants. It never fails to make me feel as though I am indulging myself.

And tomato ramen, you say? Yes, that's right. For any soup enthusiasts that aren't in the mood for a heavy meal, I say definitely give tomato ramen a try. Not knowing what to expect, I was pleasantly surprised to find that it was something like a vegetable stew, tomato soup, and pasta all mixed together. In addition, almost all of the dishes come in different sizes (as noted by the smaller sized lettering). I'd recommend getting the smaller size if you're not excessively hungry, or if you'd like to have a side of gyoza with your meal. The larger size looked like it came with more soup and

more noodles, but the same amount of toppings.

So next time you're looking for a quick and easy eat in Sannomiya, I definitely recommend *Ramen Tarou*. During some busy periods such as lunchtime on weekends, you might find a line waiting for a place to sit. Don't be intimidated, the most I ever had to wait was 15 minutes (though for a larger party might take longer), and the food will be worth the wait.

Elaine Tamargo

Location

17 locations throughout Hyogo. *Ramen Tarou* in Sannomiya is a 3 minute walk north from Tits Park, or Sannomiya station (Hankyu/Subway side), 10-10 1-chome, Chuo-ku, Kobe-shi, Hyogo, 650-0004

Contact Info

Web: chinaroad-japan.com (Japanese only),
Phone: 078-351-4232

Hours

10am-4am

Price

Average; ¥600-800 (\$)

Cuisine

Indoor counter ramen shop

English friendly?

The Japanese menu features large and descriptive photos of all dishes, making it easy to point and order. Some of the staff was also able to understand and answer questions about the dishes in English.

Fitting in: Interview with Kazumi

In a close-knit community, nestled in the mountains of Fuji country, stands the home of Kazumi; three cubical stories of jet-black modern design, which make it utterly unique and utterly out of place sandwiched between its traditional neighbors. Yet somehow, sitting back behind the other houses, its dignified simplicity seems to keep it just Japanese enough to maintain the neighborhood harmony.

Then there's Kazumi herself. She surrounds herself with foreigners, myself included, throwing dinner parties with imported wine, English conversation and a husband who doesn't understand any of it. Worldly yet impossibly down-to-earth, ever since she returned from a somewhat reckless, impulsive "do-something-before-I'm-30" stint abroad, she became a wife and mother in quick succession without looking back, doing what most Japanese women do in selfless fashion; taking care of home.

Her biggest fear now is leaving anything behind when everything can change in an instant. While she guiltily admits that, living in these quiet mountains, words like "Tohoku" and "Fukushima" can be sometimes forgotten, the understanding that life can end – abruptly, painfully – at any time, is now more than ever something that no one in Japan can forget.

It baffles me a little that Kazumi can remain content in this town, in this life, when she has seen what lies beyond. But Kazumi doesn't think about things that way; she got her taste, and that was enough. You always come home. Here, some things can stand to be different, but like her house, you still have to fit in somehow.

Laura Liszewski



*Big things
on Little Awaji*

Be Love

Love is in the air.

Or perhaps it isn't depending on where you live, who lives near you (or doesn't), or if the cold air actually froze it... So what can you do? My advice to cope with those lonely, cold winter nights (and days) is to BE LOVE.

The rewarding thing about choosing to be love is that you get to define what love is and act accordingly. Is it doing a random act of kindness for someone? Being extra patient with someone? Creating an event to show your love? The possibilities are infinite.

The other great part about choosing to be love is that if your actions aren't coming from a place of love, you probably shouldn't be doing it. No one wants to deal with a grumpy, grumbling, whiny you.

Being love takes practice and it's not always easy, but it's your choice. When I am trying to decide if I should do something or not, I ask, "Am I doing this out of love?" Setting the intention puts me back into perspective and shifts my sour attitude into a positive and highly effective one.

I'd like to share an example of how I chose to create something I wanted to see in my life by organizing an event at Christmas time:

Right before Christmas, a group of ALT's and I were trying to figure out how to cope with the loneliness over the holiday break. Recalling the Smile Kids Japan organization, my friend suggested we try and find an orphanage to volunteer at for Christmas. We lacked the physical love of our families and friends and realized this would be a great way we could

overcome this – by creating love. I took the idea and ran with it. After creating the plan to visit the two orphanages on Awaji, I raced to ask my JTE for help. There was still the issue that I can only speak beginner level Japanese. I'd need him to be the contact person for the project and spend a lot of time on the phone conversing with the orphanages for me. Luckily, he loved the idea and happily joined my team.

My next step was to build a team of volunteers. I found the perfect mixture of Awaji and Hyogo JETs who were up for the challenge. In addition, during my adult English class, my student informed us that she liked to perform puppet shows and read stories to kids as a volunteer. Immediately, I asked her to share her talents with the kids and she excitedly agreed.

There was much more I would've liked to do with the project, but had less than 25 days to implement everything. I had to put aside my perfectionism and concentrate on only what was realistically possible. When I focused on using people's strengths, I found they were more excited about the project. I refused to make people do things they didn't want to do, because in the long run, it would create more complications. Besides, the kids were still getting more than if we weren't coming at all. We decided on having the high school kids build Meiji chocolate houses while the smaller kids could decorate Christmas cookies, make snowflakes, play games, and decorate gingerbread men.

Preparing for the event was a challenge. There were complications as all events typically have – lack of communication, problems with setting dates, and unexpected twists. Even though I got frustrated, I would simply say, "I am love" to refocus. So when I had to bake about 120 sugar cookies in an "easy bake oven" in three days, I'd simply repeat the phrase and smile.

The day finally arrived. The Japanese storyteller, her assistant, my JTE, and I went to the first orphanage the day before Christmas Eve. It was the first time I had been to one and was completely humbled. I realized I'd love to adopt someday. At one point, I sang and taught "White Christmas" to the kids. I may have been extremely nervous and knew I could have done better job, but the experience was a memory I will treasure forever. As I was leaving, the kids couldn't stop thanking me and asked me to come back again.

On Christmas Eve, the group of ALT's, the Japanese storyteller, and I headed to the second orphanage. We'd be running the event instead of just participating in it. The kids loved the puppet show, cookies, and the crafts and games. For some of them, it was their first time seeing foreigners. I think we brought them more sweets than they'd ever seen in their lives! Everyone had a blast, again creating memories we could all cherish forever.

Even though this wasn't the love that I was used to, I was able to discover a love that I didn't know I was capable

of giving. Before this, I had never organized a charity event or had an interest in doing so. A problem arose – a lack of feeling love during the holidays – so I took my passion of loving kids and created something amazing. These visits may not have been perfectly organized or coordinated to my standards, but in the grand scheme of things, that doesn't matter. We can always find ways to improve a situation and I can use the knowledge for next year. I learned that the love we shared was more powerful and influential than any toy we could've brought them.

The next time you hear yourself complaining about a lack of something in your life or a situation, ask yourself what you can do to change it. It all boils down to personal responsibility. Whatever you decide, give it your all even when you're surrounded by challenges. Ghandi said it best, "Be the change you want to see in the world." If you want more love in your life, then go give it. Give the love you want to see.

Veronica Chung

Die Alone

As I was lazily flipping through my Facebook photos, I came upon some shots that I couldn't recognize. The guy in the shot was absolutely fabulous, corky, was wearing a chic pink-checked-printed shirt with a denim pant and recently faded out Mohawk haircut. He was bright-eyed and bushy tailed, some would say. He had a striking resemblance to me, but for some reason, it appeared to be a stranger. Hell, it was me for sure. Yester-year: precious times that have flown by so swiftly. It was as if my yester-years were laughing at me, jeering me and reminding me that I am quickly approaching my 30s. The big THREE-O. The point of no return. In the lovely world of the gays, 30s are the same as the 60s in the 'straight' world. I then thought to myself, "Where has time gone? Is it that I waited too long to settle down? Is that I found the 'right' guy and I let him go?" [Then that brought on a whole different tangent of which one of those losers....I meant....exs was the 'right one' and if that were the case, what I could do to get back the 'right one'.

But then my Fag-hag called with yet another dilemma and interrupted my thought. Fag-hags always trump day-dreaming!] Anyhooo, these serious questions continued to flood my mind as I thought of all the dates, the blind dates, the "online dating", the guys I met at parties and clubs, the young guys, the older guys, all kinds, colors and creeds (except a Jew) [wait again, I hope I am not painting a bad picture of my repertoire..]

But don't be fooled, these are the questions that a lot of persons have unanswered. Having my second cosmo' cocktail (which I so love), this led me to question Ingrid Michaelson (in her song, "Die Alone") and wondered if she was wrong; am I going to eventually die alone? In her song, she promised that if you told the guy that you loved him and stop loving yourself, you wouldn't die alone. Is she wrong? My friends think I am overreacting and being a drama queen. But that's what friends should do: support you in your lowest moments. And I think many guys are there!!

Everyone has dreams. And late at nights some of us would stay up and dream of the fabulous boyfriend who would become our husband (or life partner); the amazing wedding or civil union; the adopted Asian baby; a brown-stone house in the city and a summer home at the beach; the anniversaries; the birthdays; the Christmases and New Years together and the list goes on and on. But when you are getting older and you can't seem to land the fabulous boyfriend yet in order to decide on kitchen wall paper, and what color your baby's room should be, you start to fall in despair. And nobody likes to feel desperate and alone. Everybody wants their happy ending.

In 'Sex and the City', Charlotte said it well, **"WHERE IS HE?"** [~ as she earnestly searched for her 'Mr. Right' and continued to find Mr. Not-right] This question has been on the lips of many guys; and yet it's unanswered. Have you been dating since you were 16 years old? And as eager beings, with each person you date, you would hope that they are 'the one'. Then two months later, there comes the break-up and

you are back to the drawing board trying to find Mr. Right (now). At what point do you call it quits? At what point do you throw in the Gucci scarf? At what point do you start taking in the cats and dogs from the neighborhood shelter? At what point do you tell your friends to shut the hell up? At what point do you just call a spade a spade? That's what I need to know!! If only I had all the answers.

Finding yourself in this 'die alone' dilemma isn't a warm feeling. It tends to feel cold, hopeless and painful. But there are two options available to guys who are in this position: (1) fight like a Drag-queen on Rupaul's Drag Race, or (2) buy a blank Christian Dior avant garde gown and wait patiently for your funeral. What is it going to be?

Dwayne Cobourne



Photo Feature

Nishinomiya Shrine

New Year Festival



Onsens and the West

Steam rises, obscuring the

snowy mountain scene outside the window. Serene pools ripple gently. You let the heat soak into your skin, through your muscles, down to the bone. It ensconces you, slowly coaxing all of the tightness in your shoulders and back into release. You sigh, giving in to the calm of the onsen.

But then you open your eyes. An old Japanese woman (or man) gets out of the pool, water dripping from her (or his) naked body. For some of us foreigners, this is slightly horrifying. For others, perhaps, it is the simple fact of being naked in front of strangers (or friends) that makes us feel a little nauseated.

Whether it is an elaborate 露天風呂 (*roten-buro*, or outdoor) spa – complete with saunas, cool pools, Jacuzzi tubs, and massage waterfalls, or merely a simple 野天風呂 (*nonten-buro*, or indoor) bath in a small pool

house, the onsen is a relaxing public bath – that may not be for everyone. It can be hard for a person from the West to reconcile their ingrained sense of decency with the more loose (but only in certain settings) Japanese perception of privacy. But it truly is deeply based in social constructs.

Thousands of onsens dot the volcanic landscape of Japan. Public baths have had a long history with the Japanese. Communal baths had a long history here as well, before visitors from the West changed them during the Meiji period. Before that, men and women, families and neighbors bathed together, unashamed. A few “mixed baths” still exist today in certain locations (very hard to find, in fact), though for the most part onsens are separated by gender. Was this an intrusion that unfairly forced a people to change their culture to

please outsiders? Was it an idea that benefited a growing nation, whose cities got further away from the familiarity and communal atmosphere that onsens provided smaller populations? As an outsider myself, that is impossible to say. I do, however, feel grateful that onsens still exist, and remain a popular and important fixture in Japanese culture.

Onsens are said to have healing properties. And after leaving one, it certainly feels that way. They heal aches and pains, and many visit to treat illnesses. The onsens in our own Kinosaki in Hyogo have a rich variety of baths that are said to have many different properties; from healing sickness to making a person more fertile, even to granting a wish. In any case, an onsen is good at least for relaxation and clearing of the mind.

The rules for taking a bath in an onsen are simple: wash yourself thoroughly. Do not enter the water dirty or with any soap on you. Do not drag your towel into the water – put it aside or fold it and wear it on your head as the Japanese do. Don't mind too much if people stare – as a foreigner you are an oddity, get used to it. These are all things that those of us who have been around a while already know very well. Although a special note for those with tattoos: yes, it sucks that you might be judged as being a gangster because of a personal decision. As a person with a medium-sized tattoo, I sometimes feel guilty

for making old ladies feel uncomfortable. Yes, sometimes you will be asked to leave because of your body art. While this may feel very unfair, please try to leave as politely as possible. It is their culture and their home, and the very best you can do is try to change their minds by being respectful, and not enforcing a stereotype by being belligerent and crass.

If it's your thing, enjoy an onsen or two this winter. Let yourself open up to a beautiful and delicate facet of another culture. Some of us have yet to decide whether or not to renew our contracts for another year. Why not go to an onsen

on a snowy day (or night) and think it over? Be free enough to bare all and open your mind to the possibilities of the future at the same time. After all, where else would you get to do it but Japan?

CJ Stearns

Photo courtesy of mijeets.org



Hyogo Times February Event Calendar

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
29	30	31	01	02	03 Ikuta Shrine Setsubun Festival 1:45pm – 5:00pm	04
05	06 Sapporo Snow Festival Feb 6th – 12th	07 Sapporo Snow Festival Feb 6th – 12th	08 Sapporo Snow Festival Feb 6th – 12th	09 Sapporo Snow Festival Feb 6th – 12th	10 JET reappointment paperwork Sapporo Snow Festival Feb 6th – 12th	11 National Foundation Day Sapporo Snow Festival Feb 6th – 12th
12 Janken contest for Matsuba Crab festival Kasumi Station 10:10am – 3:00pm	13	14 Valentine's Day 	15 Ako Kotto-ichi (antique market) Oishi Jinja (Shrine) Held the 15th of each month.	16	17	18 Okayama Saidaiji Naked Man Festival Okayama
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26 Janken contest for Matsuba Crab festival Shika Station 9:20am – 3:00pm	27	28	29	01	02	03

More events for
Feb 11th are viewable
on the website!!

For more indepth details about all the events, please visit our website: www.hyogoajet.net/hyogotimes