

# JETAA.NY

Newsletter for The  
Japan Exchange  
and Teaching Program  
Alumni Association,  
New York Chapter

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## THE "FAMILY" ISSUE

### What's Inside?!

- 2 Letter from the Editor
- 3 Sayonara Iida-san & Nagumo-san!
- 4 JETAA Society
- 5 And Baby Makes JET!
- 6 Alien Baby
- 7 Theatre Review: JET Alum Randall David Cook's *Sake with the Haiku Geisha*
- 9 Mrs. Tanizaki, a short story by Alexei Esikoff
- 13 Book Review: JET Alum David Mc Connell's *Importing Diversity*, reviewed by Justin Tedaldi
- 14 DVD Review: *Story of a Prostitute & Gate of Flesh*
- 15 Top 12 List & Manga Corner

## KAZOKU-BANASHI!!

Family Stories from Days of JET

*While most of us went off to Japan alone, our families played a big role in our JET experience, whether through their visits or their absence, or in some cases the substitutes we found in Japan, and even the new families we created. Here are some of those experiences.*

I took my parents to Kyoto and Hiroshima for a bit of sightseeing. On our first day in Kyoto, I bought a pack of bus tickets at a *conbini*. I gave one ticket to each of my parents, tore off one for myself and put the booklet back in my bag. We walked the one block from the *conbini* to the bus stop and in that time, my father managed to lose his ticket. I freaked out! I totally took on the role of the parent and reprimanded him - how could he lose his ticket in one block?! I made him search his pockets, his wallet and the bag he was carrying and then I proceeded to search. After much ado (about nothing - perhaps 150 yen), I reluctantly tore off another ticket which ruined the symmetry of my plan. I would have to buy an additional ticket so that we would all have a return ticket. To this day, I still get a hard time every time I go to a museum, zoo or ride public transportation with my Dad. He's constantly asking if I'm sure that I still have my ticket. He wouldn't want me to lose it!

-Cindy Hoffman



When my little brother came to visit me, my mother sent him with a huge suitcase stuffed with goodies and necessities. My list of needed items was so large that she could barely get the bag closed and had to leave some things behind. When my brother went through customs they asked him to open the bag. To his dismay, he opened the bag and loose tampons spilled out all over the place. Apparently, my mother couldn't fit the two boxes of tampons, so she had spread them in all the open spaces after everything was packed. Needless to say he didn't speak to me for two days after his arrival.

-Lynnette Martyn

I was a JET in a very small town, where everyone knew everyone else's business, so when my dad came to visit, it was practically headline news. I brought him into Town Hall so he could see where I worked, and they pulled out all the stops. The Deputy Mayor and Town Manager formally met with my father in the Mayor's office, the Office Lady served tea and bean cakes, the IT Manager demonstrated his plans to wire the entire town to high speed internet, etc. Not being used to the celebrity status of Americans in *inaka* Japan, my father

("Kazoku-banashi" continued on page 11)

The "FAMILY" Issue

As the Pointer Sisters once sang about the JET Alumni Association, "We are fa-mi-lee." And who are we to argue with the Pointer Sisters. We all went to Japan and lived our lives together, many of us feeling like babies as we looked around our new home with wonder and amazement and suckled from the teat of the Japanese government.

We discovered our new playmates and did our best to make friends and learn the local lingo. And then, as we grew more comfortable and confident, perhaps we pushed back against the restraints we felt and carved out our own new identities. And by the time we finished our service, we were like 5,135 distant cousins who had grown into semi-formed adults.

Well, perhaps I'm over-romanticizing a bit. But we did get to know each other and in many instances come to rely on each other like family. And as we've returned to our real families in our home country, we still turn to and rely on each other for the original experience that we shared, people with whom we can talk comfortably and who understand us in ways no one else can.

So whether you're an old JET like me, a recently returned JET or even an old JET who's just moved to this area, I'd like to say welcome to the JET Alumni family. Sure there are a few crazy relatives among us, but for the most part we're here for you and all we ask in return is a little participation and the hope that you won't get too embarrassed when you introduce us to your friends.

Steven Horowitz  
Newsletter Editor

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY!

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JETAA  
New York

EDITOR

Steven Horowitz  
newsletter@jetaany.org

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Justin Tedaldi

PRESIDENT

Jennifer Olayon  
president@jetaany.org

VICE PRESIDENT

Katrina Barnas  
vicepres@jetaany.org

SECRETARY

Carey Lynn Asselstine  
secretary@jetaany.org

TREASURER

Tony McCormac  
treasurer@jetaany.org

SOCIAL COORDINATOR

Matt Jungblut  
social@jetaany.org

PHILADELPHIA REPRESENTATIVE

Therese Stephen  
phillyrep@jetaany.org

WEBMASTER

Scott Norman  
webmaster@jetaany.org

DATABASE COORDINATOR

Shannan Spisak  
database@jetaany.org

Please check out e-mail from our Secretary and the web site

**www.jetaany.org** for updated announcements.

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# Sayonara Iida-san and Nagumo-san!

In February, JETAA NY bid a fond farewell to **Noriko Iida**, and in March we will bid an additional fond farewell to **Masahiro Nagumo**, both wonderful and dedicated members of our community who have returned to Japan.



*New York and returning to Japan on February 15th to assume a new assignment at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo.*

*My stay in New York for three years has been very rewarding. I feel privileged to have had this great opportunity which permitted me to meet wonderful people such as you. I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your support and friendship that you have kindly extended to me throughout the past three years. I know that you will extend the same courtesies to my successor, Mr. Hirotaka Ono. He will arrive in March 2006 to take my position in New York.*

Iida-san, as a key staff member at the Consulate General of Japan in New York, and Nagumo-san as JETAA's liaison with CLAIR, focused on strengthening relations with JETAA NY and promoting the JET Program (among their many other responsibilities!) Their enthusiasm for the alumni organization made them an integral part of the success of our various events through their work with JETAA NY on the Pre-Departure Orientations each June and the Welcome Back Reception each October. Additionally, Iida-san was an integral part of planning the well-received JETAA International Conference in New York (Feb. 2004), the innovative "Big Brother - Big Sister: Japan Cultural Day" (November 2005), and helped to encourage and support us to pursue 501(c)(3) status for our organization, while Nagumo-san helped us to plan the Career Forum and cheerfully helps us prepare for every Newsletter stuffing. We will miss their positive attitude and generosity towards the growth of our organization.

*I truly hope that our paths cross again in the near future. If you have an opportunity to visit Japan or would like to maintain communications, please feel free to contact me through the JETAA officers. Please accept my best wishes for your continued success.*

*Warmest regards and Farewell,*

*Noriko Iida*

*Consulate General of Japan in New York*

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Below is a message from Iida-san:

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... and now a farewell message from Nagumo-san:

*Time flies like an arrow and I am writing to inform you that I will be leaving*

*("Sayonara" continued on page 15)*



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It's been a cold winter, but not as cold as in Japan (e.g., this year's *shinnenkai* didn't even have a blizzard on the same day.) What it did have was around 50 JET alums packed once again into the super-long *tatami* room at **Naniwa** while everyone gorged themselves on serious *nabe*, of both the seafood and carnivorous variety. **Clara Solomon** did another *subarashii* job of organizing, collecting the money and even getting her hubby **Jeff** to help her out again. Jeff no doubt this year appreciated the increased attendance by JETASO's (JET Alumni Significant Others) who all participated in an enlightening discussion of how to negotiate these types of events in a relationship... Meanwhile, a healthy mix of new and old, Japanese and American all did a fantastic job of overwhelming the diligent kimono-clad waitstaff, ordering food and drink until nearly 10:00 pm despite the original limitation of 9:00 pm...The State of Connecticut was represented, as usual, by **Cindy Hoffman**. The **Japan Society** by **Tomoko-san**. And noticeably absent was all around good guy **Janak Bhimani**.

**JETAA NEW YORK  
SOCIETY PAGE  
by Yoko Shitteiru**



\*\*\*\*\*

Japanese travel agency that no longer advertises in the Newsletter and therefore will remain nameless at the insistence of my editor.

It had been a while since the last **Nihongo Dake Dinner**, but **Brian Hersey** put together a nice one in mid-February. The place was **Shabu-Shabu 70**, a yummy and classy Japanese restaurant that is owned by the parents of Friend-of-JET **Sakura Suzuki** and serves ... well, you can guess. With over 30 attendees, the JET alum group took over most of the restaurant, indulged on delightful pre-*shabu-shabu sashimi* and did a good job of sticking to *nihongo-dake*. Among the interesting assortment of JET alums coming out of the woodwork was original Newsletter editor and mother-to-be **Lulu Lin**. Also, **NY de Volunteer** was well represented by **Miyuki** and **Harumi**. By the time everyone cleared out of the place it was 11:00 pm! Apparently there was no shortage of conversation topics.

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Yoko Shitteiru wants to offer a special *omedetou* to former vice-pres **Rosie DeFremery** for recently not only moving up to the next level in her *shodo* (i.e., Japanese calligraphy) class, but also and for passing the *nikkyu* Japanese language test less than 48 hours after de-planing from her weeklong trip to Japan and more than five years after returning from her stint on JET. *O-tsukare sama deshita*, Rosie-chan!

(“JETAA Society” continued on page 8)

If you missed the most recent **Happyfunsmile** show, well, that's because for the second time in a row it was canceled due to circumstances beyond their control. But if they ever do have another show, you definitely want to catch it. Meanwhile, **Gaijin-a-Go-Go** is still doing their fun thing around the city. But the newest and hottest Japan retro act to hit NYC will be March 26 at **B.B. King's** when Japanese metal band **Loudness** hits the stage, managed by **Aiko Sakai**, who used to work at a



\*\*\*\*\*

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# AND BABY MAKES JET!

by Lee Smitheman

*A JET Alum writes about bringing a child with him on the JET Program and having another one after he got there.*

When I first arrived on JET our daughter was already 18 months old. It never occurred to us not to go just because we had a child, in fact we saw it as a great opportunity for her and us. The JET salary was enough for us to live comfortably on, but we were not able to travel as much as some of the single JETs and most JET functions tend to exclude spouses. You will also have to pay for your partner and child(ren) to get to and from Japan, although the JET Programme was very helpful with regard to visas. After the first year or so though, when my partner had teaching part-time, we found it easy to travel and visited much of Japan.

How was the JET experience different for me, compared to other JETs? I feel that it was a much richer experience to be honest. Not only did I get to do all the JET cultural exchanges, attend the enkais and conferences, but I also had something in common with a lot of the teachers right from the start. We may have had not a lot else in common, but having a child gave them something that they could identify with straight away and gave them and me the opening to start many a conversation. As my daughter came to the open days, sports days, etc., she quickly become known to every student in the school, and from there to everyone in the village I taught in and a lot of the people in the town that I lived in. This became so much so, that people referred to me as "Lily no otosan." And, in fact, I found it easier at times to introduce myself as such. The usual "Hajime mashite, Lee to moshimas," usually elicited far less response than "Hajime mashite, Lily no papa desu."

For the partner of a JET with a child it can also be a good opening into the local community. There is always a danger when you are there with a partner that the one that stays at home can become isolated, lonely and feel excluded from the local and JET community. However, we put our daughter into local schooling from the very start. This meant that my partner was meeting other mothers and teachers on a daily basis. Her Japanese language picked up a lot quicker than mine due the necessity of speaking to these people regularly. There were many friends found in this way and no shortage of friendly enquiries and invitations for Lily to play with their children. Whether this would be the same in a large city, I couldn't say. Our daughter soon outstripped both of us in language ability, to the level that, after 4 years and finally heading home, she

needed a few weeks of extra English lessons to catch up with the kids back home.

We also had another child while we were in Japan. This can be a daunting experience, even in a country where you understand the system and the language of the doctors and nurses. In Japan it was even more so. We made sure that we had a pediatrician who had a better command of English than we had of Japanese and had had experience with foreign parents before. The system was very good and we felt completely at ease the whole time. A word of warning for anyone intending on having a child in Japan, pain relief during childbirth is not the norm in Japan and it is unlikely that it would be offered. My wife felt that it was better for her (afterwards) as she recovered a lot quicker and was more aware of everything that was going on. However, it's a big consideration to remember.



I thoroughly enjoyed my time on JET and did not feel it lessened at all by having children. Yes, it was difficult at times. Having parent-teacher meetings when your 5-year-old child is translating is not the most ideal situation, and having a child that thinks she is a princess can be a little trying. (So many times did high school children scream "Kawaii!!!!" as we rode past, that once, when they didn't see her, she became demanded to know why they didn't think she was cute!!)

Four years on and with most of their Japanese language forgotten, or hopefully just dormant, both my children have vivid memories of their time in Japan and I feel has made them very aware and understanding of different cultures, and I hope that by meeting and becoming friends with a *gaijin* family, the people we met in Japan have become a bit more understanding of our culture and ways.

*Lee was a British JET now living in Wellington, New Zealand, but is reportedly getting itchy feet again! Lily is now almost 10 and Jamie is almost 6.*

*They are both happy and well adjusted and seem to remember a lot about Japan. They have been back once and hope to go again soon. A legacy of their time in Japan? Lily's favourite food is white rice, and Jamie's is noodles, any sort. As part of JETAA in NZ, Lee is grateful for the chance to socialise with people whose eyes don't roll back as soon as he starts a sentence with, "Well, when I was in Japan..."*

# ALIEN BABY

by Nigel Stott

Hi, my name's Nigel and I was an ALT in Fukuoka from 1994 to 1997. I currently work as an associate professor at Fukuoka Prefectural University. My wife (who is Japanese) and I are planning to stay in Japan permanently. This article was originally written ten years ago when our first child was born, but I hope that it might still be interesting to readers of the JETAA New York Newsletter.

After the birth of our daughter, one of my congratulations cards contained this little rhyme:

"The good 'ol days of sleepless nights  
without a baby, meant pure delight!!  
But Aya's 'ere and tho' she has her charms  
you now have two girls in your arms!"

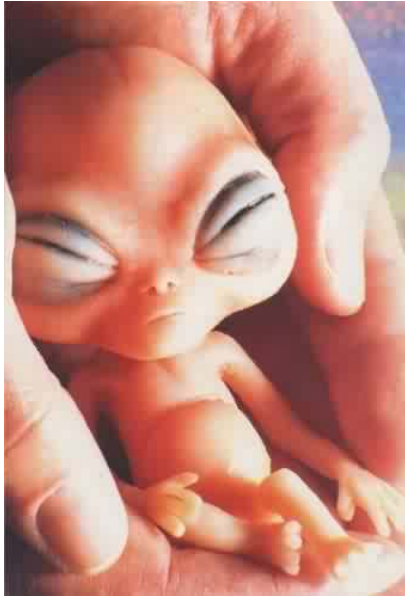
Yes, it's true. There have been many sleepless nights since January 10<sup>th</sup> when Aya-chan was born. I don't really mind, though, because she's worth it. Do you know the Japanese word "oyabaka"? Literally it means "stupid parents" but it really means doting parents who talk about nothing except for their own offspring. My wife (Shinobu) and I now definitely fall into that category. And so, without hesitating to apologize, I will inflict the story of Aya's birth upon you...

The private clinic we chose is, to use their own word, a "heartful" place. It has brochures and cards stating "with all your heart" and a notice board filled with baby photos under the message "Hellow Baby." We live nearer to the big public hospital but, apparently, they discourage fathers from attending births and I really wanted to be there. Also, the private clinic came highly recommended by a former ALT and friend. I think that she recommends it to rather a lot of people as the place is always packed and waiting times are lonngggg. However, the atmosphere is relatively relaxed and the nurses there are out of this world (don't get excited, I mean "heartful")!

Aya was due on January 1<sup>st</sup>, which is a very lucky birth date in Japan. Everyone who heard went crazy with their congratulations. They said stuff like "amazing," "you did very well," and "what incredible luck, she's sure to become rich." Inevitably she came late. Ten days late and ten days bigger than Shinobu had hoped. At nine pounds I guess she wasn't huge by Western standards, but she was one-and-a-half times the size of the average Japanese baby. That made for quite a funny scene in the new baby room – about 20 cute little babies all lined up in one long open cot (not separated) with one giant in the middle, looking like she would crush the others if she rolled over! We could see the looks of horror on the other parents' faces as they tried to hint to the nurses that their babies might not be safe lying in Aya's swollen shadow. Still, at least we didn't need to read the labels to know which was ours. We saw one couple gazing at their baby lovingly through the window, only to be rudely informed by a nurse rapping on the window and pointing, that this was not in fact their own child. Red-faced, they shuffled along the side of the cot, looked carefully at the labels and found the right one.

Anyway, back to the time before Aya's birth... There were four Lamaze (it's

a breathing technique) classes and one parents' class for us to attend during the pregnancy. We all sat on mats in the clinic's dance studio and did stretching, relaxation and meditation exercises. The stretching I could follow, but the meditation tape contained nothing but some rather irritating music and a man saying the names of various body parts (good Japanese lesson for me), following each utterance with "ga atataka" (is warm). Not something that I could meditate to, although everyone else seemed OK. There were 18 women in the group and only four male partners. I was one of a proud minority. The three other fathers-to-be joined in most of the exercises but only one male did the most embarrassing kneeling on hands and knees, pelvic thrusting type exercises (can you guess who?!)



Then there were the Lamaze breathing exercises. Japanese breathing consists of breathing out to the sound of "hi" (small breath) and "fuuu" (large breath). Combinations of these "hi-hi-fuuu" or "hi-fuuu-hi-fuuu" are pretty difficult to do with a straight face, I can tell you. In the final Lamaze class, a rather ominous-looking computer with four sets of wires and chest straps was leering at us from the front of the room. "We're going to give you a test" – shock waves around the room. Looking at Shinobu with a little grin and a whispered "well, it is Japan," I started to move to one side. "Oh no, don't try to escape, honorable husbands also included!" Foolishly, we'd sat up at the front. Shinobu, two other women, and I all had our chest straps and wires attached and then the computer showed us what we had to do – match our breathing speed and depth to the graph on the screen. When we breathed, our progress was shown by a colored line superimposed on the ideal graph. From what I could see, one of the mothers was dying, her breathing looking more like a fly buzzing randomly around the screen. After ten minutes of this

torture, the computer told her she should "ganbarimasho" (let's try harder), Shinobu got "yoku dekimashita" (well done) and I got "taihen yoku dekimashita" (very well done). I felt a warm glow of self-satisfaction and pride as the nurse told me that I should have the baby myself as my breathing technique was perfect. For a moment I thought I'd achieved something... then I realized that I hadn't!

In the half-day parents' lesson we had one session with no apparent purpose. We were expecting a lesson on baby care or something. I was surprised that, this time, all of the husbands were present. Each couple sat on their mat on the floor. The nurse had all the pregnancy medical record books in front of her. She picked the first one up, called out the name and then (shock) asked the husband to introduce his wife, tell us the baby's due date, and give his wife's current weight. He faltered on the last point and received a look of disapproval from over the nurse's glasses. There was a lot of frantic whispering around the room as husbands got the relevant information from their wives. However, the nurse was far too clever

(*"Alien Baby" continued on page 10*)

OFF-BROADWAY REVIEW

## JET Alum Randall David Cook's SAKE WITH THE HAIKU GEISHA

Reviewed by Lyle Sylvander

Randall David Cook's new play *Sake with the Haiku Geisha*, produced by the Gotham Stage Company at the Perry Street Theatre, is a must-see for all past and future JET participants. Early reviews of the play were written by critics who had little understanding of Japan, much less the experience of actually living in the country. What emerges from the play, in a fine production by Alex Lippard, is not a superficial conflict of cultural values but a more profound assessment of the psychological scars left by cross-cultural contact.

Each one of the play's vignettes follows a central character, three of whom are JET participants. Charlotte Linscott (Emma Bowers), Parker Hamilton (Jeremy Hollingworth) and Brianna MacInnis (Fiona Gallagher) are all Assistant English Teachers who have brought their own uncertainties and ghosts with them to Japan. The initial comical culture shock moments, such as mistaking Santa Claus for a crucified "Santa Cross", soon evolve into a deeper confrontation with inner demons and emotional insecurities. Charlotte's story is told in a series of letters to her grandmother in England. Her reasons for coming to Japan are never made clear and her prim and proper pose may be masking a painful memory back home. Parker is a closeted gay American Southerner who finds that Japan is not the best place to disclose his sexual preference. The combined pressures of being the local *gaijin* and a closeted gay man are hilariously exposed in a dream sequence, in which a class of antagonistic females throw painfully embarrassing questions at him. Of these stories, the most poignant is that of Brianna, a Canadian who constantly reminds her students that Canada is, in fact, a sovereign nation and not part of the United States. Her promiscuous affair with a Japanese teacher becomes a desperate attempt to escape the memory of her dead boyfriend. Like many JET participants, Charlotte, Parker and Brianna are young college graduates embarking on the first years of their adult lives. The often painful road to self-discovery and growth is magnified by the strange cultural surroundings. Brianna wishes that she could have one day in which she doesn't feel like she's "on Mars". All three characters must confront their stark naked fears and insecurities far from the comfort of their home countries.

The last two vignettes concern Japanese nationals: the English teacher Ichiro Hashimoto (David Shih) and a local girl named Sumiko Matsuhira (Angela Lin). The impetus for Hashimoto's story is a fascistic school parade in which the students salute a Hitler float. Brianna is offended and Ichiro tells her not to blame the students for Japan's historical amnesia. The resulting confrontation sends him into a retelling of his grandparents' eyewitness account of the bombing of Hiroshima. Historical memory is thrust to the present as the cast members stoically recount the horrible effects of the bomb. Cook seems to suggest that the legacy of the bomb has permanently scarred the Japanese collective unconscious.

Sumiko's story is the most conventional of the five and is structured like a self-contained one act play. Despite her mother's warnings, she



embarks on a love affair with an Irish expatriate. Jeremy Hollingworth plays him well - his bumbling Japanese is at first cute and charming but hints at a less than genuine character. Sumiko's initial distrust dissolves into full-fledged love and she bears him a child. Ultimately, she is abandoned and advised by her mother to raise the child in Kyoto. The child grows into the titular *geisha*, who connects the five vignettes by reciting Haiku poems. As the child of Japanese and Western parents, she is literally the connective tissue that holds the play together.

Director Alex Lippard's staging manages to mix both Japanese and Western theatrical conventions, much like Amon Miyamoto's staging of Stephen Sondheim's *Pacific Overture* did last season. Like the latter show, the actors perform on a sparse wooden stage, suggesting *Noh* theatre. What makes *Sake with the Haiku Geisha* a more effective production are the characters which populate that stage. *Pacific Overtures* suffered from an overly didactic and academic approach that left little room for empathy. Randall David Cook has populated his show with real people, whose innermost thoughts are laid bare before the audience. The excellent company of actors should be commended for bringing Cook's script to life. According to the program, this is the first production by the Gotham Stage Company. They have provided a service for all JETs and non-JETs alike in launching their organization with this powerful play.

### WANT TO SEE THE PLAY?

**WHEN:** Performances run Tuesday through Saturday at 8:00 pm, and Sunday matinees at 3:00 pm.

**WHERE:** The Perry Street Theatre in the West Village, just off 7th Street.

**FOR TICKETS:** Visit the SmartTix site ([www.smarttix.com](http://www.smarttix.com)) and enter "SAKE" or use this link: <https://www.smarttix.com/show.aspx?show-code=SAK&AID=PER40>.

You can also visit [www.jetaany.org](http://www.jetaany.org) for more info and links.

(JETAA Society, continued from page 4)

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Bruce Feiler wrote the first book about the JET Program (*Learning to Bow*). And now **Randall David Cook** (Fukui-ken, 1991-93) has written *Sake with the Haiku Geisha*, the first off-Broadway play about the JET Program. Lest you should be influenced by the completely clueless reviews in *Time Out* and *Daily Variety* who deign to suggest that some of those events we've all experienced were not real, rest assured the show is an impressive and innovative production that does justice to the JET Program. And for a JET alum, watching the show is simply a moving experience on several levels. [Editor's note: See a more thoughtful review of the play on page 7 of this issue.]... There is, however, no truth to the rumor that JET alum **Nick Cook** will do a 60-second version of *Sake with the Haiku Geisha* in his upcoming improv performances at the Magnet Theatre March 11 & 18 and April 1 & 29.

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March 10 saw the first ever **JETAA Pre-St Patrick's Day Nihongo Dake Crawl** out in the Irish-centric neighborhood of **Woodside**, Queens, organized by Woodside resident **Clara Solomon**. While enjoying the local homebrew at the **Cuckoo's Nest** served by waitresses with charming Irish accents, the 15 or so attendees, including **Stacy Smith and the Nikkei Crew** and a crutch-less **Sakura Suzuki**, sampled the Shepherd's Pie and, unfortunately, the Irish pub-style beek teriyaki while **Cindy Hoffmannsensei** and **Wynne Wu-sensei** led a comparative discussion of Japanese and Chinese history, and Clara, Stacy and **Tatsue** attempted to appropriately translate the term "disposable income." After moving to **Toucan Tommy's** across the street (officially making it a "crawl"), the **Nihongo Dake Crowd** completed the cross-cultural experience by encountering some of the neighborhood characters such as *yoparatteiru* Nebraskan and lifelong secret Japan-ophile **Sarah**, who repeatedly shared her *kanji* tattoo on her lower back and explained how she used to study Japanese by satellite video in 1997.

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*Hanami* is coming soon and **Yoku Shitteiru** is ready. See you next issue!



### Shinnenkai at Naniwa



**Nihongo Dake St Patrick's Day Warmup - Cuckoo's Nest & Toucan Tommy's,**



Our neighbor growing up was Mrs. Tanazaki. There were a couple black families but she was the only Japanese. "Oriental," my father called her, and my mother, who had some college, said "Asian" in consternation, but that was before my father left and my mother only had us to yell at, which she did whether or not there was reason to.

Mrs. Tanazaki's house was the same size as ours, as were all the houses in the development. But her lawn had no broken tricycles or deflated balls. Instead, she had dotted the perimeter of her house with shaped hedges—*topiary*, my broken-spined dictionary told me. Most of them were circular, and my brother Toby and I called them puffs. There were different kinds of puffs—commanding puffs that must have been six feet in diameter, snowman-shaped puffs in increasing size, and tall puffs that looked like a champion poodle's leg.

One more thing was that even though we knew it was Mrs. Tanazaki's house, Toby and I had never seen her up close. It was obvious she was short—she dragged an aluminum ladder around the length of her property (her grass never showed tracks), to clip the tops of the plants into shape. But she always wore a floppy blue hat with green polka dots.

"Mom," I asked one day, "how old is Mrs. Tanazaki?"

This was back when my mother had long hair, which was thick and blond, her great vanity. "I don't know."

"Haven't you met her?"

"Yes."

"Well, how old did she *look*?" I asked.

My mother hesitated. She was sitting at the table patching a pair of Toby's overalls with a bright blue square, my brother's favorite color. "I couldn't tell. She's a burn victim."

I didn't yet have a sense of delicacy or tact. I looked confused.

"Her face is melted," my mother continued.

Melted? To a young girl, a melted face is beyond frightening. It was incomprehensible.

"How?" I whispered.

"In the war—not the one your father was in, an earlier one—there were bombs. In Japan. Some of the people who survived the bombs were disfigured." I knew what disfigured meant. My mother, unlike my friend's mothers, didn't talk down to me. "It was a terrible decision."

Again, I didn't understand. When I asked, she said, "It's important to know. You'll learn about it in school soon."

But I didn't learn about it in school. It was Thanksgiving time and instead we learned about Columbus and the Indians. And I had a reputation for asking too many questions, so when I mentioned a Japanese bomb, my teacher, shriveled Mr. Greaves, told me, "Not now."

That winter, as usual, only Mrs. Tanazaki's puffs showed any color in the neighborhood. My father was staying in his mother's house, watching it "while Grammy's in the hospital." Grammy had lung cancer, that was true, but I knew my father's reason to be false. Perhaps because I kept up appearances for Toby's sake, my father thought I believed him. Back at home, my mother started making calls for a living, and I hated that voice she used, sweeter than candy corn, to convince people to donate money for children she had never met. Trudging through the lawn's dead gray leaves on a Saturday cold as metal, Toby with our father, Mrs. Tanazaki made an appearance in her floppy hat. In

## MRS. TANIZAKI

*A short story by Alexei Esikoff*

her right hand she clutched heavy shears. I stood on the imaginary boundary between our crinkly grass and hers. She saw me and waved, the brim of her hat still pulled low.

I yelled, "I like your topiary!"

Mrs. Tanazaki stopped mid-clip. With her head lifted her chin was exposed, ridged and rippling. I wasn't about to let myself be afraid.

"Thank you," she said. The ripples held firm like clay when she spoke.

"I'm Sharon."

"Sha-ron," she repeated, "it's very cold out."

"Yes," I agreed.

"Would you like hot tea?" Her accent was round like her plants.

"Yes please."

Mrs. Tanazaki set her shears down next to an oblong puff. Her walk back into the little house was that of an old woman, swaying from side to side. When her screen door closed, I crossed the invisible line to her side of the property. Then I waited patiently on her stoop, not daring to peek in. Mrs.

Tanazaki's house, I imagined, was home to swirly potions and hairless cats.

"Are you to come in?" Mrs. Tanazaki was on the opposite side of the screen door.

"I'll stay out here."

Her ridged chin quivered, and she disappeared again into the house. When she came back, she held two steaming, chipped mugs, like the ones we used at home. But this tea was pale green. "Thank you," I said. I took a bitter sip.

"Japanese tea doesn't have sugar," she said.

We sat on her concrete stoop. Mrs. Tanazaki's trousers were flimsy cotton; I wondered if she felt the seeping cold like I did through my jeans.

"I like it," I told her, lying. The warmth traveling down my throat did help. She only nodded.

"My mother told me you were in a bomb."

What I expected was Mrs. Tanazaki to have a very serious adult discussion with me about living through a bomb attack. What she did was throw her head back in a great genuine laugh. And for a couple seconds her face was

exposed. Her nose was shaped like a collection of wax drips. Her cheeks were speckled pinkish, her eyes mushy slits.

I must have appeared consternated because Mrs. Tanazaki cleared her throat and apologized for laughing. "Children say funny things!" Being called a child had me rumped. "Bombs aren't funny."

"You are right. Not funny."

"But you're laughing."

Mrs. Tanazaki shrugged. "Now my life is good." She removed the hat, welcoming me to stare.

"But your face," I whispered.

"I have health. I have a beautiful daughter."

"Where does she live?"

"California."

"Does she look like you?"

"My daughter was born in America," she said, not answering the question.

I gulped down the rest of my tea, which had cooled off. Chills rose through my legs. Mrs. Tanazaki cupped the mug in both hands and stared ahead. Next door, I saw my mother step outside. She called my name.

"Your mother," said Mrs. Tanazaki.

*("Mrs. Tanizaki" continued on page 10)*



("Aliben Baby" continued from page 6)

for us and she asked a different third question each time. I was the fourth to be called. When I said that our baby's due date was January 1<sup>st</sup>, there was a gasp of astonishment (envy?) from the other couples and the nurse gave the inevitable "omedetou gozaimasu" (congratulations). She then asked me what medical problem my wife was currently experiencing. How could I explain low hemoglobin levels in Japanese? A look of confusion clouded my face and the nurse gave Shinobu a sympathetic oh-what-an-uncaring-husband look, before explaining "chi ga usui, desu ne" (thin blood). I was irritated at her patronizing manner but, at the same time, I also thought this was a big internationalization breakthrough – I was being asked about my Japanese wife, in her presence, in Japanese, with absolutely no acknowledgement of my gaijinity! That's a first! Now, obviously, the purpose of this session was to make the fathers take a greater interest in the pregnancy (even if it was just to prevent being caught up by questions in the future). However, although this was our last lesson in the series, for the other couples it was their first before the Lamaze training. Suddenly it dawned on me why so few husbands had made it to the other sessions – fear of further humiliation.



January 1<sup>st</sup> came and went. No sign of a baby. A week later, Shinobu felt contractions and, just as we'd been instructed, she waited until they were at ten-minute intervals before calling the clinic. She was expecting them to say that they'd have a bed ready and waiting for her arrival but, instead, the nurse simply said "you're not having real contractions because, if you were, you wouldn't be able to talk to me right now!" Shinobu was taken aback, "you mean it gets worse than this?!"

The next day the "real" contractions started. Shinobu couldn't talk through this pain. They admitted her to the hospital at 9:30 pm and, from that moment on, I became her masseur – targeting that spot in the small of her back where she felt like her pelvis was being pulled apart (which of course it was!). At 1:00 am I was finally persuaded to return home for a few hours' sleep (holding onto the telephone like a teddy bear) and then rushed back to the clinic at first light. Contractions galore but still no baby. All day long! Finally, 24 hours after admission, they took us into the delivery room. What an amazing room! With its wall-long fish tank and tiny electric multi-colored ceiling stars (instead of normal lights), peace and serenity were almost guaranteed. Or so you'd think. I guess it probably was a more calming atmosphere than in an operating room but, at times, I felt like we were in a submarine in an emergency. You know, in the movies, when they switch off the lights and there's that red twilight glow

with the silence punctuated by the ping-pings vibrating through the vessel's hull. Very unnerving! But at least the torpedo didn't hit us... Well, Shinobu doesn't quite agree with that last statement. She said that's exactly what it felt like!

Nine long hours in the delivery room. After a 48-hour labor and just at the point Shinobu and I had agreed that she should be taken outside and shot to put her out of her misery, the baby arrived. When it was held up in all its purple, blue, gray, blood- and gore-covered glory, an exhausted Shinobu gasped "watshi no alien-chan" (my alien baby).

All through the latter half of the pregnancy, everyone had asked us "is it a girl or a boy?" Much to the puzzlement of all, we replied "don't know and don't want to know." The worried response: "But how will you know what color clothes to buy?" "Duhh! Big problem!" In fact, preventing the doctor from telling us the baby's sex was a feat in itself. He kept trying at every clinic visit. "No thank you, we want it to be a surprise." You see, we had this romantic image (from movies and TV dramas) of the moment of birth and the midwife or doctor holding the baby aloft with the words "Congratulations, it's a boy" or "You've got a beautiful baby girl!" The kicking bump suddenly becomes a little boy or girl and the parents cry with joy. In our case, however, the nurses and doctor had forgotten that we didn't know, the doctor's hand had obscured the important bits, and we hadn't noticed. I was so relieved that Shinobu had survived the ordeal that thoughts of the baby's gender hadn't even crossed my mind. The nurses took the baby away for checking and cleaning and I held Shinobu's hand and gazed at her tired but happy face. Suddenly, she looked at me and said "Is it a boy or girl?" "Oh, I don't know." "What do you mean, you don't know, you cut the umbilical cord, didn't you?" "Well, yes, but I was focusing on making a clean snip, I didn't look down there!" We had to call the nurse over to tell us. Laughing, she said "Didn't you know? It's a girl!" and so the little alien became Aya-chan.

Aya was handed to me and, amazingly, she had her eyes open and was staring straight at me. I don't suppose she saw much beyond a shadow of a man (which is an apt description of my state at that time!) but it was incredible to be looking into the eyes of the child we had made. Our daughter. Definitely one of those weak-at-the-knees moments.

("Mrs. Tanazaki" continued from page 9)

"I guess I should go home."  
 "Say hello to your mother. She's a good lady."  
 I stood and spoke politely. "Thank you for the tea, Mrs. Tanazaki."  
 "You're welcome. Please call me Midori."  
 "Is that your first name?"  
 "Yes. It means 'green.'"  
 "Goodbye, Madori," I said, stumbling a little. She remained on the stoop as I dashed to my own front door. My mother waved at our neighbor and pushed me inside.  
 "Why were you bothering poor Mrs. Tanazaki?"  
 "She gave me tea."  
 My mother sat back down in front of the squat telephone. It was the exact color of the inside of an avocado, but I didn't know what an avocado was then. "Don't bug her too much. She's had a hard life."  
 "She told me she's happy. She has a daughter who lives in California."  
 "I hope you didn't ask about her burns."

"I didn't."  
 "You know we were the ones that dropped that bomb."  
 "Who?"  
 "We did. Americans."  
 I was speechless. Americans win wars over bad guys. Bad guys were Nazis. Only bad guys would leave someone looking like a raisin.  
 "I feel guilty every time I talk to her." My mother reached for the avocado phone and opened the manila folder next to it.  
 "Toby will be back soon. Will you cut the veggies?"  
 It was my mother's conviction growing kids have fresh vegetables every day. Nothing canned or bagged. She went to the farm stand run by Indians several times a week, the only white lady wandering the aisles for the perfect broccoli. I took out the wooden cutting board, marked by years of vegetable chopping, and arranged three carrots in a row. As I cut perfect slices, I thought of ways to trick Mrs. Tanazaki into giving me tea again. Next time I'd go in her house.

("Kazoku-banashi" continued from page 1)

was truly impressed. But everyone in the office kept apologizing that the Mayor wasn't there to greet my father himself. Even though we repeatedly said we didn't mind being "slighted" by the Mayor, the town office workers felt very bad about this situation. Later that evening, when we had gone back to my house so my dad could take a jetlag nap, my cell phone rang. It was the Mayor's driver — they were in front of my house and the mayor was hoping to come in to greet my father! I quickly woke up my dad, who was totally disoriented (as jetlag will make you), made him change back into nice clothes, didn't give him time to even comb his hair, and we opened the door for the Mayor, who was bearing a box of locally made treats and apologizing profusely for not having been at the office earlier in the day. Thankfully (because my house wasn't clean), the mayor didn't come in, but we had a nice chat on the front steps. My father still talks about that experience today!

-Clara Solomon

The Tsukamotos became my "Japanese family" through a typically weird sequence of events. I went to find my landlord one day with virtually non-existent Japanese language ability and some vague directions from the folks at the Board of Ed. I just started knocking on doors asking people if they were my *jinushi* (which I later learned is like the 16th century word for landlord.) But while everyone else shut the door in my face, the Tsukamotos invited me in for tea and cookies, despite knowing virtually no English. Somehow they helped me find my landlord, and then they started inviting me to cultural events — the symphony, English bunraku. Then they started having me over for dinner every Monday night. And since they knew I didn't like seafood, I ate *shabu-shabu* or *sukiyaki* almost every time. (They were pretty well off.) The strange thing was that they had an adult son who lived with them. After two years of spending quality time with my Japanese "family," it was finally time to say goodbye. I went to their house, said goodbye, and as I was about to leave, Mrs. Tsukamoto said goodbye and... and... stuck out her hand for a handshake!! I had to counter by giving her an awkward, but heartfelt, hug.

-Steven Horowitz, Aichi-ken, 1992-94

After JET, I enrolled in a full-time language school in Fukuoka. During that time, my youngest brother Eric, four years my junior, visited. Although we grew up together, I had been in college and then off to Japan thus, we finally had an opportunity to get reacquainted as adults. I met him at the airport, we dropped his stuff at my apartment, and immediately headed out to The Dark Room, a *gaijin* bar on the famed Oyafukudori. We met up with one of my classmates, who I will call Adam (since that is his real name), another JET alumnus. As students, money was tight so the gimmick that drew us to the Dark Room that evening was "free tequila night." Free, *nomihoudai* tequila! One must imagine that the business plan counted on sensible people having other drinks and food with the occasional free shot. Adam and I, however, planned to stick to the tequila. As a beer drinker, I lacked experience with hard liquor but knew I needed a strategy to ensure that I made a good impression on my brother. I elected to pace myself two shots behind Adam, the more experienced drinker, in order to make sure things stayed in control. Things seemed to go well for a while, but then my memory gets fuzzy. My own patchy recollection and my brother's account indicate that Eric, after about 6 hours in Japan, with no knowledge of Japanese and completely reliant on his "responsible" oldest brother, wound up out on the sidewalk (were we thrown out?) taking care of the two vomiting and incoherent locals who were supposed to be taking care of him. No idea where I lived, how to get there, no language skills, nothing. Eventually, Warren (now JETAA's national president)

happened by and rescued us, driving us back to the apartment as he and Eric coaxed the directions out of me. The next clear memory I have is waking up in my apartment the next morning. I had slept on one of my futons, Adam on the other in my sleeping bag, and Eric was pathetically huddled under the *kotatsu* cover, shivering on the *tatami*. Way to make a good impression. Welcome to Japan little brother. Sigh...

-Brian Hersey



I'm English and Matt's American. We met after I'd been on the JET Program for a year, then Matt came to Nagano-ken, too. We lived about an hour and a half away from each other by train. This was August '97. After another year on the programme for me and a year for Matt (though this was his third time in Japan), we decided to travel together. We went to Korea and China, then took the Trans-Siberian Railway from Beijing to Moscow, then to St. Petersburg, Prague and to Paris. There we left each other: Matt back to Minnesota, and myself to England. Matt then visited me in November '98 and proposed, we were married in '99 (a ceremony in MN, honeymoon to Greece, and another ceremony and reception in England). We now live in MN and have two adopted children from South Korea. That's our story in a nutshell.

-Nichola & Matt Schoenfelder, Nagano-ken '96-'98

My cousin Tim was in Tokyo for a business trip, and came up to my little town/city of Ninohe in Iwate-ken to visit. I lived in an old, drafty teacher's house for which I paid 6,000 yen a month in rent. He'd been staying in a fancy hotel in Akasaka. Needless to say, he was not too impressed with Ninohe's rustic mountain charm, nor with sleeping on the floor in my spare room (already a bit chilly by early October) and making use of my pit toilet. He only stayed one night, but refused to use my shower, which required cranking to heat up the hot water, sitting on a little stool on a cement floor (he's 6 feet), so I took him to our local onsen. He was actually a really good sport about that and still counts that as the highlight of his visit, although he still makes fun of me for living in a house with a pit toilet.

-Crystal Wong

My brother came to Japan not only to see his little sister, but also to get a traditional tattoo. He did his research and got recommendations for a really good artist. Turns out you need to book this particular artist months or even years in advance. So my brother booked his apprentice. The tattoo was started on that trip and continued on a return trip to Japan to finish it off. He got it done in the "traditional" way, which means not using an electric needle (I think they are needles, I am no expert on this). All of which basically translated to a whole lot of hours of work and my bro laying on the *tatami*. I went to the studio once to watch. It is quite a nice image of carp swimming.

-Kat Barnas

The first time my mother visited me in Kobe we went to this little noodle shop in Akashi. She had to go to the bathroom so I pointed her towards the little door in the back. She came back some minutes later, looking flustered and bewildered. "What happened?" I asked. "Well," she said, "I'm not sure if I did it right." "You mean the bathroom? OHHHH, was it Japanese style." Head bobbing. "Well you must have figured it out somehow." She proceeded to tell me how she had nothing to hold on to. "You hold onto the flusher handle," I emphasized. "Well I couldn't reach it..." "Whaddya mean you couldn't reach it, it's right there!" "Well not if you're facing the door..." The image of my aging, diminutive mother with a bad leg teetering precariously over the slippery porcelain with nothing but the wall to hold on to was too much. I still laugh heartily at her expense.

-Kennerly Clay, Kobe-shi, 1995-1998

Prior to JET, I lived in Japan for one year as an exchange student. During that time I was shuffled between four families (don't ask). When my host mother wasn't cheating on her husband -- *okaasan* once gave me a 1,500

("Kazoku-banashi" continued from page 11)

yen train pass so I could "disappear" for the day -- she was drinking herself silly. I remember one night where I was having dinner with her and my nine-year-old host brother, and she noticed that the Kirin she tried to insta-chill in the freezer became solid. Not one to let the laws of thermodynamics keep her from getting sozzled, *okaasan* busted out the can opener and scooped out a nice helping of *aisu biiru*. While her son was bemused by this, she said it wasn't too bad and kept pecking at it throughout the meal. She was still busy nursing it by the time I went to bed.

During JET my own family never it made it over to visit me, but I did get to meet my girlfriend's parents, who lived in a small fishing village two hours' north of Kobe. I had never visited a country town before and was amazed at how different a vibe it was from city life. For example, I got to observe a public funeral and attend a pre-wedding ceremony all in the same day. I didn't think my girlfriend's folks liked me much, since they didn't really fit the description of "open minded" Japanese. But at the end of our visit, they surprised me by giving me a lovely hand-made Doll Festival display made almost entirely out of origami. It was so delicate that it couldn't help getting wrecked on my way back to the States, but I was able to fix it with some carefully placed Crazy Glue. It's now proudly on display in my living room, a lasting memento of my time on JET.

**-Justin Tedaldi, Kobe-shi, 2001-2002**

The highlight of my brothers' visit to Japan was taking them to a *rotenburo* in the snow-covered mountains of Gifu. We were the only ones there and had a great time running around naked, throwing snow at each other and taking barely appropriate pictures of each other.

**-Steven Horowitz, Aichi-ken, 1992-94**

My school totally rolled out the red carpet when my parents came to town. They had an assembly with all the *san nen sei* which included my students performing the school song, *kendo* and *karate* demonstrations, traditional Japanese dance, a "rock" band performance and of course the requisite opening and closing speeches in English. Afterwards, my parents witnessed a tea ceremony and finally tried their hands at *ikebana*. Much to my mother's and my surprise, my father excelled at *ikebana*. The teacher told my father that his arrangement was perfect and made no corrections/adjustments. This humbled my mother a bit since she's arranged flowers at church and for many holidays and celebrations. In his retirement, my father now gives my mother interior decorating suggestions. Who knew Japan would help him discover his artistic side?! Either that or math and engineering skills somehow translate to *ikebana* proficiency. I always felt very loved and appreciated on JET, even on those days where I was used as a human tape recorder, but the treatment my parents received made me really understand the lengths and depth of Japanese hospitality.

**-Cindy Hoffman**

I had a great host family in Yokohama and stayed with them for two weeks while my apartment was being prepared. My host father taught at my school and Wakako-san was a traditional housewife who taught me how to make all kinds of great Japanese dishes from scratch. I'd come home from school and we'd cook. For two weeks, she made me these wonderful *bentos* for me to take to school. Once I moved out, I thought it would stop—until I was presented with the same wonderful *bento* box delivered by my host father with the announcement that since we was making his lunch, it was no problem to make one for me too. For the two years I was there, Wakako-san made me lunch every day—to this day one of the most memorable things that happened to me in Japan.

**-Ilonka Osvald**

My parents visited me in Japan in the spring of my second year on JET. I

thought I had prepared them with a care package of books about Japanese culture and etiquette for Christmas. Things went pretty well, for the most part. On one of the few occasions where we dined alone (no friends, teachers, etc.) we went to my favorite restaurant in the city where I lived. I ordered all of the dishes I really liked and wanted my parents to try. "Sammy," the owner, whose real name none of us *gaijin* ever learned (coincidence? I think not!) came out and saw that my parents were visiting, so he quickly rushed back in the kitchen to prepare a special dish. I had witnessed the house specialty before when the



FIG. 197. A JAPANESE FAMILY. Methodist Prints.

other *gaijin* in my town had ordered it to shock other *gaijin* visitors to our town and purposefully did NOT order it. I knew it would not be good when Sammy started to make a fuss over how honored he was to have my parents visit his little restaurant. Out first came a beautifully prepared and displayed dish of *iwashi sashimi* (the restaurant's name was *Iwashi no Sanshiro*) and, just to show how fresh the *iwashi* was because the huge tank with live *iwashi* at the end of the bar wasn't proof enough, the still breathing, head and tail intact, skewered remains of the poor fellow. When the waiter disappeared back into the kitchen I really started to

worry. My parents, who thankfully enjoy fresh(!) seafood and are fairly adventurous as far as food goes, politely nibbled on the *sashimi* as I sat awaiting my fate. Next came a small dish with the dime-sized, still beating heart of the *iwashi* on it. I knew my mother would not go near it, but was hoping my father would take it on since he had sampled his share of unusual fish in his years in the Navy. No such luck. I resigned myself to my fate, let the beating slow down a bit, quickly swallowed the heart and chased it with a large gulp of beer. To add insult to injury, the final part of the dish involves the chef deep frying the remaining part of the *iwashi* (head, backbone and tail) to make *hone-sembei* (bone *sembei*) which I also was forced to eat in order to save face with my friend Sammy. Leave it to Japanese to not waste a bit of the fish!

**-Cindy Hoffman**

This wasn't on JET, it was when I was a rotary exchange student at the tender young age of 16. My host fathers used to take me to hostess bars to show me off (I'm not sure who I was being shown off too...) Rotary club members are usually very successful businessmen from their community, seeing as how this community was Osaka, these men were quite well off, so we went to some swanky places. My favorite was the one where the women were actually dressed in little bunny suits.

**-Clara Solomon**

When my parents were coming to visit, they asked me what I wanted, and I said, half joking, a hoagie from Hoagie Haven (best hoagies in the world.) Well, on the way to the airport my mom went to the Haven with my special request and the guy gave her all the ingredients separated into plastic ziploc bags. I picked my folks up at the airport and we took the express train from Narita. And while other passengers proceeded to open their tray tables and eat their train-purchased *bentos*, my mom hauls out the hoagie ingredients and on our tray tables we proceeded to assemble a good old American turkey hoagie. A nice cultural contrast to start their trip. One additional family train experience: On the *shinkansen* while playing Travel Scrabble to pass the time, we dropped a tile (I think it was an 'R') and spent the next thirty minutes on our hands and knees crawling around the *shinkansen* floor with a couple other helpful Japanese passengers. We never did find it.

**Steven Horowitz, Aichi-ken, 1992-94**

## BOOK REVIEW CORNER

DAVID L. McCONNELL'S  
IMPORTING DIVERSITY: INSIDE JAPAN'S JET PROGRAM

Reviewed by Justin Tedaldi

**Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the JET Program But Were Afraid to Ask**

"They hired me for *this*?!"

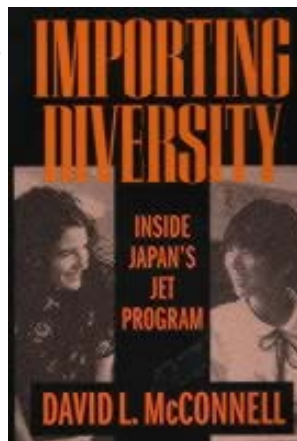
What JET hasn't ever said that? Though anyone who's been on the program probably finishes richer for the experience, some come away with the feeling that they learned more about its host country and its people than the other way around—a definite contrast from the aims of the JET Program and its goals concerning internationalization.

To shine a light on this dynamic, JET alumnus and current anthropology professor David L. McConnell took his experiences to the extreme by writing the very first academic study of the JET Program. Published in 2000, *Importing Diversity: Inside Japan's JET Program* dedicates the bulk of its 280 pages to the stormy relationships between the Japanese ministries and CLAIR that administer the program, and the JETs faced with adapting to cities and schools that many not necessarily know what do with (much less have a need) for them.

But McConnell isn't anti-JET. He uses the friction generated in the birth and early years of the program—most of his research is dedicated to personal experiences and interviews with JET administrators of the late 1980s—to draw an interesting parallel between how JET accepts and places its applicants with how Japan itself is similarly selective in picking foreign labor.

Most telling are the interviews the author conducted with former JETs and prefectural administrators who are more than vocal in describing what they think works in the program and what doesn't. Despite speaking with ten years of hindsight, it's fascinating to read about the origin of the JET Program (it was first presented as a "gift" to the American delegation at the "Ron-Yasu" summit in 1986 between President Reagan and Prime Minister Nakasone) and how the Ministry of Home Affairs struggled with the Ministry of Education to make JET a reality.

These episodes are interwoven with snapshots of Japan's own checkered history of internationalization and the delicate balance the ministries exerted to maintain between the private (the Japan teach-



ers' union was less than pleased to have to work with a bevy of untrained young visitors from abroad) and the public (having more foreigners working in the country and teaching English is good P.R.) facets of Japan.

The book is not without weaknesses. First, the author apparently never met a case study he didn't like. The "categories" of JETs, instructors and administrators and their cornucopia of quirks is so exhaustive that non-JETs will be tempted to read only the interview portions of the chapter to get to the juicy bits. Additionally, if you're looking for an equally balanced view of life as a CIR or SEA, forget it. Despite what the title says, the book's concentration is on the ALT experience and how it ties into internationalization Japanese-style. JETs who have recently returned to their home countries and scan this book may even take offense at all the "problems" the author describes regarding the system when much of the data is drawn from the first few years of the program (and when its long-term future was never a sure thing).

**Most telling are the interviews the author conducted with former JETs and prefectural administrators who are more than vocal in describing what they think works in the program and what doesn't.**

The book really shines as a primer for prospective JET candidates. The screening and interview process—which the author sat in on in numerous occasions—apparently hasn't changed much since the early years of the program, so more than a few hints for a successful interview can be gleaned from the book. The same can be said for the right/wrong way to behave professionally in Japan. Since most JETs start their careers with the program right out of school in the respected field of education, depending on where they're placed or who they work with, teachers will either be thrilled to work with the JET or will want little to do with them. One standout quote provided from a teacher of Japanese is the feeling that a more "individual" method of teaching would take the focus off the students' entrance exams and take away from their finely-tuned cramming skills and "good of the group"-isms.

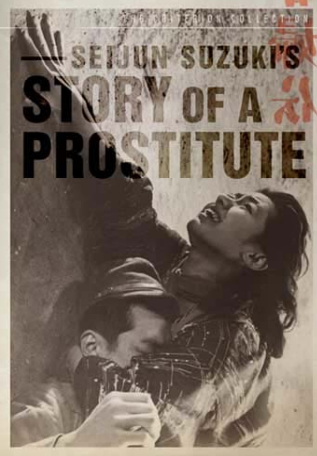
Ultimately, *Importing Diversity* makes valuable reading for those interested in Japan and the inner-workings of any society based on a microcosm that is Japan's JET Program. The style may be a bit too academic for some, but the substance is the clearest JET's-eye view of Japan yet—at least until that CIR book makes its way to the shelves.

DVD REVIEW

SPOTLIGHT ON: SEIJUN SUZUKI

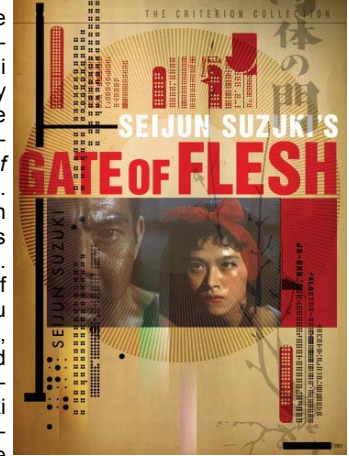
Director of "Story of a Prostitute" & "Gate of Flesh"

by Lyle Sylvander



Japan's Golden Age of Cinema, which flourished during the 1950s and 1960s, supplied the international film circuit with a steady diet of respectable award-winning films. However, far from the lights and glamour of the Cannes and Venice film festivals, a different type of film vied for the attention of domestic audiences. Unlike their more distinguished kin, these films had no artistic pretensions. They were the low-budget series of B-movies whose sole purpose was to make a quick yen. Nikkatsu Productions dominated the circuit and left the high-brow and bigger budget epics to the more established studios. While working within a limited number of genres – predominantly the *yakuza*

*Gate of Flesh* takes place after the war and can be seen as a chronological sequel. Indeed, if Harumi had survived the war, she may have found herself among the street denizens and black marketers that populate *Gate of Flesh*'s American-occupied Tokyo. Once again, the story focuses on prostitutes, although Suzuki uses five protagonists this time around. Into the decrepit underworld of Maya (Yumiko Nogawa), Oroku (Tamiko Ishii), Sen (Satoko Kasai), Machiko (Misako Tominaga) and Omino (Kayo Matsuo) comes ex-soldier Ibuki (Joe Shishido). Ibuki is running from the military authorities and finds refuge within the



and "prostitute" film – the directors were nevertheless granted a certain amount of creative leeway. As long as the film delivered what the producers wanted – sex and violence – directors were free to use the resources of the limited budget to their advantage. Seijun Suzuki, working under contract with Nikkatsu, flourished in this type of setting. Best known for his series of pop art *yakuza* films (*Tokyo Drifter*, *Branded to Kill*), Suzuki directed two "prostitute" films - *Story of a Prostitute* (1965) and *Gate of Flesh* (1964) – that take place before and after the war respectively. Both films are based on novels by Tajiro Tamura and have been simultaneously released on DVD by The Criterion Collection.

**One wonders if Japanese audiences, able to sympathize with the destruction of their homeland at the hands of a foreign occupier, were unable to come to terms with their own military past.**

*Story of a Prostitute* is a tragedy about comfort women serving Japanese soldiers on the Manchurian front in 1937. The protagonist, Harumi, is played with ferocious fearlessness by Yumiko Nagawa. The heart of the film revolves around a struggle of wills between her and the tyrannical Lieutenant Narito, played by Isao Tamagawa. He personifies the ruthless imperial military mindset, dehumanizing everything in his path while she is the vehement woman warrior, who's brutal only to survive. Private Mikami (Tamio Kawachi) enters Harumi's life and offers the hope of redemption. He is a soldier who has been demoted and passively accepts Narita's corporal punishment as a form of penance. Their experience is not a happy one, however, as his desire to redeem himself as a soldier conflicts with her determination to flee the war. Ultimately his steadfastness in the face of her resolve leads to the destruction of both. Throughout the film, Suzuki employs such New Wave techniques as reverse negatives, quick cuts, deep focus black and white photography and slow motion to create a heightened surrealistic anxiety. Most jarring is Harumi's point-of-view shot of Mikami – his frame freezes and then shatters into many pieces. Suzuki served in the Japanese navy during World War Two and, in an interview on the *Gate of Flesh* disc, comments on the surreal brutality of war. Directing from first hand experience, Suzuki demonstrates an impressive technical prowess, especially considering the constraints of his budget.

bombed out building the women call home. As Maya falls in love with him, she violates the "rules of the house," in which free sex (i.e., love) is not allowed. As in *Story of a Prostitute*, Suzuki eschews realism for a surrealistic approach – this time through a heightened sense of theatricality. Forced to shoot with little money, Suzuki and his production designer, Takeo Kimura, make no attempt to conceal the artificialness of the set. The bombed out buildings are meant to look fake and are propped up within the walls of an obvious soundstage. Suzuki coordinates his five female characters by costume color and, at one point, even shines a spotlight on Sen. Despite these stylistic flourishes, the film struggles to transcend its exploitive B-movie constraints. This is unfortunate, for, unlike *Story of a Prostitute*, *Gate of Flesh* is a victim of its studio's low commercial aspirations. Violence and sex are presented on the literal level and there is little narrative to sustain one's interest. None of the characters have the energy or dynamism as those in *Story* and one longs for a Harumi or Narito to arrive and shake things up.

It is interesting to note that *Gate of Flesh*, the inferior of the two films, was a big hit in Japan while *Story of a Prostitute* flopped. Both films are antiwar and portray the military machine as imperialistic and brutal. Suzuki seems to attack the horror and viciousness of war in general – not just on the battlefield but in the psyches of those affected by it. The difference in the commercial fates of the two films can perhaps be explained by the nationality of the exploiter. In *Gate* the source of misery is the American military; in *Story*, it is Japan's. One wonders if Japanese audiences, able to sympathize with the destruction of their homeland at the hands of a foreign occupier, were unable to come to terms with their own military past. Despite *Gate*'s shortcomings, viewing it after *Story of a Prostitute* is a valuable experience from this socio-historical perspective. Once again, The Criterion Collection has provided a valuable service to fans of Japanese cinema with their simultaneous release of these two films.



THE "FAMILY" ISSUE TOP 12!

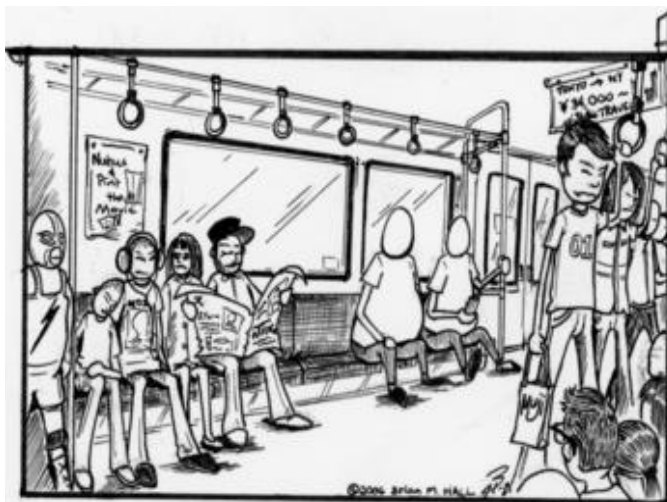
When you think about it, the JET Alumni Association is one big happy family. One big *organized* family, really. And we've got members of the Family working at various Japanese and U.S. companies and organizations, in positions to exert influence, if you will. Kind of makes you wonder, what would be...

THE TOP 12 DIFFERENCES IF JETAA-NY WERE AN ORGANIZED CRIME FAMILY

12. Sentences beginning "You had better..." taken more literally.
11. Bloody turf war with DC chapter over control of Pocky distribution in Philadelphia.
10. Vice-President's responsibilities updated to include "loyalty maintenance" and "knife skills."
9. Punch perms make it easier to spot other JET alums around town.
8. Article submissions to Newsletter required as "repayment for loans."
7. Uncontested elections for officer positions. (Ehh? Chotto matte...)
6. JETAA logo design commissioned to tattoo artist.
5. Hits outsourced to NY de Volunteer.
4. JETAA New York quarterly "development" meetings held in basement of seedy pizza joint. (Ehh? Chotto matte...)
3. "You think this is *omoshiroi*? *Omoshiroi* how? *Omoshiroi* ha-ha?..."
2. JETAA-NY informally known as the "Olayon-gumi."
1. Three words: Pachinko dake dinners.



MANGA CORNER



"THEY SURE ARE HOSPITABLE HERE. LOOK AT ALL THE SPACE THEY GIVE YOU!"

("Sayonara" continued from page 3)

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I have been working since April 2005 to help promote the JET Program and international exchange between Japan and the U.S. I am returning to Niigata, Japan, my home prefecture, at the end of March 2006. I've had some wonderful experiences with JETAA NY. I will miss New York but hopefully will have a chance to come back.

Allow me to introduce my successor, Mr. Aharen. He is an Okinawa Prefectural employee and has been working for Japan Local Government Center for about a year. He is enthusiastic about mingling with former JETs, and so he will be happy if you could let him know drinking party information!

I want to thank everyone for their support and for their involvement in the U.S.-Japan exchange.

Best wishes,  
Masahiro Nagumo.

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We'll miss both of them very much and wish them best of luck in their new jobs.

Ganbatte kudasai! O-sewa ni narimashita!

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