

# JETAA.NY

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

SUMMER 2007

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### HOW DID WE LIVE THERE?

*Some of us were livin' large, and others were livin' small. But whatever our situation, we lived it up and got some new perspectives. So get comfy under your kotatsu and drink up the nice nostalgia your fellow alums serve up in the following stories.*

#### Melissa Chavez, Nagano-ken, 2004-06

People would come over to my house and be shocked at how nice it was. I lived in teacher housing and was placed in a village, though, so every time my boyfriend was over I had to sneak him in and out because it was a major taboo for a female teacher to have guys over. I learned that when I took my guy friend from the town over to an event in my village and people insisted that he was my boyfriend for years even though I adamantly denied it. I paid about \$100 a month for rent for my place, which was unbelievable, which I totally realize now that I live in New York.

#### Crystal Wong, Iwate-ken, 2002-04

My first apartment in Ninohe was 35,000 yen a month, a fifteen-minute walk to school and next to a river which I constantly worried would flood. My first week there I remember waking up one morning, watching it rain very heavily and fretting that the river was rising rather quickly. I called my landlady and she reassured me that in all her years of living there the Mabeichi river had never flooded. It was also very humid and moldy — mold was everywhere — on my cabinets, on my shoes, even on my passport. One morning, I

(*"Living"* continued on page 8)

### HOW DO THEY LIVE HERE?

*Most JET alums had their housing already set by the time they got there. But what about our Japanese friends who come to the U.S.? How does their housing experience compare to that of JET alums?*



#### Kishi, Accounting Manager for a Trading Company

My company gave me an allowance for housing but I had to find it on my own. I didn't want to use a broker since I know they take a big cut, so I just picked a neighborhood near my office and walked around talking to doormen and building managers until I found something, and it's worked out great. I think in the past Japanese workers would always use a broker, but increasingly that's changing. Other people at my company now ask me for advice and information in order to find a place without a broker.

#### Kaz, Interior Designer

I went to a Japanese agency that specializes in finding roommate situations in New York for Japanese people, and after seeing two or three places ended up living with a 69-year-old Ecuadorian-American man. My room was very small — 10x10 feet — but my roommate let me do my own thing and would go away for extended trips to Ecuador twice a year. Occasionally he would try to make conversation with me but mostly he just watched TV and I would stay in my room when I was home. I never brought friends back to the apartment because

(*"Japanese Living"* continued on page 11)

## The “Living Large” Issue

We’ve got it pretty good here in NYC. It’s easy to get together, great entertainment like *Karaoke Man*, *Fate’s Imagination* (a new off-broadway play by JET alum Randall David Cook), *The Glamorous Life of Sachiko Hanai* and *Paprika* all are easily accessible, as is the Astoria Beer Garden. Our apartments are still about four *tatami* — albeit without the actual *tatami* — and we’ve traded cold air drafting through a cold metal apartment door in exchange for violently heated junior 1BRs.

So take advantage of this issue to reflect on the good side of living conditions here in the New York Metro area, or wherever you happen to be living. And now that I think of it, if you have space maybe you can host a *Nihongo Dake* Potluck Dinner at your place? No pressure, just think about it, let the idea wash over you and get back to me later.

In the meanwhile, I hope everyone continues to *ookiku sumu*.

Steven Horowitz  
**Newsletter Editor**

P.S. I know my direct translation of “Livin’ Large” must seem a bit silly. So special mention in the next issue to whoever can offer a superior translation.

“I agree, Prime Minister Abe. More JET alums should write for the Newsletter.”

Get in touch with us at:  
[newsletter@jetaany.org](mailto:newsletter@jetaany.org)



**WHAT GOOD IS A WARM  
 TOILET SEAT WITHOUT SOME  
 QUALITY READING  
 MATERIAL?**



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COMINGS & GOINGS

**RYUICHI KOHAMA**  
Director of the JLGC



**Ryuichi Kohama** joins the Japan Local Government Center (JLGC) as a Director from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government where he worked with Tokyo Rinkai Holdings on the development of Tokyo waterfront areas.

Originally from Tokyo, Kohama-san enjoys tennis and looks forward to working for the JLGC in New York because, "Living and working in a foreign country is fun, just like JET."

We know what you mean, Kohama-san! And we hope you enjoy your time here.

**TORU MUKAIKUBO**  
New JETAA USA Liason



**Toru Mukaikubo** joins the JLGC as a Director from his home city of Hiroshima where he worked on tourism issues as the Assistant Director of the Tourism Department.

As an avid jogger, Mukaikubo-san will certainly have plenty of opportunity to study the sites and scenes of New York City.

How does he feel about living in New York? "Living in the Big Apple is one of my dreams." Well, Mukaikubo-san, you can stop dreaming and put on your running shoes, because now you're here, and we'll look for you running in Central Park!

**RIYO MORI**  
Miss Universe



**Riyo Mori**, the first Japanese citizen to win the Miss Universe Pageant, recently came to New York for the Japan Day Festival in Central Park on June 3. She is in no way connected with the JLGC or the JET Program, though if she'd like to be an honorary member we'd be happy to have her.

She was coming to New York and then she was going. And that, we feel, is a good enough excuse to include her in our Comings & Goings section.

Stay in touch, Riyo-chama!

**YOROSHIKU ONEGAISHIMASU!!!**



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**JETAANY  
SOCIETY PAGE**

by Yoku Shitteiru



**Irrasshaimase!** And welcome back to another edition of what the NY Post's **Page Six** aspires to be. First it's worth mentioning that the top brass at the **JLGC** were a bit, um, shocked when they read the April Fool's article on **Jenna Bush** joining the JET Program. Fortunately for the Newsletter staff, **Director Sasaki-san** has a good sense of humor... Meanwhile, there's a lot going on this *natsu*, though not everyone is yet on *yasumi*. **Seen around town:** On June 13, **Carol Elk, Monica Yuki**



Lee-Sean shows Prince how it's done.

and **Cindy Hoffman**, taking in the Metropolitan Opera's performance of **Faust** in Central Park.... On June 27, **Earth Bennett** at **Japas 38** celebrating his birthday in karaoke style, and also **Nancy Ikehara** at **Sweet & Vicious** in **Nolita** celebrating one year of living in New York and demonstrating intimate knowledge of details about **Ichiro** while her friend **Atsuko's "wife" Hilton** treated everyone to Thai food and Lombardi's pizza.... **Pat Dwyer**, at the **Gorilla Coffee** on 5th Ave. in Brooklyn, gearing up for a Sierra Club hike in **Yellowstone Park** later this month... On 41st St. outside **Cafe Zaiya**, former Newsletter editor and current international compensation consultant **Jody**

**Mousseau**, who recently joined global HR firm **OCR Worldwide**.... **Alexei Esikoff**, Newsletter writer, currently residing in Minneapolis, at **Cherry Tree** on Fourth Ave. in **Brooklyn**.... and **Rob Underwood**, also at **Cherry Tree**, who identified himself as a JET alum after overhearing **Alexei** ordering a **Hitachi microbrew**, and was pleasantly surprised to learn of the mere existence of JETAA.... **Not seen around town:** **El Presidente Rob Tuck**, who was back in the UK in early July to interview for a graduate fellowship and also renew his visa... The lovely and brilliant **Cindy Hoffman**, who, after taking in the opera, traipsed around not **Korea Town** but **Korea the Country** on a two-week tour for teachers. Is it just coincidence that the political situation with **North Korea** improved during that period?... and All Around Good Guy **Janak Bhimani**. Where the heck is that guy these days?... **Movers & Shakers:** **Shannon & Shannan (Quinn and Spisak, respectively)** will be continuing on in their current roles as JETAA Country Reps, leading our JETAA USA National Conference and Regional Meetings in Atlanta (Aug. 8-12), and participating in the International Meeting in Toronto (Sept. 13-16).... In JETAA Media news, out on the Left Coast **Mark Frey** recently took over as editor of the **JETAA Northern California Newsletter** after an excellent stint by **Ryan Moore**.... Also, JET alum **Kia Cheleen**

recently left the **Japan Foundation** to pursue other opportunities. **Kia** previously worked for **CLAIR** in Tokyo with former **JLGC JET Liason Takao Aharen**, who is now back in **Okinawa** working for his local government (and hopefully still reading the Newsletter).... **Kirk Akahoshi** says goodbye to NYC and hello to **L.A.** where he'll be pursuing a Ph.D in philosophy... Also, **George Rose**, former JETAA President and interpreter for **Hideki Irabu** when he was on the **Yankees**, may be working for the Yankees again. More on that hopefully in the next issue.... And if all went well, **Mack "Scalia" Maloney** may be already working in D.C. for the **Federalist Society** .... **Website Watch:** **Clean Is Happy** — If you haven't seen **Toto's** new toilet seat web ad for the U.S. market, make sure to go to **cleanishappy.com**. Or go to the Newsletter website at **jetaany.org/newsletter** and find the link there. It's not a joke, but it is rather funny.... Also, for good info on all things Japanese in the Big Apple, **chopsticksnyc.com** is a free monthly print guide and website full of Japan-in-NYC resources — restaurants, shops, etc.... **Big Brother JETAA NY:** With the new e-mail distribution system set up by crack webmaster **Lee-Sean**, the problem of receiving the weekly e-mail multiple times or several days late should be cleared up. Additionally, JETAA NY can now tell how many people actually read the weekly e-mail. Though it sounds a bit **Dick Cheney-rashi, shinpai shinai de**, it'll be great for getting some sense of how many JET alums on the e-mail list are paying attention. Plus our **Vice Prez Megan Miller** has made no claim that her position is not within the Executive Branch of JETAA NY, so no need to get your **mawashi** all in a bunch over this.... **Big Brother China:** New York JET alum and former JETAA NY Secretary **Alex McClaren**, now working for the U.S. Foreign Service in Beijing, was hoping to make his experiences for everyone available on a blog. However, the Chinese government had other ideas, as Alex noticed posts disappearing immediately after he'd submitted them.... **Question #1:** When was the first-ever **JET Alum Pub Quiz Night** and where was it held? **Answer:** June 1, 2007 at **Lolita's** on Allen and Broome Streets. **Q #2:** How many people showed up? **A:** 39 people. **Q #3:** Who won? **A:** The **Reverse**



El Presidente Rob surveys the Bohemian Beer Garden.

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("Society" continued on page 5)

Theatre Review

**FATE'S IMAGINATION**

Written by Randall David Cook

Reviewed by Debbie Lee & Brian Hersey



Playwright and JET Alum Randall David Cook

JET Alum **Randall David Cook**, playwright of **Sake With the Haiku Geisha**, recently debuted his second Off-Broadway play, **Fate's Imagination**, which ran at the **Players Theatre in the West Village** from May 25 through June 17.



unrequited love, like a disease tearing away at her mind and memory.

Brock is the typical twenty-something — headstrong, invincible, impressionable — whose job involves posting obituaries of each casualty of an unnamed overseas conflict. He is brought to life, however, by scenes with his mother, a Hillary-esque politician (Donna Mitchell) running for the presidential office. Brock is affected by her lack of sympathy, by feeling double the amount of turmoil and guilt for his mother's inaction at the time the war was launched. His relationship with Lilah begins as manipulation on his part yet quickly turns into a real exchange of ideas, and ends with both characters almost surprised at the strength of their feelings for one another.

Imagine waiting years for your husband/wife/lover to come back to you. Imagine reading the news about young people your age dying in a war and knowing your mother may be the decision-maker who will keep them there. Imagine turning your back on everything; your family and your own happiness, so that you can win a high-powered job in Washington. These kinds of all-consuming obsessions form the emotional core of **Fate's Imagination**, playwright and JET alumnus **Randall David Cook's** latest work.

The play begins with Brock, played by Jed Orlemann, a twenty-something writer, who encounters an older, somewhat attractive, certainly desperate woman named Lilah (Elizabeth Norment) who tells him that he reminds her of an old lover. She quickly follows this statement with an invitation to her apartment to "fool around." Brock, realizing Lilah is not quite right in the head, is nevertheless drawn by her desperation and his own curiosity to her apartment.

What we later forget when these two inevitably fall in love are those early scenes where Lilah hallucinates, mistakes Brock for her former lover, and begs him to stay the night with her. She is dangerously lost in the past. It's this glimpse of her complexity, possibly forgotten by the end of the play when she emerges as something stronger, that humanizes her and shows the effects of years of

Brock's mother is polished, selfish, multifaceted, coldly detached and the hardest character to sympathize with. She provides us with a monologue about her cheating husband, a man who provided her with gifts whenever he cheated on her. She gleefully tells us how she was able to manipulate him further so that gifts of diamonds turned to contributions of money to the public and then eventually a seat in the Senate for her. The play begs the question, "Is this the type of woman that we want in the presidential office?"

The storyline is highlighted by camera flashes, political speeches in the form of commercial breaks, and blog entries. There is plenty of witty dialogue and a creative use of space. The play ends with an amusing plot twist and takes you by surprise. In sum, another entertaining play from the most prolific JET alum on Broadway!



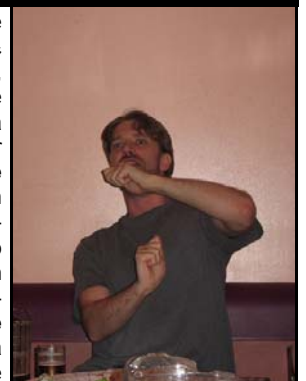
Carol, Monica & Cindy takin' in da' opera in Central Park.

(*"Society"* continued from page 4)

**Twinkies**, featuring **Scott & Keiko Matsunaga**, **Earth Bennett** and some guy named **Kurt** who really knew his stuff. **Scott** barely had time to celebrate his team's victory before jetting off with **Nick Cook** to attend a celebrity benefit featuring a rock band with **Stephen King** and **Amy Tan**. Great job organizing and coming up with questions by **El Presidente Rob** and **La Secretaria Carol** (who for the record does an excellent NPR voice).... **Overheard** from a loquacious

woman in the bathroom line: "Axl Rose was in this bar last week and some guy tried to pick a fight with him.".... **Japan Day** in Central Park on June 3 turned into a bigger success than anyone expected, with 14,500 people showing up at a venue designed to hold 4,500 max. With appearances by **NY1's Sandra Endo** (resplendent in kimono) and the freshly-minted **Miss Universe Riyo Mori**, the festival was also family friendly, especially for the little *kodomos*. A number of JETs participated in the morning four-mile run, including **Social Coordinator Monica Yuki**, who also was one of the first 100 people to get into the festival and enjoy the *taiko* drumming.... Those who didn't get their fill of Japanese

culture at **Japan Day** certainly did at the **JETAA Development Meeting & Karaoke Party** at **Japas 38** on Tuesday, June 5. **Lee-Sean** brought down the house with "**Purple Rain**" and sang a Chinese pop song with Newsletter groupie **Wynne Wu**, while **Mack "The Knife" Maloney** wooed the crowd with his soft crooning of **Frank Sinatra** numbers, and **Nick Cook** kept the energy up with his passionate air-drumming on **Bon Jovi** tunes. The evening ended appropriately with the karaoke anthem "**Take Me Home Country Road**", all fueled by a *nomi-hodai* that was more than everyone could *nomi*.... As you can tell from the photos on page 6, **Pre-Departure Orientation** went off rather well. But what you can't hear in the pictures is **El Presidente Rob** pointing out to the newbies that **JETAA NY** rhymes with **Armani**....Meanwhile, for those of you who missed the **Faces & Names nijikai**, one informative JET alum shared some hair-raising stories about his "friend" and his escapades in various **soaplands**, and a good time was had by all, especially the newbies who were on the receiving end of increasingly incoherent advice from a clearly exhausted **El Presidente**.... And lastly, on July 14 nearly 50 JET alums gathered for the annual



Air drum specialist Nick Cook.

(*"Society"* continued on page 15)

**PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION**

**TEACHING THE TEACHERS**

On June 16 at the Nippon Club in midtown Manhattan, JETAA NY helped organize and run the Pre-Departure Orientation for new JETs.

A crack team of grizzled JET alum vets successfully shared their wisdom and knowledge with fresh new JETs eager to help "internationalize" Japan and answered questions about work situations, cross-cultural sensitivities and, of course, shoes.

Hats off to another Pre-Departure Orientation well done, and thanks to our officers and all of the volunteers for their time and hard work in once again teaching the next generation of teachers.



Hiroshi Sasaki, Executive Director of the Japan Local Government Center, addresses the new JETs.



Joe Samalin and Megan McKnight tell it like it is as they pass on their finely-honed Senior High School Job Skills.



Keynote speaker Josh Safier (Oita-ken, 1991-92), Administrative Director for the Jerome A. Chazen Institute at Columbia Business School, draws on his own experiences for the benefit of new JETs.



Kat Barnas expounds upon JET life "after 4:00 p.m."



A new JET practices for upcoming Bon O-dori festivities.



Cindy Hoffman, Monica Yuki and Clara Solomon teach the new JETs how to say "chee-zu."



C.J. Hoppel, Pre-Departure Orientation master of ceremonies and JETAA NY Treasurer, drops some knowledge on the new JETs, possibly related to ultimate frisbee.

## JET Alumni Association 20th Anniversary Essay Contest!

We are proud to announce the **JETAA 20th Anniversary Essay Contest** celebrating twenty years of JETs and the JET Program!

**Fifteen Kintetsu Grand Prizes** will be awarded to the top essays. Grand Prize recipients will win a trip to Japan, including an opportunity to visit their JET host prefecture courtesy of Kintetsu USA. Winners will travel as a group to Japan in early December 2007. Winners unable to travel with the group will forfeit their prize.

### Prize for all 15 winners:

- \* Round trip airfare to Japan via West Coast gateway
- \* Reception and one-night hotel stay at West Coast gateway
- \* Transportation from Narita Airport to Tokyo hotel
- \* Reception and three-night hotel stay in Tokyo
- \* One-week JR pass
- \* Assistance from CLAIR and AJET arranging home stays in host prefecture

**Deadline for Submissions: SEPTEMBER 4, 2007**

[essaycontest@jetalumni.org](mailto:essaycontest@jetalumni.org)



- Foiled again, learning is never easy

### Guidelines:

- \* **Share an event or series of events** that had a profound and positive impact on you or the person/people you were involved with.
- \* **Capture moments**, rather than the whole one to three years of life in Japan. Use those moments to reveal what makes your experience unique, extraordinary, and worth telling, or a personal story that embodies a universal truth.
- \* **Show, don't tell.** Stories draw a reader into what the writer experienced first hand. Stories have vivid details that the reader can feel, taste, touch and see. Make your reader experience the events and emotions portrayed. Color your story with details that make the experience come alive, details in action, imagery, dialog, and/or dramatic scenes.
- \* **The JET Program or the JET Experience** must be integral to the narrative or event described.

### Submission Rules:

- \* All submissions must be received via email by September 4, 2007
- \* The essay must be typed in MS Word
- \* Double spaced
- \* 1,000 - 1,500 words
- \* Include essay title as a centered header on every page
- \* Include page numbers as a centered footer on every page
- \* Do not identify your name or chapter in your essay
- \* Do not include a title page
- \* Include JETAA chapter number and location in subject line

Submissions must be sent to [essaycontest@jetalumni.org](mailto:essaycontest@jetalumni.org).

You MUST include the following:

In the **Subject Line**: Essay Contest Submission— JETAA Chapter Location and Number (e.g., JETAA US 2— New York ). (See [www.jetalumni.org](http://www.jetalumni.org) for a list of chapter locations and chapter numbers. You do not have to be an official member of a chapter to participate!)

### In the **Body of the E-mail**:

- \* Name
- \* E-mail address
- \* Mailing address (including Country)
- \* Phone number
- \* Years on JET (e.g., 1999-2001)
- \* Location on JET (e.g., Tottori Prefecture)
- \* Essay title (this must also be included as a header in the essay itself)

This information is used solely for awarding prizes and will be kept strictly confidential. If you would like JETAA USA to forward your contact information to your local chapter for membership information, please indicate this in the body of your e-mail as well.

For more information on the essay contest, please contact [essaycontest@jetalumni.org](mailto:essaycontest@jetalumni.org).

Thanks and good luck!

JETAA USA is also coordinating with JETAA International to include some winning essays and runners-up in a compilation of international essays, details of which will be announced at a later date— all entrants in the JETAA USA/Kintetsu contest will automatically be considered for the international contest.

We invite all writers from JET Alumni nationwide to submit an essay to help us celebrate the long, varied experience of JET participants. Please see below for topic and submission guidelines.

### Topic: Narrative Essay of Japan

Essay contest participants are asked to submit a narrative essay depicting a scene, point, or experience of Japan and/or the JET Program. Narrative essays recount a connection forged and developed either in the time the author lived in Japan or recounts a recognition of this connection when the author goes home where the tie to Japan remains strong. The narrative uses the themes of building bridges, ties through time, or uncommon journeys.

### Some Additional Prompts:

- Home away from home
- A familiar "stranger"; new friends and families
- Stories and lives, connected through time
- Uncommon stories, hiccups along the road

("Living" continued from page 1)

woke up with the ceiling dripping on me and decided I wanted to move out. So I moved into teachers' housing where rent was 6,000 yen a month (the parking spot was an extra 1,000 a month), and I had two floors, loads of closet space, a balcony, and a three-minute walk downhill to school. The pitfall? A pit toilet, and the old fashioned shower where I had to crank up the gas every time. And the rash of *dango mushi* that would invade in the summer. But it was all worth it for all that extra cash I had to burn!



**Alexei Esikoff, Fukushima-ken, 2001-02**

When I moved to Fukushima, I had just completed my undergraduate in Wisconsin. Armed with a down coat and pom-pom topped fleece hat, I was prepared for the cold outside. What I did not expect was the cold *inside*. The lack of insulation baffled me, and I developed a hatred for my kerosene heater. The thing was orange and boxy and I could never get the timer to work, so I would wake up on winter mornings with chattering teeth. (My parents found my complaining phone calls amusing; in the mail one day was a fluffy purple sleep suit — essentially footie pajamas for adults.) I hated lugging the sticky canister to the local gas station. And the smell of the gas was enough to make me fear for my future unborn children. It gave me headaches similar to the one I got when I pumped my own gasoline for the first time as a teenager and sprayed it in my hair. Eventually I gave up on the kerosene. I spent nights with a little space heater pointed at my head. This was a more expensive operation, but no longer did I fear giving birth to mutants.

**Robertson Allen, Yamanashi-ken**

Upon my arrival, I was shown to my new abode, a small house just off Route 52 in rural Yamanashi, the prefecture that claims half of Mt. Fuji. My landlady, Nagai-san, whose sizeable house effectively blocked mine from being seen from the busy road, had a small garden off to the side that I had to walk past in order to get to my house. Beyond the garden was a diminutive community shrine whose red *torii* I had to pass through on the way to my place; every time I came home, I was entering sacred space, and it was also my backyard. I loved that shrine. Hardly anyone came to it except for some old ladies and one old man who would periodically meet there to chant scriptures. I could watch and hear them from my kitchen just a few yards away. In the space between the shrine and my house was a small yard where I would occasionally host cookouts for Japanese and ex-pat friends.



Dango mushi-chan genki?

The interior of my house was the space that I could truly call my own. It was a small house, one-story, but with two bedrooms, a Japanese-style room with *tatami* and sliding doors, a kitchen/dining room with long sliding glass doors opening out to the shrine, and a bathroom with the best feature of the house, a heated toilet seat. Because of poor insulation and no central heating, winters were cold — freezing, literally. I got frostbite on my toes my first year there from just living inside. (I learned how to stay warm after that.) But oddly enough, though, my fondest memories of my house come from winter, for that was the time when I could retreat and hide, when the sun would start setting by 4:00 because of the southern Japan alps behind the house half a mile away. The house, over the course of three years, became completely my own, and the *torii* through which I had to pass to enter and leave my house became my threshold to the reality of being a foreigner working at a school in rural Japan with all of the social pressures it entails.

**Scott Alprin, Aichi-ken, 1992-95**

Fujii Mansion in Takakura-cho, Kariya-shi, across from the Yamazaki

Pan (bread store); up the street from Kondo Bike Shop (where I bought a bike) and Kamihaza Jidosha (where I bought a car with limited *shaken* left), up the street from Fuji Camera (where I bought a camera), around the block from the Jyango Italian Restaurant (where my girlfriend walked out on me during lunch), down the way from the Ito Yokado (where I shopped), over the hill from Yoshinoya (where I dined on *gyudon* (before Mad Cow Disease was an issue)), beyond the intersection from Meiho Video (where I violated copyright laws and rented American movies and studied the *jimaku* (subtitles)), and a ways away from the Murasaki *izakaya*, where a friend of mine met his girlfriend when we were playing Scrabble. Rent was 45,000 yen a month, and worth every penny. The trash dump was right below the balcony of the second floor,

so I could drop it right down. It was the first place I ever lived in by myself that had a "step" (there was a step between the kitchen and the living room). The building was only two years old, and the floor was wooden and comfortable and the air conditioner was my savior. It was the place where I learned that one should point bowls away from oneself when doing dishes, or water can shoot from the bowl as the sponge comes around, causing wetness upon clothing. I never even spoke to a neighbor, but could hear them all coughing under their respective breaths at night. Never heard anything untoward, though.

**Shannon Quinn, Kagawa-ken, 2000-01**

*Seto Naikai Sunsets*

In some ways, my apartment in Takuma-cho was pretty symbolic of my JET Program experience. Like many fresh-out-of college JET participants, I was unable to appreciate how well taken care of I was by my host community. My spacious 2LDK three stories above the Takasegawa River came with the scent of fresh *tatami* mats, a double balcony, and sunsets over the Inland Sea. Fully furnished and complete with both a mountain bike and a *mama-chari*, the apartment was mine for less than \$150 a month.

Five years later I moved into my second Japanese apartment — a compact one room *manshon* in Yokohama. Armed with my electronic English/Japanese dictionary, I visited real estate agencies all over the Tokyo area before settling on a 250 square foot apartment that cost over six times what I paid on the JET Program. As I reluctantly handed over my deposit and key money, I realized that what I would miss most about living in Takuma would not be the space or even the heavily subsidized rent, but rather the town full of friends I inherited when I moved in.

**Nina Morganlander, Friend of JET, Wakayama-ken, 1998-99**

My boss ran a small school and he was *very* cheap... so we lived in his house. They must have added some rooms on for teachers and a small kitchen area. All the appliances were old and falling apart. (e.g. the fridge had nails sticking out, there was no hot water in the sink, etc) Since there were only two rooms and his two daughters lived there as well, guess where the male teacher lived? In an apt, which the boss only paid part of and made the teacher pay the rest of. At least *he* had privacy. (We even had to share the toilet and bath with the family. Imagine that.) The best part was when a new teacher came the boss put her in his room and he and his wife took the daughters room and the daughter had to go sleep with her sister. So there was little time to clean between teachers and we all had the same furniture. This wasn't a problem until towards the end of my stay when the other teacher had bug bites or a rash all over - probably from the *dani* (mites) living in her rug. Thank goodness there were none in my *tatami* room, but I'm sure that it was only a matter of time!

("Living" continued on page 9)



(“Living” continued from page 8)

**Justin Tedaldi, Kobe-shi CIR, 2001-02**

I can describe my living conditions in Japan during my year on JET in one word: Spartan. Wait, not even Spartan: *Draconian*. Since I only planned to spend a year in beautiful Kobe City, less was more—and the high cost of sea mail rates I paid the previous year as an exchange student made me think twice about sending any heavy electronic gadgets home.

Nestled in my *danchi* (multi-unit apartment), my biggest creature comfort was a TV/VCR I bought at the local supermarket in my first week since my predecessor left me with a busted one. Other than that, I had a faux leather desk chair with wheels; a wobbly dining room table; a telephone with a wonky cassette answering machine; a microwave (no gas burners); and my portable CD player hooked up to computer speakers. After Christmas I had some mini electronic drum pads to thrash around on, but that was it. I checked e-mail at other people’s homes, and for some reason waited near the very end of my time on JET to rent movies. Day trips to Kyoto, Nagoya and a week in Tokyo made me forget all about my cavernous apartment (and my mailbox perpetually stuffed with *enjo kosai* adverts).

**Julie Holmes née Udd, Saitama-ken, Kitawabe-shi (little town bordering Ibaraki, Gunma and Tochigi. This is where the Watarase and Tone river meet!), 1998-2000**

I had a sweet deal! A great one bedroom apartment, Western size, and one of my students’ families lived in the one right next to mine. It was the same size but he lived there with his mother, father and two siblings. When I got there though, as a Westerner, I thought nothing of it, really. Just that I had adequate space and felt comfortable.

When I first got there, my school and board of education gave me the month off as school was not in session yet. I was lonely but busy starting life in this new country and my new surroundings. I spent the first week or so getting things together at home and then the week after a girl that I had met at the JET orientation came over to spend time. “Great,” I thought! “My first guest and, as I love to host, it will be great!”

The whole time she was there she was soooooo homesick but that’s OK... I cooked for her, I talked with her and I walked to the next town with her to see *Godzilla*. Appropriate first movie in Japan, no? I basically mothered her and it was somewhat of a comfort to me, too. As we had a good time and enjoyed each other’s company, she invited me to go climb Mt. Fuji the next weekend with her and friends. I accepted, we took the bus up there the following Saturday, and arrived at 10 p.m. at night. We had chosen to climb overnight so we could see the sunrise from the top.

Well, pretty quickly on our hike my shoelaces came undone and I stopped to tie them. When I looked up, my “friends” were far ahead and going at a faster pace than I was walking. At a checkpoint up ahead I saw them and I asked if they wanted to walk with me... They said, “Well, we want to walk fast!” Again, I asked if they were going to walk with me and they replied, “Well, we want to walk fast so that we

can get up there sooner than later.” I just walked away and didn’t look back.

All was well by the next checkpoint because I met up with a German man whom I met on the bus who believed in walking as slow as the slowest person in your group. Even though I wasn’t in his group, he let his friends go ahead and stayed with me the whole way. At the top, we sat right next to my “friends” and the German man was talking loudly about never leaving anyone behind.



“A Huntsman like me needs at least eight tatamis to stretch out my legs, deshou?”

What do this story and my apartment have to do with each other, you ask? About a week after I returned from my mountain hike, even with the comfort of the German man I was beginning to feel very alone and out of sorts from my first few weeks in Japan. One night it was raining heavily outside. I was comfortable in my heated apartment until water began coming down like a sheet of rain all across the entrance to my bedroom, the sliding door entrance to my *tatami* mat room from the living room.

That was it! I couldn’t take it anymore. I had taken care of a girl who had repaid me with jilting me on Mt. Fuji late at night, who was the only person I had had over to my place and I was spending way too much time there alone. My sobs were soon coming down like sheets of rain over me.

After I wiped my tears away, I got several pots and pans under the entryway and called a teacher I worked with, who came over as quick as she could, and, although they never fixed anything, it didn’t happen again the whole time I was there. I guess it was just the angle of the rain that night or I don’t know what??? I enjoyed my apartment, realized soon when I met others living there how decadent a space it was and made many good Japanese friends to make up for the first one that ended up being one of two lousy ones... both with foreigners. I hosted others in my apartment and its walls are full of good memories from my time there. No matter what your accommodations, it’s what fills the space and not your superficial surroundings or size that matter most!

**Brian Hersey, Fukuoka-ken, 1994-96**

As a JET, I lived in a *kyoshokuin jutaku*, i.e., public teacher housing. The building was old and a bit tired looking (although it has since been painted a vibrant-shade of pink) but my 3DK was comfortable, with a nice view out the back window of the sunset over the valley. In the winter I used just one of the rooms and my kitchen to save heating fuel. The place was big by Japanese (or, for that matter, New York) standards and cost 7,000 yen a month. No hot water, but I did have a nice tub that could be heated, and the school purchased me a seat that went over the traditional toilet (though I eventually scrapped that as I adapted to rural Japan.) The doorways were 1.8 meters high so I needed to bob my head as my 181 centimeters entered any room (a habit that remained with me for months after I left Japan). The wildlife was the only real drawback. The white-washed bedroom walls were often splattered with my blood where invading mosquitoes met their grisly demise after feasting on me in the middle of the night. The occasional roach could be heard scampering through the night on the *tatami*. There was also one centipede spotting, and a huntsman spider

(“Living” continued on page 10)

("Living" continued from page 9)

**Gabriela Pedroza, Hokkaido-ken (Kurisawa-chou), 1993-94**

After spending three whirlwind days in Tokyo for training, I was sick as a dog! I was dazed, confused, culture shocked, and did I mention, sick? I got sent on a plane to Hokkaido and two Japanese men picked me out of the crowd as their JET. We had a silent lunch where I displayed my inability to use chopsticks. This was followed by an hour drive through foreign cities and fields to a tiny town. Raggedly, I sat with yet another man in what appeared to be a communist era room with a doily-covered coffee table and brown sofas. Appearing in the doorway were a man and woman. "This is your mamma and pappa." The dam of hanging-in-there could no longer hold; tears secretly worked their way down my face. These kindly people, they would take care of me. They would take me home. For seven months my mamma, pappa and their three children shared a home. They taught me to count, to tell time, how to bathe. Each morning my pappa would make me eggs and toast and drive me to school. Each afternoon I heard "Okaeri!" in response to my "Tadaima!" Each evening my mamma would make us dinner. I watched a lot of TV I could not understand. And in the spring, friends of the family would bring corn and melons from their fields. I look back on those days of familial bliss fondly. I doubt they will ever know how much their kindness meant to me; how much I needed them that first summer afternoon.

**Elizabeth Sharpe, Aomori-ken, Mutsu-shi, 2000-02**

A small two bedroom apartment all of my own for government-subsidized \$100 a month was a dream come true, or so I thought. Come winter, the below-freezing temperatures and Aomori snow up to my waist made for a very cold apartment that soon seemed too large. There was too much space to heat. I took to curling up in my sleeping bag on the kitchen floor in front of the only large kerosene heater in the apartment. The portable kerosene heater would be in the bathroom, thawing out the pipes so I could take a bath. This really wasn't practical, nor very safe, considering the number of burst-pipe stories that circulated among JETs and Japanese alike. So, I preferred the steaming, sauna-like shower at the gym I belonged to. Or I visited the various *sentos* in town. Which I now remember as my very favorite memories in Japan — cold, cold apartment and hot, hot baths. All that for only \$100 a month.

**Mike Harper, CIR, Kagoshima-ken, 1990-93 (now living in Seattle)**

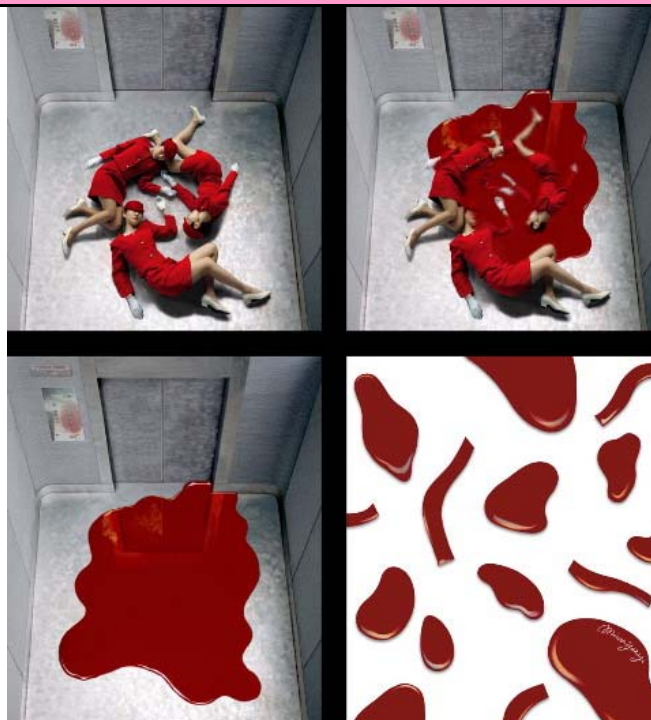
I lived in Yaku-Cho, Kagoshima Prefecture and had a very sweet deal. A small house meant for a teacher and family was all mine. Two six-*tatami* rooms and one 4.5-*tatami* room. I think it was slightly bigger than the house that the married teacher with a wife ad two kids next to me had, which I found a bit embarrassing. The school board also installed a Western-style toilet for me and I know the house next to mine had the old fashioned *benjo* with a lid put over it. And all of this was rent free for me.

The teacher and his family moved in next door the first year I was there. They arrived in the late afternoon and some people from the school board helped them move their stuff into the house. As it got dark someone went into my house — I was gone — and turned on the lights of the two main rooms to help illuminate the outside. That was fine with me. Since it was a small town I did not bother locking my door unless I was travelling, which meant not worrying about whether I had forgotten to lock it. I did not lock the sliding doors, either. It also meant the mailman could just drop off my mail inside the house, since I did not have a mailbox. Once a neighbor brought a bag of *tankan* (tangerines) and left the door open a foot or so. I think that was the time I came home to find some stray cats exploring my house, who took off very quickly when they saw me. They may have lived under my house for a while. For typhoons the house also had wooden panels to slide over the screens, and it was a good thing I had them.

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**Art Review**

**MIWA YANAGI'S  
First Solo Exhibit**



Thanks to special efforts by Vice Prez Megan Miller, on May 24 and June 7 a limited number of JET alums were treated to a free private curator tour at the Chelsea Art Museum of Miwa Yanagi's first solo exhibit. Shannan Spisak was there on special assignment for the Newsletter and shares her impressions.

The Chelsea Art Museum was a perfect space for this exhibit — the first floor housed floor-to-ceiling panoramic color shots of Miwa Yanagi's **Elevator Girl** series, which was *natsukashii* for anyone who has been to a department store in Japan. A second section of the first floor showcased her black and white fairy tale series, which was an interesting juxtaposition of young girls in witchy, wrinkly, and somewhat morbid masks within surreal settings and surroundings.

An interactive exhibit was set up beneath a circular velvet-curtained enclosure with a video of the old Japanese movie *Woman in the Dunes* running to create a feeling of claustrophobia that Yanagi was trying to portray through her photographs.

On the second floor was the **Grandmother Series** — glossy large colorful shots (4'x6' and larger) — of fantasies that were depicted by young women in make-up to age them. The young women imagined what they would want out of their lives as grandmothers, and the photos were taken to reflect that.

I was surprised by how large the photos were, and the Elevator Girls especially had an inviting quality, as if you could walk right into the scene. That was definitely my favorite series.

Domo-domo Shannan and Megan! And double domo-domo to tour leader Carolin Wagner for enlightening our JET alum community.

*("Japanese Living" continued from page 1)*

it was so old that I was embarrassed to show it to other people. I lived there for about four years, but then my roommate went to Ecuador and didn't come back. His niece got in touch with me and explained that he had passed away while in Ecuador and that she needed to come to the apartment to get the will. After that, I had one month to move out. I went back to the roommate service and now live with another elderly man. But he coughs and sneezes all night and the walls are thin, so I think I want to try and find another living situation.

**Atsuko**

My husband, who is Australian, and I moved to New York from Tokyo and stayed with friends while we looked for an apartment. One of the challenges for us was that neither of us were U.S. citizens and no brokers would even show us an apartment until my husband got his social security number.

We stayed with friends for a month until we found an apartment on the Upper West Side, but then it took us months to get a landline, cell phone and cable because we had no credit history in the U.S. We had to get a pre-paid cell phone for several months to build up a credit history before Verizon would let us get a landline.

**Shizuka (Saitama-ken), Recruiter for Bremar Associates**

I went to college in Florida and lived in a very rural area. I had a one bedroom apartment that was the best, the newest, and largest in the town, with AC, dishwasher, big walk-in closets all included for just \$500 per month. So I was very surprised when I came to New York and saw that apartments didn't come with those accessories. And the only apartment that I could get for \$500 was a futon bed with a curtain in the lobby of the apartment.

At one point I tried finding a roommate. I went to an agency that matches roommates (I did not know about Craig's List at that time.) I had to pay a non-refundable fee of \$200 plus a fee of \$300 which they would keep only if I got an apartment through them. I only had one week to look and was pressed for time. So I paid \$500 in total in advance. The agency set up some appointments to see apartments, but I also missed an appointment set up by the agency because the interview at the previous appointment they had scheduled for me took longer than expected. The agency left me a voice mail warning for being a no-show and wouldn't return my \$300 after that.

I finally found a room to share for \$800 in Astoria. The apartment itself was small but very clean. My room was big and faced south so I got a lot of sunshine. That was the very first decent apartment I saw — the others I saw were not fit for humans — so I was happy and decided to take it. My new roommate told me that we would split the rent 50/50, but somehow he paid only \$350 while I was paying \$800.

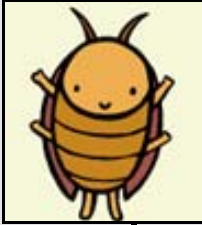
After that I moved to Brooklyn into a three-bedroom apartment. I had a few roommates come and go. The last roommates were French and Russian, so we were all bilinguals in the apartment. I think this happens only in NY!

**Kazumi**

I first came to the U.S. with my parents when I was 11 years old. My parents gave me a few months' advance notice that we were relocating to Dallas from Tokyo. I was terrified and sad, and cried almost everyday until the day of the move. When we arrived in Dallas and walked into our home, the first thing I saw was the fireplace. I was suddenly very happy, because as much as they tell you about Santa Claus in Japan, most Japanese houses do not have a fireplace for him to come through!

It also blew me away that it was so big and horizontal — it all fit without the second floor. I couldn't believe that there were two bathrooms and that there were two sinks in every bathroom! It was strange for the toilet to be in such a large space, with a bathtub. Since I was an only child, and the

house had three bedrooms, I had two bedrooms to myself, plus a den to play in, and an enclosed patio to bask in the sun. The patio made up for the lack of a *tatami* room...There was a large spa bathtub in the master bedroom that I could take a bath in occasionally, and reminded me of Japanese bathtubs. (I have yet to find tubs in the U.S. that are deep enough, though.) The "bubble bath" concept was totally new and fascinating to me, and I enjoyed it very much.



The house also came with eat-in kitchen, dining room, huge living room, utility room, two car garage, and nice yard where my father learned the traditional Texan ritual of BBQ. Our house wasn't even big compared to Texas standards. Now that I've lived in New York for the past 14 years, and the last four years in a mere 360 square foot one-bedroom in Harlem with a spouse and a child, I miss the house tremendously. One of my goals now is to come up with creative ways to somehow match the Texas experience in New York City, without having to dish out \$5 million for a townhouse.

**Kenji (Takarazuka-shi, Hyogo-ken), Student at Baruch College**

One of my first apartments was in Chelsea, and I found it through a Japanese agency. I found my room was extremely hot. I was on the second floor, and there were Chinese and pizza stores right under my room on the first floor. My room was being baked by the oven. I used the air conditioner 24/7. I had a huge electric bill during the summer time. I also had a roach problem, as many people do. One night when I was sleeping, I awoke and noticed an empty beer can moving around on the floor, seemingly by itself. I had never seen such a huge roach in my life. In the case of both apartments, I had to pay 1.5 months' worth of rent of the annual payment as an agency fee. And yet, the agency didn't help me with anything after I moved into each of the apartments. I asked for help when I faced a living problem, but they just said, "We don't care what happens to you after we found your apartment." This surprised me a lot because an agency in Japan wouldn't say this. Since I don't have a credit history and a guarantor, I had to rely on the agency to rent an apartment by myself.

I moved to another apartment after that, but my current apartment is in actually with the same landlord in the same building. He let me have an apartment in his building without any extra fee. There haven't been any major problems, but I was surprised when a man came down the fire escape mumbling something at 4:00 in the morning. An apartment in Japan usually does not have a fire escape for each room.

**Sayaka (Tokyo-shi), Human Resources Professional**

When I looked for my first apartment, I had no credit history, so basically I needed to find an apartment that didn't require a credit history. I found a good apartment in Queens that my broker took me to see. I had no idea that I would need to pay a deposit when I decided to take the apartment. The building manager was very nice, though, and somehow he trusted Japanese tenants so much (not sure why) that he told me I can just pay *any* amount for the deposit and just come back the next day or so to pay the rest. At that time, I only had \$10 on me, so I only paid \$10 for the deposit!!! He was kind enough to keep my apartment until I came back a day later.

**Rie, (Oita-shi, Oita-ken)**

I went to college in the Adirondacks (about forty minutes' drive from Lake Placid). At first I lived in a dorm, but I found out that there were small cabins right outside of the campus (five minutes driving at most). The cabins were rented by students most of the time. Five cabins in row, and no TV connections. That was my first place. Just \$350 per month, all inclusive. I was 22 or 23. Living in North Country was nothing like my living situation in Japan. Unlike Japan, it was very isolated, especially in the winter, and quiet. After living in Tokyo the place was too quiet, and I didn't know what to do to enjoy my free

*("Japanese Living" continued on page 13)*

Film Review

PAPRIKA

Reviewed by Lyle Sylvander

Satoshi Kon's latest film *Paprika*, is a feast for the eyes and intellect, a combination not commonly found in mass-marketed entertainment.

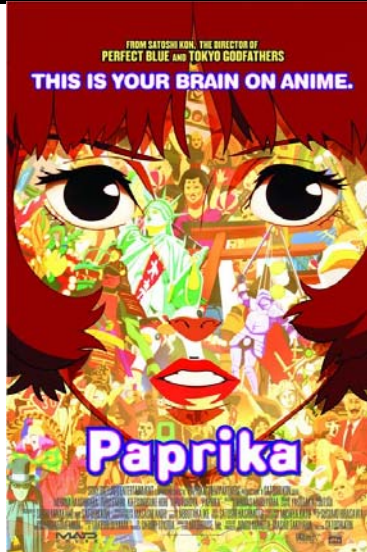
His previous feature, *Tokyo Godfathers*, was dramatically static and its earthbound narrative undoubtedly imprisoned the active imagination seen in the earlier *Millennium Actress* and *Perfect Blue*. *Paprika*, on the other hand, frees Satoshi from gravitational reality as he explores the nether reaches of unconscious dream states and nightmares.

Like his compatriot **Hiyao Miyazaki** (*Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*), Satoshi Kon proves the superiority of Japanese hand-drawn animators over all others. The surreal, eye-candy visuals put the product coming out of Hollywood to shame. Those annoyingly cute CGI animals from the West Coast simply don't hold a candle to the marching toasters, drumming frogs, evil dolls and walking Shinto gate (seriously!) that populate *Paprika*'s universe. Indeed, the animator has larger and more serious things to say about the influence of pop culture on the human psyche and its confluence with more traditional and universal primordial images – subject matter rarely explored in commercial cinema.

Based on a novel by **Yasutaka Tsutsui**, the plot hinges on a high-tech gadget called the "DC Mini," which enables doctors to record and witness patients' dreams. One is stolen from the psychiatric hospital where it was invented and most of the film follows the attempts by Dr. Atsuko Chiba (**Megumi Hayashibara**), Dr. Kosaku Tokita (**Toro Furuya**) and detective Toshimi Konakawa (**Akio Ohtsuka**) to recover the machine and find the culprit.

While this set-up is straightforward, the film takes drastic twists and turns. It turns out that the DC Mini can do more than just record dreams as the thief uses the device to invade dreams of others. As the dream/waking life boundary becomes more and more blurred and eventually shatters, the everyday world becomes encapsulated by one large collective nightmare. While there are no doubt unlimited Freudian and Jungian motifs and themes to be found, there is too much information to absorb in one sitting. Although repeated viewings would present intellectual benefit for the academically inclined, it is best to observe the outstanding animation and surreal narrative without making too much sense of it.

As one of anime's most cinema-savvy auteurs, Satoshi fills *Paprika* with unlimited filmic references. It opens with a Fellini-esque circus sequence, complete with sinister clowns and doppelgangers. When Konakawa escapes from this, he lands in a film-noirish cityscape populated by gangsters. He flees once again and transforms into Tarzan (with an obvious allusion to the Disney version), swinging away on tree vines. His real-life persona is even modeled on the classic hard boiled detective type (a la *Dirty Harry*). Similarly, the nerdy Dr. Chiba's avatar is the athletic Paprika, a variation on countless "vigilante women" found in anime. At one point, Paprika sprouts wings like Tinkerbell, but is soon pinned to a table like a butterfly in an insect collection. In another



sequence, Dr. Chiba and Konakawa visit a restaurant where each floor resembles a movie theme. The Tarzan jungle reappears and there are floors dedicated to romantic movies, suspense films and James Bond.

Satoshi seems to suggest that the movies (particularly those from Hollywood) have so colonized our minds, both in their conscious and unconscious states, that their influence can no longer be expurgated. Furthermore, the film pulsates with a sense of unease, as if the melding of our minds with pop culture and technology has disrupted our sense of moral values. Satoshi's most searing indictment occurs when the heads of uniformed schoolgirls turn into giant mobile phones. They take photos of kneeling salary men who are peering up at their skirts and shout "let's capture the moment!" with high-pitched glee.

This dark universe is not without its silver lining, however. Paprika and Konakawa exhibit an awareness of their inner demons and are able to harness

an inner morality that anchors the surrounding chaos. By bombarding our sites with a cacophony of beautifully surreal hallucinations, Satoshi also brightens this world – the underlying tension between the attractiveness of the images and their underlying threat invests the film with an aura of fascination.

Whatever one thinks of this film, one will not soon forget it.



(*"Living"* continued from page 10)

Most people in the neighborhood knew where I lived, or could find me quickly. At least one did not. I answered the door once and it was a local politician asking for votes, and he apologetically explained that he did not expect that I would vote.

**John Hyon, Yamanashi-ken**

I lived in public teacher housing and only paid 7,000 yen per month for a decent place. Though if I wanted hot water, I had to fill up this thing with cold water, turn on the gas for the hot water heater and wait a few minutes. Also, my apartment complex had something called "Community Day," which meant that one Saturday a month, invariably after I'd been out drinking all night, they would knock on my door at 7:00 a.m. and I'd have to help out with something like raking leaves.

Pink Film Review



**THE GLAMOROUS LIFE OF SACHIKO HANAI**

**Bush Reigns Supreme in Quasi-Political Skin Flick**

Reviewed by Justin Tedaldi

The world is in danger, and only its smartest prostitute can save it!

So describes the plot of *The Glamorous Life of Sachiko Hanai*, a 2003 mash-up of *The Daily Show* meets *Debbie Does Dallas* that proves sex and politics aren't mutually exclusive!

Not many sociopolitical films start life titled *Horny Home Tutor: Teacher's Love Juice*, but that's the world of pink eiga (exploitation films that dare you to set your watch to softcore scenes every 10 minutes). Imagine *Grindhouse* with sex subbing for car crashes and you get the idea.

Having lots of the sex in question is Sachiko Hanai (Emi Kuroda), who offers her buxom charms nightly at a Tokyo *imekura* (image club, or brothel offering adult services through role playing and costume play). She starts the film pretending to be a teacher (the scene where her pupil incorrectly guesses the capital of the United States should have most JETs foaming at the mouth), and moments later winds up with a bullet through her head and the cloned finger of president George W. Bush. Oh yeah, and she's now a super genius who invokes Noam Chomsky's name like it's chocolated-covered Viagra.

There's just one problem. The North Korean fellow (Takeshi Ito) who got Sachiko into this mess realizes she has the finger, which he needs for the usual prophetically diabolical purposes that's so common in skin flicks these days. While he seeks to finish the job, Sachiko-kun is taken under the wing (so to speak) of a local philosophy professor and—of course!—Chomsky expert (Yukijiro Hotaru), who after a little social intercourse brings her home to his wife and—of course!—teenage son to tutor the boy with her insatiable...wealth of knowledge.

Will Sachiko ever go back to being loved just for her body? Will the professor's son get schooled in more than just Statutory 101? Will her would-be assassin complete his mission? And can the "appearance" of



Dubya do for American appendages what President Clinton did for cigars? Sit back, switch off any logical thinking, and enjoy.

Weaknesses? There are a few. Although *The Glamorous Life of Sachiko Hanai* contains wall-to-wall sex and violence, its political agenda is like glitter on a stripper: it's there, but tough to make out with everything else going on. Director Mitsuru Meike and writer Takao Nakano play the material for laughs one minute (two of Sachiko's customers could make healthy profits as sperm donors) only to turn stone-faced the next (if the filmmakers were trying to mean something by giving the professor's son no libido whatsoever, it's lost on me).

The events leading up the end are also ambiguous enough to suggest that this isn't a zany satire so much a dirty movie strung together with a few Bush cameos (which do offer some genuine laughs in light of the situations Sachiko finds herself involved in).

So while not perfect, this is truly a film that almost defies description or simple categorization, and worth watching if the idea of something with tons of apparently consensual sex with its willing and able heroine doesn't offend you. It's campy all right, but there's a serious side that can be worth discussing depending on whose company you watch it with.

Palm Pictures' DVD of the film contains bonus features as ample as its subject. You get *Horny Home Tutor* in its entirety, the original U.S. and Japanese trailers, a "What Is Pink Film?" feature, and the mini-film *The Adventure of Sachiko Hanai*, a sort of postscript to the film trumpeting the return of President Bush (this time represented as a gun-toting Howdy Doody-ish puppet) and a rooftop martial arts battle between Sachiko and a blackface *ko gal*. It's not Bergman, but wouldn't you rather watch *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* anyway?

(*"Japanese Living"* continued from page 11)

time.

I moved to NYC after college. I decided to rent an apartment with my Japanese friend who previously lived in Manhattan. Using a Japanese broker, we looked around at some apartments in Queens. I was around 25 or 26 at this point. It was a bit annoying to prove that we had good financials because I was in the process of looking for a job, and my roommate was a student.

Soon after, I ended up getting a job at a hotel in the Berkshires in Massachusetts. Luckily, one of my co-workers and his wife were looking for a roommate and asked me if I was interested, so I decided to take the offer. It was a pretty big two-family house. We had three-bedrooms,

one-and-a-half bathrooms, a big kitchen, dining room and living room. After living at the house for a year or so, the couple moved away and I took over the place by myself which meant I was responsible for all the utilities as well. Summer is awesome, but in wintertime it snows a lot, and the bill for heating was pretty high. I should have found a place with heat included. Dealing with the house's problems wasn't fun, such as when a water pipe froze one cold day. If I lived in the northern part of Japan maybe I would have experienced the same things.

**Megumi Kikuraku**

I went to a Japanese agency to find my first apartment. The rent was \$1,100 a month for a very small studio on the Upper East Side in 1999. The broker's fee was two months' rent. The Japanese

(*"Japanese Living"* continued on page 14)

## JETA THEATRE REVIEW



Sometimes it just happens.

**Reviewed by Justin Tedaldi**

and imagination make him appealing and passionate, or are nothing more than tonic for a bland and colorless life that offers little joy save for the occasional croon.

You're at school, on the job, or any place where you'd rather be doing something else. The goal is escape without leaving the room, to indulge yourself in a fantasy world where you are the star, and everyone revolves around you.

Such is the life of the titular protagonist of writer-director Ryuji Mizutani's *Karaoke Man*, a one-man play starring venerable actor Morio Kazama, which recently capped its five-date U.S. tour with a pair of shows at the BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center on June 28 and 29.

For over a decade, *Karaoke Man* has been performed in countries like Spain, China, Russia, and Korea. Mizutani likens the international journey of his work to that of the karaoke machine, which was also invented in Japan but has now spread out all over the world.

*Karaoke Man*'s hero fancies himself a first-class singer, and our introduction to him proudly suggests it: Wearing a sparkly blue kimono festooned with crashing waves while singing a lengthy number from the 1950s, Karaoke Man has all the charisma of a Neil Diamond or Tony Bennett. He knows his audience, and they know he's singing exactly what they want to hear.

Suddenly, the curtain behind him drops to the ground, and once again Superman is Clark Kent. We're in a kitchen, where Karaoke Man is berated by his wife, who doesn't appreciate being subjected to such an early performance. "Sometimes I just wanna sing my favorite songs," he says, grinning, as he changes for work. Subtitles projected overhead provide a running translation of the entire play, including several puns.

As he dons his "proper salaryman" garb, Karaoke Man tells us his story: He only sings while entertaining clients, and his opening number was practice for an important meeting later that evening. Why does he enjoy singing so much? His wife doesn't understand him and his children, he says, seem to exist only to spend his money and to ignore him, in that order. Engaging in a dialogue with his teenage son about the boy's future, the underappreciated workaholic father reveals himself to be more optimistic than his own offspring.

He has good reason to be optimistic. After another tailor-made performance at the meeting to please a potential business client, Karaoke Man shuffles off to yet another karaoke bar for a rendezvous with his secret lover. We learn that the girl works under him at his company, and is significantly younger than he is.

She's also madly in love with him, and things are greatly complicated by the fact that Karaoke Man was selected as a go-between for an intra-company marriage between two other coworkers. His lover wants to discuss the future, to talk about where the relationship is headed, but all he wants to do is sing. "Whatever your troubles, singing makes you feel better," he explains.

By nature, most one-man theatrical productions are limited to monologues or interpretive art. Kazama's performance is something different. His interaction with his unseen costars is rich in pathos, leaving many of the details to the viewer's imagination. Like an artist living in his own world, Karaoke Man can be viewed either as someone whose creativity

The later scenes strongly reinforce this, as Karaoke Man is forced to give a speech at his subordinate's wedding accompanied by his wife (with his mistress also expected to be in attendance), and is also struck a blow by his mother's failing health. The latter scene is an especially poignant subject, yet feels rushed in that the relationship between mother and son is never adequately explored. Perhaps this is also left ambiguous for the viewer to fill with their own experiences, but it comes up short dramatically, especially in the final scenes as Karaoke Man subjects himself to a brutal self-examination of his life.

Overall, *Karaoke Man* offers much to think about. A two-time Japan Academy Prize winner, Kazama sells the drama with both feet anchored to the ground. The set and art design by Keigo Takagi are elegant and detailed in all the right places; Karaoke Man's perpetually hanging clothes in the corner of the kitchen is a wonderful touch.

For Americans, the intricacies of salaryman life are never easy to understand completely, but *Karaoke Man* succeeds in defining a character that might only serve as comic relief or a secondary role in a more mainstream work. Karaoke Man's musical tastes reflect those of a generation born over 50 years ago, so unless you're really up on your history of Japanese pop music (I only go back as far as Southern All Stars), it's hard to get the full flavor. Perhaps next time Kazama can learn a few English songs to further enrich his repertoire.

*Karaoke Man*'s New York performances are presented by IPS Productions LLC. For more information on it and future events, please visit <http://www.ipsnewyork.com/>.

(*"Japanese Living"* continued from page 13)

apartment agencies were very useful and helpful. At that time I couldn't speak English very well to negotiate with American real estate agencies. I didn't want to live in Brooklyn or Queens because I had just come from Japan and wanted to experience living in Manhattan. The rent on the Upper East Side was cheaper than downtown. Before living on the Upper East Side, I lived in an NYU dorm in the East Village. I thought the Upper East Side was boring, and only elderly people lived there. But I did feel safer there. The only problem with the apartment was that I saw the little mice very often, which I never saw in my apartment in Japan. I told the landlord about that but he never did anything. It made me think that that's why Disney could draw Mickey Mouse! They were very small and cute, but disgusting.

The "LIVING LARGE" Issue TOP 14!

Some of us loved our housing in Japan. Others, not so much. But what you probably didn't know is that there's a whole liturgy of songs on the topic. And so after extensive research by the Newsletter staff, we are proud to present ...

THE TOP 14 COUNTRY & BLUES SONGS ABOUT LIVING IN JAPAN

14. My Daddy Was a *Yaki-imo* Man
13. Another Man's Shoes in Your *Genkan*
12. Under the *Kotatsu* with You
11. My *Sha-ken's* Got Me Shakin'
10. I Got a Woman Loves the NHK Man
9. If Only I Could Tear Down the Paper Walls of Your Heart
8. Grab the Good *Gomi* and Bring it on Home-y
7. The Ballad of Billy-Bobby *Wabi-sabi*
6. The *Shoji* Slide
5. I Love My Papa But I Miss My *Mama-chari*
4. Beat! Beat! Beat! (That Futon)
3. Feel So Close to You (In My Two-*Tatami* Apartment)
2. *Gokiburi* Blues
1. I Got a Long Drop Toilet (I Don't Know How Deep It Goes)\*



\*This is actually a line from a song written by a JET alum and performed at the Chubu Block Conference talent show in 1993.

("Society" continued from page 5)

Bohemian Beer Garden Happy Hour in Astoria, taking up three tables, consuming much Spaaten, and pulling in random Japanese passerbyers such as Taka-san who, guuzen ni, works with Noriko Furuhata



Carol's Avi, Steven and Neel enjoy the Bohemian Beer Garden and sample the kielbasa.

(Official JET Liaison at the Japanese Consulate). Familiar faces such as El Presidente Rob y La Secretaria Carol, Kat B., Official JET Alum Brother & Sister Neel and Nandita were there as well as new faces such as Paul from St. Louis, John from Westchester,

Deno from New Zealand, and New JET Sophie, headed for Akita-ken. And of course a happy hour wouldn't be complete without routine surprise visit from John Sandoval, in from Puerto Rico (though soon to be relocated to Cincinnati)... **Second Best Overheard CIR Joke:** Two CIRs are sitting in a bar and one says to other, "So what do you do for work?" The other one says, "I'm a CIR." And the first one says, "Yeah, me neither." .... That's all for this edition. See you next issue when JETAA NY (hopefully) regains the softball tournament crown!



Did you come out of your shell to catch any of Japan Society's excellent Japan Cuts Festival of 15 Japanese Films from July 5-15, like Gamera the Brave?



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