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All JETs in Hyogo are encouraged to send in articles, musings, photos, 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 hyogotimespublications@gmail.com

November is one of my favorite months (and there's no personal reason for that; absolutely none; nothing; no way). At least back in America, the fall colors still linger and it doesn't get quite so biting cold. In Japan, on the other hand, it can get quite chilly. My first year necessitated my poofy pink down jacket, while I didn't need it last year until mid-December. This was unusual for me, as I often refer to myself as a cold-blooded lizard. I complain it's too hot for half the year and that it's too cold for the other.

I recently found myself in Osaka on a Monday night, and let me tell you: it can get pretty weird. The first bit of oddity came in the form of a clothed and caged rabbit beside a man accompanying himself with an acoustic guitar. Down the road, two bicyclists sped past. One was carrying two smallish owls and the other had a large one perched between the handlebars. Outside a shop a little farther down, a clothed dog was waiting dutifully for its master. Jokingly, my friend and I said we only needed a cat before we could complete the set. Instead, we next happened upon a group of people with reptiles. Two had snakes draped on their shoulders and the others were sitting next to three lizards. Highly entertained, we turned toward Amemura and encountered not one, but three cats. Keep in mind this was all within a ten minute span of time.



This month, a new contributor, Emma, shares with us her Canadian wisdom on battling the fridity of Japanese winters. As she mentions, food can be a great way to dispel some fridity, and Mandy's kuri-gohan, or chestnut rice, does not disappoint. Under reviews, we have Rackle share her experiences on the annual Shikoku rafting trip, a travelogue of Miyagi, and an overview of several cafes of the geeky persuasion that can be found in Tokyo. Rory shares his musings on penmanship, and our alumni this month is Mike Bass, formerly of Shiga. Finally, there are two works of fiction in The Refuge, one of which is the fourth chapter of Sometime Last Week and the other is called "My Father's Shop."

Life (and your route during road trips) often makes strange twists and turns. It's not always what you expect, or what you can handle. I've found searching for the humor in such situations helps keep everything in perspective. And hey, you may find a menagerie waiting for nothing but your appreciation. If nothing else, these twists will give you learning and character-building opportunities.

Brittany Teodorski

U h oh... What is this odd sensation I feel? It's been so long, I had almost forgotten about you. We had a respectful parting last time in mid-April, but I see you have crawled back to me after all these months. It was only when I woke up to my feet being tickled by your breath of needles that I realized you have returned. And so from here on I shall greet you every morning with a well-thought out curse word as I crumble out of bed only to make the mad dash to the boiling nabe pot of a bath I have waiting for my now numb body.

Welcome back, Winter. And hello Hyogo!!

For November, we begin to say "okaeri" to good old Jack Frost to nip at our extremities. With the change of seasons, however sad it may be at times, we can always look forward to multiple new and unique opportunities in this fine country. Japan has a knack for having special events and activities based on the current season, and winter is no different!

Kyoto, our third enormous city in this absolutely stunning region (go Kansai), will yet again change its appearance to please the eyes of many tourists, Japanese and foreign travellers alike! First, the leaves change colors, thus making the already picturesque landscape look like a scene from the most vibrant of dreams. After that, it can become a lovely winter haven perfectly ripe for lovely Facebook profile pictures. The already exotic temples covered in snow? I haven't seen it yet (Osaka's Namba was always calling me last year), but it looks great and I will check it out this year, so you should too!

Though not a November event, you may also look forward to a rather popular occasion in Kobe known

as the Luminarie, a giant European-styled mass of intricate light displays. Erected to commemorate the 1995 Kobe earthquake, it draws a huge crowd every year for two weeks early in December....which is exactly why we will go on a weekday! Stay tuned!



Though of course, if the cold isn't your style, there is always the option to travel further south in Kyushu and Okinawa, which seem to remain a bit warmer while also losing their humidity. If the summer heat was just too much for you to want to visit, now is the time to go! Check out that Nagasaki War memorial, the absolutely incredible displays of the volcanoes, and maybe even the beaches if you are that daring.

Winter is a season that can either be quite blue or rainbow colored depending on how you use your time. The amount of daylight is decreased, your poor insulation will make you throw your fist in the air when you have to leave your kotatsu, and the constant "さむい" remarks by your fellow teachers may be a bit too frequent, but I promise that winter is a very rewarding time in Japan. This country has a habit of always presenting something new to do or see for each season, and winter doesn't disappoint.

So Hyogo, let's have some fun! Adventures await.... assuming you get out of bed first.

Love,
Cody

The temperature has started dropping and the autumn season is fast approaching. This means swapping out clothes, pulling out the kotatsu, dusting off that nabe pot, and getting ready for what is considered the season with the best food in Japan! Be sure to eat your fair share of mikan, persimmons, and of course chestnuts!

Typically, you'll find chestnuts being roasted out on the street this time of year and you'll see farmers' markets selling raw chestnuts by the bag. One popular way to enjoy chestnuts is by cooking them with rice. Thus we have 栗ご飯 (kuri gohan). This recipe will help familiarize you with the intensive labor required to peel

chestnuts. Don't be intimidated though! You will be rewarded with higher tensile strength in your fingers and a warm, savory traditional autumn meal.

Yield: 2-3 large bowls of rice

Ingredients:

- 1 ¼ cups Japanese White or Brown Rice
- ¼ cup Mochi (glutinous) Rice *(If you don't have mochi rice at home, 1 ½ cups of Japanese White or Brown Rice in total will work too)



- 13 Chestnuts (or however many you happened to buy)
- 1 tsp Mirin or Sake (or ½ a tsp of each)
- ⅓ tsp Salt or Soy Sauce

*For a variation of this recipe substitute the Salt/Soy Sauce & Mirin/Sake for 1 ½ Tbsp. Sugar and some Honey if you have a sweet tooth. Be warned though, this variation is NOT traditional Kuri Gohan. It's yummy though. ;)

Instructions:

1. Mix the rice into your rice cooker pot and wash thoroughly. Cover the rice with water and let it soak as you prepare the chestnuts.
2. Fill a large pot with water and the chestnuts. Cover with a lid. Bring the water to a boil and then turn off the heat. Let the chestnuts soak in the hot water for 30 minutes. Drain.
3. Using a sharp knife, peel the chestnuts and put them into a bowl of tap water. Start from the bottom part of the chestnut and carefully slice into the part where the skin texture of the chestnut changes. Remove the remaining shell and peel off any skin to reveal the milky or yellow glow of the chestnut's interior. *Please be careful not to cut yourself on this step*
4. Let the chestnuts soak in the bowl of water for about 5 minutes. Rinse and drain the chestnuts

a few times.

5. Give your rice a final wash, rinse, and drain, before adding the amount of water appropriate for 1 ½ cups of Rice. (Measurement usually marked on the rice cooker bowl.)
6. Mix in the Mirin/Sake, salt/soy sauce, and chestnuts. Start your rice cooker. If you have a fancier model with multiple settings, set it to cook on the 炊込み (takikomi) setting. If you don't have a rice cooker, this can be cooked in a pot the good 'ole fashioned way, too.

7. When the rice is finished, stir everything once more with the rice paddle.

Serve while warm. If there is leftover rice, you can make chestnut rice balls!

めしあがれ!

mandy

Fall is in full swing in Japan. Finally we have been released from the insufferable temperatures and now can enjoy the beautiful colours of the changing leaves and innumerable varieties of sweet potato and pumpkin flavored foods. However, as October turns to November, and November to December, we are faced with another climate related challenge: the cold.

Depending on our home country, we all have different base levels of cold tolerance. However, this doesn't mean some of us don't feel the cold. Just like how Australian JETs still found it hot in summer, Canadian JETs still find it cold in winter. This all boils down in my opinion to one important cold fighting feature that most (if not all) Japanese houses are missing: insulation, with central heating coming in at a close second. Remember that even though I'm from Canada, the inside of our houses are not the same temperature as the outside in the winter so we're in as much misery as the rest of you.

I personally hate being cold, despite coming from the Great White North. To combat this, I have some tips and advice for staying warm without breaking the bank on heating costs. Obviously winter temperatures vary greatly across Japan and some techniques might not be doable in some situations, but hopefully this guide will provide the advice you need to stay toasty this winter.

The first thing to keep in mind is that it's easier (and cheaper) to heat yourself than it is to heat a whole room. So first and foremost, layers! When layering, start with an under layer. Grab all the heat tech and long johns you can get your

hands on. Women's leggings or multiple layers of tights work similarly. This will keep a warm layer close to your skin. Second, add on as many shirts and sweaters as you need for your situation and desired temperature. Finally, if you plan on going outside add a wind/water-proof layer to stop the wind from leeching away your heat.

Pay special attention to your extremities, including your hands, feet, ears, and head. When these areas are cold, even if your core is warm, you are going to feel cold. It is a myth that you lose the most heat through your head (you actually lose it equally from any exposed body part), but if you're bundled up but leave your head bare, then it will become the place that is losing the most heat. Wearing a hat around the apartment and when you go to bed may feel a little silly but can make a big difference. Same goes with socks:



wearing a nice thick pair (or multiple pairs) puts a barrier between you and the cold floor and goes a long way to keeping you warm.

Something to remember about layering is to not layer too much. Although exercise is a good way to warm yourself up (and I would definitely advise not sitting in one place in a cold room for too long), sweating is something you really want to avoid. The purpose of sweat is to cool you down, and when you're in layers it will make

your inner layers damp, which will quickly drop your temperature below a comfortable level. With this in mind, try to avoid having cotton material next to your skin. Cotton dries slowly and will hold any sweat you do have against your skin. Furthermore, loose clothing will actually insulate you better as it lets warmth circulate around your body more; blankets have the same effect.



Japan also has many additional methods of keeping yourself warm in the winter. First is hot water bottles (there's a whole NHK Japanology special on them!), great for either having on your lap or under your feet while you work or as a bed warmer. Hand warmers are a life saver if you have to stand out in the cold or when your hands get chilled from typing away at a keyboard. Don't have any? Stick some rice in a clean sock, put it in the microwave and BAM! Instant warmer! If you're really crafty you can sew one together with rice, barley or other grains, and add things like lavender or essential oils to make them smell good. And finally, hairdryers. For drying your hair (cause wet hair will definitely cool you down) and as instant heat on cold parts of your body.

Moving on now to what you can put in your body to stay warm. Good news: being well fed keeps you warm! We tolerate cold better when we are

full and well hydrated. A drop in your blood sugar can also bring your temperature down.

Here is a list of some foods that can help keep you warm this winter:

- Ginger
- Cinnamon, cumin, and other spices
- Hot soups
- Whole grains
- Oatmeal
- Hot chocolate
- Sweet potatoes
- Squash
- Walnuts and/or avocados (both have healthy oils)
- Chili
- Caffeine



Cooking (or baking if you have the luxury) will also heat up your house. Remember how you avoided cooking in the summer because it made your apartment that much warmer? Well now is the time to make up for it! You have to eat anyway so you're not spending extra money to create the heat. Be careful, however, of dishes that need or create a lot of steam; like with sweat, you don't want things to get damp, especially since anything that's left damp will freeze if you're not careful.

There is some bad news though: you'll want to skip the hot toddies. Alcohol, though in the short term makes you feel warmer, actually drops your core temperature, which could be dangerous after one too many at a nomihoudai. I'm not advising you to stop drinking all together, just be aware that when you're shivering, it's best to be avoided.

Finally, here are some things you can do to your home to keep the warmth in and the cold out.

Try to prevent drafts by putting towels under drafty doors and windows. You may also be able to find adhesive strips you can put on window edges to stop drafts. You can use a clear shower curtain or piece of plastic to cover windows to let light in but keep the cold out. Adding heavy curtains will also block drafts from entering your apartment, though they'll also block the light, which isn't always something you want during the long months of the winter.



Putting rugs and/or mats down will help you avoid the cold bare floors which can steal away your heat when standing or sitting on them, and if you're really lucky you might have a heated

floor mat. Close off rooms you don't use to warm them up faster and save money. Candles, despite their size, will give off quite a bit of heat, and add a nice smell and atmosphere to the room. Be careful not to leave them unattended. Finally, when layering your bed with blankets and whatever else you can find to make a warm comfy nest, keep fluffy blankets close to you and thinner and denser blankets on top to block the cold air.

Hopefully these tips will help you cope with the upcoming cold weather without burning a hole in your bank book. The key is to follow the scout's motto and be prepared for whatever type of winter weather your area will throw at you. Some of us will adjust, and some of us not so much. As much as you might want to hide away all winter rather than braving the outdoors, being social and taking advantage of heated buildings is much better than becoming a hermit. Best of luck to all of you! Stay toasty!

Emma Wicks

With the (recent?) closure of Osaka's Sailor Moon themed cafe, Cafe Talisman, I've needed to look elsewhere to get my nerdy food fix. Sadly, there is a relative dearth of these in Kansai (the ones I have found are not geared toward my interests). Tokyo houses many, a large portion of which are only temporary, so make sure you research before getting your heart set on a specific one. Such temporary locations which have already closed their doors include four Super Mario cafes, the Sailor Moon theme at the Q Pot Cafe, and the Sailor Moon AniON Namco Cafe. I had the opportunity to visit the Q Pot Cafe (wonderful) and the AniON Cafe (the atmosphere was great, but the food was not).

Namco

Namco has three different cafes and for each of these, you will need to enter a lottery to get a reservation several weeks in advance. At least for the [Tiger & Bunny](#) (if you like hilarious and suspenseful anime, check it out!) location in Akihabara, these go very quickly, so keep an eye out on their respective websites. There is the [Idolmaster Cafe](#) also in Akihabara, and the [Gintama Cafe](#) in Ikebukuro. All of these have both a regular menu and character menus based on their franchise, as well as goods and a table charge. The Tiger & Bunny and Idolmaster Cafes charge 300¥ per person, while the Gintama Cafe charges 500¥.



I've only been to the Tiger & Bunny Cafe (and have

no plans of visiting the others), but I'd assume their commitment to theme is similarly strong. Origami Cyclone wall stickers are always in sight, but out of the main line of action. For each item you order (on a tablet!), you get a token with which you can vote for your favorite hero. Unsurprisingly, the (arguably) main character, Wild Tiger, is often at the top of the list. As for the consumables, the food can be a rather strange conglomeration though still enjoyable, and I really liked the Wild Tiger drink (complete with glowing ice) while not caring for the carbonated selections. The Apollon Trio Tropical Soda has fruit on top, but it's frozen and largely inedible. Periodically throughout your visit, a brief show discussing the ranking of the heroes will commence.

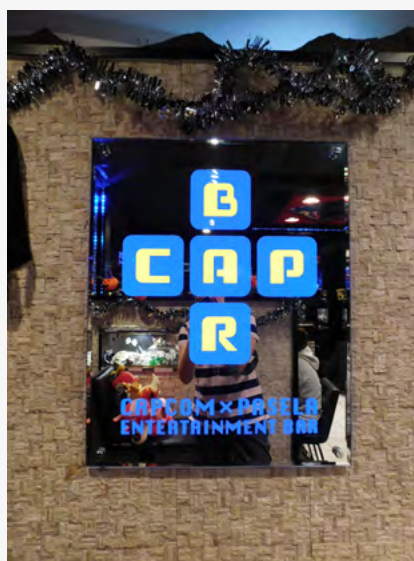


In Ikebukuro, Namja Town by Namco hosts many food stalls (serving gyoza and various desserts), crane games, and a shop. They also have limited time

collaborations, including Sailor Moon, Axis Powers Hetalia, and Youkai Watch. As a cat lover, the mascots of Namja Town fell into the "love at first sight" category.

Pasela

The [Capcom Bar](#) has a variety of foods and goods from several franchises, from Ace Attorney to Resident Evil (Biohazard in Japan for those not in the know). It is in Shinjuku and you can make reservations a month in advance. You can



play some of their games on PlayStations housed there and the waitstaff will imitate various Capcom characters if you ask nicely.

Of the themed cafes I've been to, none have been quite as immersive as [Eorzea](#), Pasela's Final Fantasy XIV restaurant. The various weapons lining the walls, the game's music, and the menu all lend to an incredibly fun experience. The dishes I've had seemed rather heavy, so consider splitting with a friend if you go. The drinks are good, but relatively weak. You also have the option to play the game on one of the four systems across from the bar.



Pasela has many other locations, some of which are also collaborations. I've seen advertisements for a Dragon Quest bar. Also, they're known for their honey toast. On my most recent trip to Eorzea, the group that had won a gigantic version of the dish ended up sharing it with everyone else there as it was too much.

Other Companies

The largest [Gundam Cafe](#) is located just outside of Akihabara Station and is currently celebrating its 5th anniversary. I've never been, so I have little to say about it, but it is probably one of the older anime-inspired cafes around.



[Artnia](#) is perhaps my favorite themed cafe in Japan (and therefore, the world). It is general Square Enix, though with a heavy emphasis on Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest. There are several things you can do at the cafe: shop for goods (some Kingdom Hearts, Bravely Default, and SaGa merchandise is available in addition to the two more widespread franchises), listen to the games' soundtracks before considering a purchase, marvel at figures and other more expensive merchandise (along with the odd display of concept art), and eat and drink to your heart's content in the cafe. They typically have special menus in addition to their main one (largely full of Final Fantasy inspired fare). The last time I went, in honor of the recent announcement of the Final Fantasy VII remake, a menu focused specifically on that game was available. As you dine, you're also treated to one of the many marvelous soundtracks the franchise has given birth to.

Though not every intellectual property has yet developed a cafe, the concept seems to be gaining popularity. I have enjoyed each cafe I've gone to and hope to return to many of them. I encourage anyone with even a slight interest to jump in and see what the deal is!

Brittany Teodorski

The annual Shikoku rafting trip has, over the past few years, become a permanent fixture in the Hyogo AJET calendar, and with good reason. Each year, between 20 and 25 JETs from Hyogo head out into the remote wilderness of a place called Happy Raft in Kochi prefecture to enjoy a wet and wild time on the October long weekend. This year, thanks to the collective planning of the brilliant Sylvette Pinet and, less helpfully, your author, there were 24 participants, 5 cars, 1 pumpkin pie and a lot of screaming.

Bright and early on Saturday morning we rose and headed towards our designated pick up points. Like all best laid plans of mice and men, however, things immediately hit a snag when it turned out that there are not just one or two, but in fact seven Toyota-rent-a-car offices around Himeji station and our cars were at one of them, but no one seemed to know which. Luckily though, with quick thinking and a bit of artfully applied Japanese, all was salvaged and according to the Facebook conversations we were all well on our way.



The drive to Kochi is a beautiful one and it's about three hours or so from Kobe by car, but there are also a few train and bus options. However, no amount of beauty makes up for the fact that you're stuck in a small metal box on wheels for 3 hours, so when we finally arrived, we were more than willing to get out and stretch our legs (shout out to Cody at 190cm; Japan has never considered the likes of you). We were lead up a tiny country road to an old style guest house with a view to die for and set up for the night's BBQ. We indulged in conversation, games and a really decent pumpkin pie from Costco. Most of us were awake to the wee hours of the morning swapping stories of terrible fanfiction and coming to terms with how truly atrocious Bundaberg Rum is. Apart from a brief encounter with a mukade, all was delightful.



Early in the morning, we headed down to Happy Raft to get kitted up. There is nothing quite like a slightly moist wetsuit in the early morning to make you feel alive, but as our mini-bus made its way to the starting point, excitement began to bubble. Lloyd, the instructor of the indomitable Team Rainbow (members Lizard, Codfish, Razzle Dazzle, Emo, Fifi and Goose), gave a fantastically

occa and pun filled safety instruction and split us into groups of six to begin our adventures. The water was cold. Like really bloody cold.



The day was split into two halves. The first half was dedicated largely to learning how to paddle, some beginner rapids, and literally getting our feet (and the rest of us) wet. The initial portion of the trip accumulated in an optional cliff jump, in which your author screamed for the entire descent before heading onto dry land for a sumptuous home-made bagel lunch and hot tea. The second half of the journey involved some slightly more difficult rapids, inter-team shenanigans and "team building exercises" aka falling in and taking your mates with you. By the time we reached the end of our journey, we were thoroughly knackered and more than a few of us had a cheeky nap on the bus ride back.



When finally warm and dry, we enjoyed the photo slide from the day laughing uproariously and, as a collective, acknowledged that wetsuits are not attractive attire. We then high tailed back to our prospective homes and promptly passed out from the long, hard slog. The next morning, I felt like I'd been hit by a truck. Thank goodness it was a long weekend.



For those of you interested in having your own rafting escapade, I strongly recommend Happy Raft. Their guides were hilarious and helpful and their expertise and guidance gave us a wonderful and safe day. You can find out more about them at www.happyraft.com and go on your own adventure.

Rackle Beaman

All photos courtesy of Happy Raft.

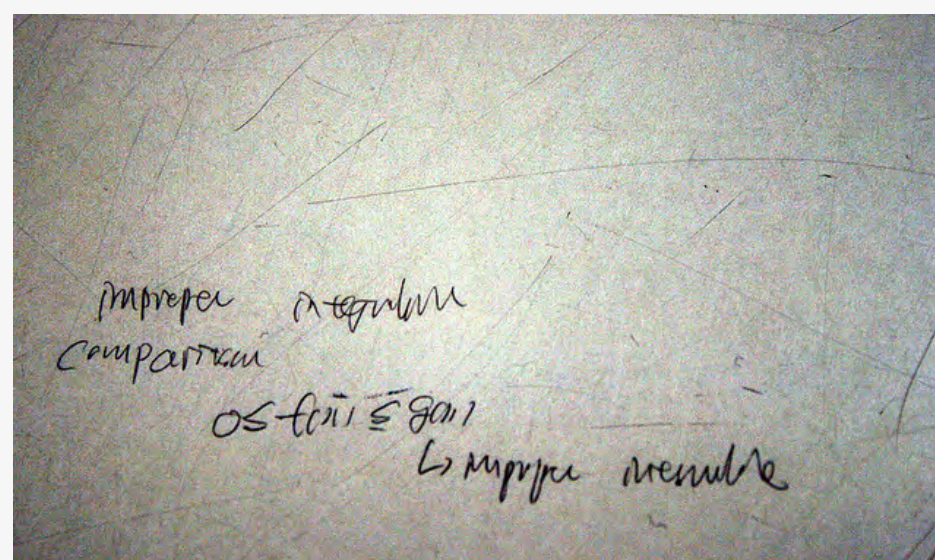
Recently, when I was visiting my godson, he was amazed by my daring, revolutionary and transgressive method of writing in block capitals. He was agog, he was aghast— a saving light had come at last! See, he explained to me that “capitals are much easier to do” and so, much like Uncle Rory, he would deal with them exclusively from now on. I had to sadly explain to him that this was a privilege only allowed to adults and that, having proved that I could do joined up handwriting and remember when something Should Be Capitalised and wHEN It ShOuLD nOT, I was now allowed to disregard everything I’d bothered to learn because people knew it was from indifference, not incompetence. He had not earnt that right.

But, as I was saying this, I began to wonder if I had indeed ever really proven this: in Primary School, I was sent to the Headmaster’s office a lot because of the “presentation” of my work. I argued it didn’t matter, because it was the content that my teachers were after, although I doubt I used the word “content.” My headmaster said “presentation” was important— I repeatedly asked why and he could never give a satisfactory answer.

I started writing in block capitals the day after I finished Sixth Form (not an exaggeration: I kept a handwritten diary at the time and the change is demonstrable). Up until the end of Sixth Form, I was still getting reprimanded by my teachers for my sloppy scrawl (I remember there even being some points allotted toward Penmanship in my

A-levels, but now that I think about it, they may just have told me that to try and scare me into conforming). I would get marked down because to my teachers, my “o” was a “6” and my “g” was either a “y” a “q” or a “%”: I didn’t really care. I knew this calligraphy malarkey was bullshit because I’d spent such a long time learning to join up letters and then was told in Secondary School that doing so would get me detention. And so, the second I was allowed, I jumped on the all-caps bandwagon and never looked back.

Fast forward six years and I am trying to teach children not too familiar with the Roman alphabet or the rules for capitalisation how to write and I suddenly see a flaw in my plan. There was actually an early warning for this when I first filled in forms at the City Office with my supervisor and was told that they were unusable because not only was my handwriting too big to fit in the space but my “l”s, “L”s, “1”s and “7”s were unrecognisable to a Japanese reader. I would have to learn how to write English like a Japanese person does before I could teach a Japanese person how to write English. I think that’s ironic.



“Improper interpretation” courtesy of Quinn Dombrowski via flickr commons

Anyway, back to the classroom— I have just been

asked to write the day, date and weather report on the board and all the kids are gobsmacked because I’m not using little letters. The teacher kindly asks me to rub it out and write it again because, I realise, Japanese doesn’t have capital letters and the children need as much instruction as possible in that area. So, somewhat shakily, I rewrite the words.

No one can read it.

My “r”s and “t”s are indistinguishable— my “y” is not a letter but some kind of weird symbol akin to the shibboleth: you know you’ve seen it on a Microsoft keyboard but you don’t know what it’s for. The less said about my vowels, the better. The teacher asked one of the pupils to come and write it for me and it’s then that I realised that a thirteen year old has nicer handwriting than I do. I am embarrassed now to mark the children’s work because I feel I’m defacing their papers with my horrid little scrawl. I’ve tried to improve; I approach writing on the board like a move in noughts and crosses: slow, deliberate, almost certain to screw me over in the long term. But it’s hard to undo a lifetime’s habit in a month. I’ve managed to stop putting such insanely long tails on my “g”s and I now always remember to put the tittle on my “i”s and cross my “t”s all the way through. But my “w”s still look like a tiny pair of bosoms, my “b”s like bent spades and my “e”s might be an arroba, a schwa or an eye staring out from some sort of wormhole, it’s hard to tell. At the moment, I just try and avoid writing if possible because honestly, these kids have it down and I don’t want to ruin it for them.

See, I inherited my bad penmanship from my father, who in turn learnt it from his grandfather

and so on and so forth, but I have a chance to break the cycle. We can let the Kelly scribble die with me and rid its pointy, scratchy, illegible ugliness from the earth, if only I don’t taint these children with my awful form and tendency to smudge.

The thing is, part of me is angry because I have now come across possibly the only situation in the modern world (where we all rarely look up from our keyboards unless it’s to use voice recognition software) where the quality of an adult’s handwriting is actually, genuinely important. I have retroactively proven my headmaster correct. I guess he must have known, even then, when I was eight years old, where my life would lead. I guess the writing was on the wall in ugly, scribbled block capitals.

Rory Kelly

Perhaps Miyagi's most well-known denizen is the daimyo that founded Sendai, Date Masamune. His likeness can be observed in many areas near the prefecture's capital. Several years following his death in 1636, the pine tree-clad islands of the aptly named Matsushima were recorded as one of the Three Views of Japan. It's easy to see why. The region's history is not all positive, however. It was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Despite this, many parts of Sendai, including the airport, resumed operations mere days after the earthquake and tsunami.



Getting There and Around

As always, the most economical option for getting to Sendai is flying with Peach. From there, you can take a train to Sendai Station, which connects to many other train lines and to the bus lines. Where the buses are going is not marked very largely. I'd recommend confirming which bus number(s) you can take before you brave the sea of people that were at the platform (at least when we arrived on Thursday morning).

For getting to places farther afield (such as the Fox Village), you will need to take a taxi. One way from Shiroishi Station is about 20 minutes and 4000円, so transportation can quickly add up. This was one of

my first trips which I budgeted, and I'm pretty glad I did so I wasn't forced to withdraw from a conbini.

Where to Stay

Keyaki Guest House is a short and inexpensive (100円) bus ride away from Sendai Station. The owner, Nozomi, is very friendly and a lovely person. The beds are about as comfortable as most hostels' in this price range.

What to Do

The Zao Fox Village is quite costly to reach. If you go with just one other person, you're looking at around 6500円, and that's without any souvenirs. Once you arrive, you'll be asked if you want to buy any food for the foxes or bunnies, then ushered into the caged area. There are a couple foxes on a leash which you can pet after asking a staff member, as well as many caged animals. There are rabbits, horses, goats, foxes (of course), and even crows, one of whom looks bedraggled. The other seemed to be toying with some of the other visitors and kept quiet while they were filming it, then cawed raucously once they began to retreat. Knowing the intelligence levels of crows, I wouldn't be surprised if this was intentional. Some of the caged foxes seemed entertained by chasing and jumping after your foot if you raised it near the fence.

In the free-roaming area, you can see foxes sleeping all around you. A few were up and walking around, but the majority were napping. Some will wake if you go near the feeding platform (do NOT feed them outside of this space; you will regret it) and



run to get some food. One fox had a different MO, however: it decided to stand in front of the only entrance to the platform and join Gandalf and the Black Knight in the No Passing Club. If you're not careful, you'll start a fight between foxes vying for the same piece of treat. In addition to the animals, there is also small shrine to Inari, a Shinto deity.



While the foxes were adorable and enjoyable to interact with, I wish that the village were more focused on providing a suitable environment for them. The open area is far too small for so many animals and it's obvious they become bored throughout most of their days. As with most zoos and animal enclosures in Asia, animal welfare is not a priority.

On a wholly positive note, Matsushima is now in the running for one of my favorite places in Japan. The views of the islands from Godaido and Fukuurajima are breathtaking. The small fee (200円) to cross the bridge to Fukuurajima is more than worth it. If you're very interested in nature, you could easily spend hours here. On top of that, the greenish hue of the water coupled with the bright red of the bridge looks incredible. While walking back to the station, we also ran into a cat, which I was of course ecstatic about. Whoever it was that listed Matsushima as one of the Three Views of Japan in 1643 (commonly thought to be the scholar Hayashi Gahou) got it right. Also, I am desperately in love with the nearly wordless wonder the haiku poet Matsuo Bashou (maybe)



penned: 松島や、あ〜松島や、松島や。How can you not enjoy such cheekiness (regardless of whether that was the author's intent or not)?

Last Minute Points

- Many wall scrolls with perhaps my favorite haiku ever are sold around Matsushima. If you're as easily entertained as I am, they can brighten up any room.
- The clerk at the small shop on Godaido is generous with his compliments on foreigners' Japanese. Speak at your own discretion (I know some could use the awkward praise and some could do without).
- There is a cat island a little over an hour away from Sendai. I didn't get the chance to go, but if you do, keep in mind that there is only at most one ferry back to the mainland each day.
- The Michinoku Lakeside National Government Park also sounds beautiful. You'll need a taxi to get there, though it seems well worth the fare. I wish I'd had enough time to go.



Miyagi is worth a trip for Matsushima alone. Then you, too, can be one step closer to completing the Three Sites of Japan!

Brittany Teodorski



Placement + years on JET

I was an ALT in Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture, Japan (Lansing's sister city) through the JET Program from 2006 - 2009. I taught in public junior high and elementary schools.



It's hard to pinpoint a favorite memory. I have many. I'll begin with a work-related memory and see where it leads us.

Along with the goal of making English lessons visually easier for students to understand (which was related to my concentration in university), I often used music in the classroom (I'm an acoustic guitarist/singer-songwriter). The usual activity was to take a song like Stand By Me or Change the World, print out the lyrics, and omit some of the words. The students would listen to the song and fill in the blanks while I played it on the guitar. The activity was fun, but I wanted students to hear vocabulary they were currently learning. Eventually, I developed an interactive album called The Moon Through My Window, which includes original songs, worksheets, and vocabulary lists. While writing the songs, I made sure to include vocabulary my students were learning at that time.

We did the activity the same way. The students would listen and fill in the worksheets as I played the songs for them, and then check their answers. I could tell the students were excited to hear familiar vocabulary, even if they couldn't understand the full meaning of each song. Several teachers in Shiga Prefecture still use the album. You can find it [here](#). Or you can use it for free [here](#).

Another great work-related memory was when I had the junior high school ichinensei Skype my parents.

Each of them had a script of three or four sentences they created. So my parents got to hear nearly 300 students say things like Hello! My name is Sayaka. I like basketball and tomatoes. See you! My parents loved every minute of it, and so did the kids. It wasn't really about performing the sentences correctly. It was about putting the kids in a real-life interaction with people from another country. That felt good.

Oddly enough, a great memory from my days on the JET Program came much later, in May of this year. In 2006, during my first year as a JET, one of my ichinensei students was so fascinated with the guitar that she asked me if I would give her a few lessons. I do a lot of percussion on the guitar while playing, and showed her some techniques on how to do it. We got in touch at some point through Facebook after I had gone home. She was living in Spain and practicing flamenco guitar! I wished her a happy birthday on Facebook in May, and she replied with:

“Hello Mike.. my teacher who changed my life completely... after almost 10 years since we have met and I thought ‘I want to play like you’ in front of your performance, I am working as the guitarist abroad.. one thing which is incredible. Thank you so much for your lesson in the junior high school. Please contact me if you have time. have a lovely days!”

That, alone, made me feel like I had made a difference. I guess you could say this memory represents one of the most valuable lessons I learned, although it didn't show itself until after the program. It's also something I would recommend JETs remember, particularly those who wonder if they are making a difference; that what you do now matters. There are students who listen to you and are inspired by you even if you don't realize it now. Even the kids in some of your most difficult classes may surprise you in ten years with how much you influenced their life decisions after they graduated from high school. Keep that in mind every time you walk into the classroom.

Like many of you, I have countless memories outside

of work. I didn't travel outside of Japan while on the JET Program (other than to go home), but resolved to travel within Japan as much as possible. I have too many experiences to list them all here, but the most notable were when I traveled by myself. When it was available, I purchased the Jyuhachi Kippu, which allowed me to ride the local trains for as far as I wanted within a five-day period. On one trip, I was able to visit both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I believe trips like this are best taken alone, at least the first time, and would give others the same advice. I learn something new about myself every time I travel alone, but it was particularly true in this case.



Adulting (Post JET)

Currently, I work for my family's company, Friedland Industries, Inc. Friedland is a scrap-processing & recycling company with a history on the same corner in Lansing, Michigan since 1886 (long before the word recycling was around or became fashionable). I'm part of the fourth generation. We process for recycling all ferrous & non-ferrous metals, paper, various plastics, and we are a mass collector of electronic scrap. We are the middle process of what has to happen to commodities, like steel and aluminum, before they can be melted down and turned into something new. I'm an account representative, PR/marketing/social media specialist, legislative liaison, and educator, among

other things.

My favorite aspect, though, is educating the public on the economic realities of recycling, and how it needs to be done cost-effectively in order to work correctly. One of the ways we do this is through providing tours of our facility to college students for their environmental science classes. Another way is through a two-minute radio segment we host called Scraponomics™: Understanding the Fundamental Economics of Recycling. You can find it [here](#).

I've recently started a podcast and newsletter called The Family Business Experience, where I interview people from other family businesses. I try to extract information about what makes their business the success that it is; what are the services they use that they've found helpful, what are their passions outside of work, what are the most influential books they've read that they would recommend to others, and how do they balance work with their other passions in life? The goal is to give readers and listeners hidden gems of advice they can use in their own businesses or for their own personal endeavors. You can find The Family Business Experience [here](#).

And, I've never stopped playing music. You can find my music here:

- <http://mikebassmusic.com>
- <http://facebook.com/mikebassmusic>
- <http://twitter.com/mikebassmusic>

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Mike Bass

T

he human is imbecilic. The human is dangerous. The human is beyond our help.

Oh Margravine, your strength is waning and I cannot stop your demise. That is the way you have chosen to go, but you promised we would be spared. You said we could save the world you made. Yet, the world crumbles still. What have we done wrong?

The esteemed flock follow me now. The traitor, with heart as black as her wings, is removed. Doesn't this please you? Hm, I think it does. You have finally come, as we knew you would. I am just relieved that ridiculous pigeon didn't have a chance to achieve the leadership. Your children are safe with me. Do you care? Of course not.

I am tired of this world. The sun shines too bright here. And it should be dead already. The Margravine flew here so long ago and then she died. It should die with her. That was to be the result of the dissolution. A world for a world. The Margravine deserted us, though we love her, and came to this place. Isn't it right for this place to replace ours in death, as it did in life? Beloved Margravine, may your blood find rest here as your spirit found rest here in life.

Actually, the fire in your blood does burn here. Something we did, at least, started the process. I feel the fire every moment, working on the land. But it hesitates. Why does it hesitate? Something stops your killing fire. I cannot tell what is working against us. The human simply watches as we watch. It is not her, or the other one in that house. I believe the house is just a vessel, a post office for you to send your messages to us. But why did you send your bones to her? She is stupid. So ignorant and soft, I can't even speak to her. But you chose her. This, I must think on, Margravine, dearest.

The dissolution went perfectly. When last came

the windy moon, we cut the Count into his bits and drowned the fool in mother's milk. Then sent we bits and milk into the void to console your dying heart and sever your ties to our world. That was the injunction you sent to us. Why did it not work? Were you not consoled? It's true, the fires stopped that day, and the rivers ran clear. But the wind did not return and the lands still shake. Were you only a little consoled? Perhaps you did not like to leave our world so easily? Is there hope that you love us a little?

But no, I cannot delude myself. We are a duty to you, a strong bond, but certainly not as strong as love. There is another reason you remain, half way between there and here. You cannot bring yourself to destroy your creation, though you love us not. And yet, you will not leave our world at peace while this one falls apart in our place. There is something here that restrains you. They are not yours. They cannot love you as we love you. Why do you spare them?

However, you do spare them, and so must I. I love you too much, Margravine, to hate something you so obviously care about. I say care about, because I cannot bring myself to think of the possibility of love. You do not love. You cannot love, dearest. Can you?

But I do hate the human you sent your bones to, Margravine! At least, I resent her immensely. She thinks she's got something here but she just meanders through her worthlessly short life too preoccupied with unchangeables to see the worth of the things in her own house. Last week I saw her in that infernal chair, looking at the messages this house has gathered for her. She looks but doesn't see. She listens but doesn't hear. Will she even see your bones properly? I don't think she can hear you, Margravine. But I am growing beyond that, Indomitable One. I will trust you even here. Let it be. You have chosen. I will go back and see what the human is doing. At least I can make sure she doesn't lose your box, dearest.

When I turn back from my meditative flight, I see that the Imperial Magistrate of Care and Forward Thinking

has kept me company. The human has named her Henwyn, which is, strangely, a bit easier to keep in my mind when I am in this world. I am glad Henwyn chose to accompany me today. She embodies the Margravine's sharp wit, but also a bit of the Count's bumbling compassion. The brush of her wake as she turns back toward the house with me is comforting.

"She didn't choose this, you know."

I sigh in response. Henwyn's company may not be as soothing as I thought. Whether I want to listen or not, she continues,

"The girl just wants to live a happy life, and we came barging in. We brought problems that will overwhelm her."

"They were already her problems too, Firefli—"

I cut her off. "This human, this world took the Margravine from us. It is because of our loss that these problems started. Can we change the messenger the Margravine has chosen? No. No matter how much we wish this human gone, or how practical it would be, we cannot change what has been done."

"The girl is more than a messenger, Fireflight. And the girl isn't the one who called the Margravine from us."

Henwyn stresses the word "girl," but I am more shocked by her use of the human's name for me. I should have expected it, but hearing it still shocks me. This world is creeping in. The human is infiltrating us. Is this what the Margravine wanted?

"What do you mean the one who called the Margravine?" I push my thoughts past the names.

"You know what the Margravine searched for, Fireflight. She found it here. But it wasn't the girl, so stop hating her. We have to work together to finish this."

"I know we do. That's why I came to meditate. I am

resolved. The Margravine has chosen. Fear not Henwyn, I have decided not to hate this... girl. I know you will help me keep my resolve. But do please stop calling me by that awful name."

"It's not awful, Fireflight." She flicks her tail with a smile. "She was quite apropos with our names. Besides, you use the names too, and I don't mind. But thank you. I am reassured."

The attic window looms before us and I continue down the stairs as Henwyn settles on a dusty roost. I want to begin immediately. There will be much to explain to the girl. It is best to get it over with. She is not in the food room where we left her. My heart starts to race before I realize that I can hear her in the other room. The room with that chair. My heart continues to speed. But that is just ridiculous. The chair poses no harm. It is just another of this house's objects. I round into the room and land in front of the offending recliner.

The girl sits, staring up. I look up, but there is nothing on the ceiling. It is a strange human gesture. Suddenly, I can feel the Margravine's box. It sits in the girl's lap and I realize it must be speaking to her. I am surprised she actually asked the question. She actually listened this time. But I am also concerned that she will drop the Margravine's box. It looks particularly precarious in her lax fingers. I take a step forward, and she snaps her head down. My heart beats faster still. Stupid heart.

"I'm still hungry." She states, stands up, and walks out the door.

Infernal girl. But at least she heard the box. That will make my explanation easier.

And I am surprised. Pleasantly surprised.

Louise Warren

This is chapter 4 of Sometime Last Week. Catch up on [chapter 3](#), or start from the [beginning](#).

My father had a unique approach to business. He wasn't a salesman, at least not in the traditional sense of the word; he certainly made a lot of money in his time. Not that he was even particularly interested in being rich— he was just interested in people, even if he didn't especially like them as a species, and above all, he wanted to prove how smart he was.

He and I had that in common.

I should probably elaborate— when my father's father died, he left him a dismal little shop and nothing else. Whatever money he'd had went to my aunt, and they hadn't owned the house to begin with. But the shop was theirs from the old days.

At first, my father was just going to sell the place, and I thought that would be the end of it. He had a job in the town; I don't remember what. I didn't really care about him at that time. But then one day, he came back with a splitting grin on his face. He'd quit his job, he said, and was going to take over the shop. I told him I didn't care and went upstairs. My mother came in from the kitchen and started shouting at him, but it didn't get rid of his smile.

Over the next few days, he tried a hundred times to explain his new business model to me, and I, as the men in my family are wont to do, refused to listen. Eventually, my mother, with whom I had a much better relationship as she occasionally gave me a lift into town, explained it to me: Father was not going to run just any ordinary shop. It wasn't going to have a name, as most shops do, because Father didn't believe in corporate identities. His father's shop had just been known locally by the family name and so would this new venture. He was also going to paint the shop red, as he believed blue was for governesses. Also, and this was the most interesting new development, there would be no prices on anything. Nothing in my father's shop would have a set value.

Instead, he would decide what to charge the customers based on how much he liked their face.

For the pretty or the striking or the handsome or even the, as my father would often put it, "honest-faced"^[1], the prices would be fair— more than fair for the particularly aesthetically blessed— but for the asymmetrical or the pocked or the puckered or the downright ugly, there would be a much higher cost than mere disgust. Had I possessed a sense of humour back then, I would have laughed.

My father was no slave to beauty, you must understand. And he certainly was no oil painting himself. But, as I said, he fancied himself a philosopher— a student of the human condition— and he thought that this new business would prove a theory he had long held to be true, that people would line up to be told that they were worthless for the possibility they might be told that they weren't. Of course, he considered himself immune to this congenital human flaw, if only because he'd spotted it in others.

Naturally, my mother tried to shout him into getting his old job back and the various acquaintances^[2] to whom he explained his idea laughed in his face.

But, they all turned up on the opening day, forming a neat little line down the street^[3] and all expecting to receive a kind word and a reduced bill for the simple advantage of knowing my father.

They were mistaken.

I don't think my father gave out a single reduction that day. I imagine he had planned it that way. I would be lying if I said that he did not lose a lot of goodwill in the town that day. But goodwill has no value, he would often tell me, and respect is worth its weight in gold. It is a strange quirk, but, I believe, an observable fact, that people will respect you for insulting them. They may protest not to, they may call you rude or even try and punch you, but deep down they will want to impress you. This may even be the purpose of the punch.

I would also be lying if I said that everyone came back. But many did. They returned with their faces slathered in make-up and concealing creams— father would later add these to his stock and make a killing from the holes he punched in people's self-esteem— they dyed their hair and wore fancy suits. This was where my father was extra-clever. He would occasionally seem to be swayed by these clumsy attempts and thus offer a

discount to his battled patrons. Of course, they would brag of this to their friends, and immediately everyone would wish to be validated by the commercial whims of my father and they would keep coming back. I don't know if he actually had a system by which he judged people's physical appearances to be acceptable or not. Certainly, I never noticed any particular traits of which he was fond. I wish now that I had asked him.

He was also not sexist in this enterprise, as one might have expected— men were given reductions just as often as women, which is to say not very often at all. Of course, this led to some gossip in the town, but my father either didn't know about this or didn't care. I suspect the latter.

And, of course, word spread about the shop where you could have your looks judged and then quantified in the most palpable way possible, through commerce. People passing through the town would make a special point of stopping by his shop and getting a knock to their ego. More often than not, these people would lie about how much they'd been charged and so the wheel of infamy would turn.

As for the ugly, I cannot decide if I feel my father was rude or not. Those who had deformities were not treated any differently from the general populace, but those whose faces were less appealing than they might have been were marked up. But then my father had always hated laziness and would say that they could make an effort to improve their appearance if they only took the time.

One time, a customer came in wearing a balaclava, claiming to have chicken pox and just wanting to buy a tin of soup and pay the price they always did^[4]. My father asked them to remove it and when they refused, gave them the soup for free, saying he had no way to judge its value. The next time someone came in concealing their face, though, he threw them out of the shop.

My father refused to let us partake of his stock for our own purposes and my mother declined to shop there. I think she knew my father's feelings toward her. Certainly better than I ever did.

I went in once. It was a boiling hot day and I had been sitting in the centre of the city all day, doing nothing,

I imagine. I was thirsty and was not allowed back into several of the nearby businesses, having been caught shoplifting^[5]. I was hot and bothered and frustrated and young and stupid. I only had one pound in my pocket, but I figured that this should be enough for a drink. At least, if my father liked my face.

I walked into his shop and I remember the bell above the door ringing. My father looked up but I don't think he made any show of recognising me. I walked up to the fridge next to the counter, pulled out a bottle of something and put it on the counter. My father looked from it to me and back again. I held his gaze. I could do things like that when I was younger.

Then he rang up the drink. It was a lot more than a pound. It was a lot more than anyone has ever been charged for such a drink, I imagine. I left without another word.

That night, when my father returned, we didn't speak about the incident. A few years later, I left home and we still hadn't spoken about it although I certainly had not forgotten. A few years after that, my father died and I couldn't come to his funeral for some stupid, ephemeral reason. My mother cried, partly for him, partly for me, partly for the terrible relationship between us.

I didn't inherit the shop. I don't remember who did. I didn't want it anyway. Like my father, I am no salesman. But unlike him, I don't have the gall to insult people to their faces. I wish I did. It not only made him rich, it also made him very happy. And that's something I've never managed.

[1] He was a big believer in the discredited science of phrenology, especially in the idea of "criminal skull shape."

[2] Father did NOT have friends.

[3] It was, admittedly, a small street and an even smaller shop.

[4] I have no idea why they didn't go to another shop. I generally found that my father's base of customers was held in some kind of magnetic trance by him, or else were prisoners of their own need for approval.

[5] I cannot recall if my father ever found out about this. Certainly I don't remember him ever examining the contours of my skull.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
All month:	British Museum Exhibition					1 Rose Walk Gion Odori (Kyoto)
	Rokko Meets Art– Art Walk 2015 (ends the 23rd)					
	Manga*Anime*Games from Japan (ends the 23rd)					
	Cheese & Wool Festa (ends the 23rd)					
2 Arima Grand Tea Ceremony Rose Walk	3 Izushi Castle Festival	4	5	6	7 Tajima Festival Miki Hardware Festival	8
Gion Odori (Kyoto)						
9 Gion Odori (Kyoto)	10	11	12	13	14 Osaka Festa	15
16	17	18	19 Skills Development Conference	20	21	22 篠山城 Samurai Festival
23	24	25	26	27	28 Pinball Tournament (Osaka) Minatogawa Mart	29
30						

