

THE JET AUTHOR ISSUE

JQ
JETaNY MAGAZINE
jetaany.org/magazine

WE INTERVIEW
LEARNING
TO BOW'S

**BRUCE
FEILER**



WILL FERGUSON

**THE HITCHHIKING
ADVENTURES OF A
SELF-PROCLAIMED
TRAVEL WEASEL**

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

THE WIDE ISLAND VIEW,
ECHOSTREAM, JAPAN
SOCIETY'S ARTISTIC
DIRECTOR, AND MORE

BRINGING JAPAN A
LITTLE CLOSER TO YOU



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CGJ in NY Welcomes Vice-Consul Kumi Matsumoto



I arrived in New York at the end of March, and it was actually my very first time to visit this exciting city. And on the very first day, I had dinner with JETAANY members! I really thank you for this heartwarming welcome.

Before I was assigned to the Consulate General of Japan, I was working at the public diplomacy department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the section which deals with the JET Program. My work was not directly related to JET, but more about the planning and assessment of Japan's public diplomacy as a whole. And among many different tools to promote positive images about Japan, the JET Program is thought to be one of the most successful programs we have ever launched. I personally think it is because JET is a win-win program which gives valuable experience both to the JET members and to the Japanese students and everyone who shared time with you. I believe JETAA's support to JET members has been the reason this wonderful program has lasted so long.

This summer, the national conference of JETAA USA will be held in New

York, and I am very excited about it. I hope all the chapters of JETAA, CLAIR, the consulate and all the stakeholders can work together and strengthen our bonds. *Yoroshiku Onegaishimasu!*

JETAA NY

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From the Editor

In early May, JETAANY's officers welcomed a very special guest to the Big Apple: Ms. Yoko Kimura, CLAIR's new chairperson of the board of directors. We met with Kimura-san along with members of the Consulate General of Japan and the Japan Local Government Center over soup dumplings and other delicacies to discuss our respective challenges vis-à-vis the JET Program. Last year, 4,436 people participated as JETs, with 57 percent of them representing the United States. As the program's reputation continues to grow, it's vital for all alumni to learn more about it, which will be on the agenda for JETAA's National Conference in August. See you there!

Editorially yours,

Justin Tedaldi (Kobe-shi CIR, 2001-02)
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From the New Country Representatives

Hajimemashite to all of you at JETAANY whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting. I am quite excited to be serving as JETAA USA Country Rep along with your very own Shree Kurlekar and Rod McLeod of the San Francisco chapter.

I am up for the challenge of following in the footsteps of Ryan Hart, and delighted that Shree will be staying on for a second year as CR. I think each of have specific skills that will lend themselves to a strong team that will serve the JETAA USA community effectively. I am hoping to contribute my experience and knowledge gained as treasurer for RMJETAA to all chapters on the national level as CR for JETAA USA. My position at the consulate has also given me insight in regards to the flow of money on the MOFA side of things and general governmental trends in financial practices.



I honestly believe this upcoming year will be one during which JETAA USA can continue to ride on the wave of energy that was present during last year's National Conference and get some good work done. I am really looking forward to this year's conference in New York City this summer and the continuation to improve and strengthen this community! *Yoroshiku onegaishimasu*,

Jessyca Wilcox (Hokkaido, 2003-06)
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My name is Rod McLeod, and I am one of the new JETAA USA Country Representatives. I was an ALT in Shimane-ken. During my time in Japan, I interacted with quite a few JETs through weekend adventures and AJET organized events, like the Tokushima Touch Rugby Tournament. After moving back to San Francisco, I volunteered to become an officer and swiftly became the president of JETAANC (Northern California). I enjoyed my time as president, but decided that it was time to move on last January. I am excited take this role, and will try to build on the foundation for JETAA USA that the previous CRs have established in past years.

As the "tech guy," I plan to work with Jessyca and Shree to centralize information and increase communication between chapters. I would like chapters to start utilizing cloud computing like Google Docs and Dropbox to catalyze cross-chapter discussions. The first step to doing this is establishing an online JETAA USA directory, which I have created via Google Docs. It is the most up-to-date officer information that I have for all 19 chapters. Please let me know if you ever have any questions. I look forward to having a great year!

Rod McLeod (Shimane-ken, 2005-07)
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There are many ways to contribute to JQ. Writing's a start. Send your story ideas to magazine@jetaany.org.



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Nippon News Blotter

3/18/10: Japanese fish dealers welcomed the rejection of a proposed trade ban on Atlantic bluefin tuna—a prized ingredient of sushi—while urging that existing quotas be more strictly enforced to protect the species from overfishing. A recent vote at a UN meeting in Doha, Qatar, rejecting the ban was front-page news in all major Japanese newspapers. Japan consumes about 80 percent of the world's Atlantic bluefin tuna. (AP)

3/23/10: Nintendo said the next generation of its DS handheld video game console would come with a 3D display and go on sale within a year. Unlike the recent flurry of three dimensional films and TV technologies, the new machine, tentatively called the Nintendo 3DS, will not require users to wear special glasses to view images in 3D. The new device will be on display at the E3 video game trade show in June. (New York Times)

3/30/10: United States auto safety regulators are turning to scientists from the NASA space and aeronautics agency for help analyzing Toyota electronic throttles to see if they are behind unintended acceleration. The Transportation Department is just beginning its review of Toyota electronic throttles, which have come under heightened scrutiny following the recall of 8.5 million Toyota and Lexus vehicles over the past six months for unintended acceleration. (Reuters)

4/5/10: The United States is seeking the maximum civil penalty of \$16.375 million against Toyota for failing to notify safety regulators of its "sticky pedal" defect for at least four months. Roughly 2.3 million Toyotas have been recalled for the sticky pedal defect. Millions more have been recalled for a defect that causes the floor mats to become entrapped. (Washington Post)

4/9/10: Eri Yoshida, an 18-year-old knuckleball pitcher who played pro ball in Japan last year, signed with the Chico Outlaws of the Golden Baseball League. The team said she will report to spring training next month. Yoshida will be the first female to pitch for a pro team in the United States since Ila Borders retired more than ten years ago, the team said. (Salon.com)

4/10/10: A Japanese TV cameraman was among those killed in a bloody clash in Thailand between anti-government protesters and soldiers. Hiro Muramoto, 43, was shot while covering fighting in Bangkok when Thai soldiers fired rubber bullets into crowds and live ammunition in the air to dislodge protesters from encampments in the capital. The army has accused protesters of firing live rounds and throwing grenades. (Reuters)

4/19/10: Fast Retailing Co. said it has signed a rental contract for a second Uniqlo store in New York, to be the world's largest. The company said it signed a lease for space of 8,300 square meters for the casual wear store on Fifth Avenue in Midtown Manhattan. Meanwhile, as Uniqlo aggressively expands in New York, upscale Japanese department store operator Takashimaya Co. is closing its store—also located on Fifth Avenue—in June. Takashimaya is shifting its focus to other overseas markets, especially in Asia. (Wall Street Journal)

4/26/10: Better Place Inc., a U.S.-based electric car start-up, launched the first taxis based on its swappable battery technology in the Japanese capital to test its vision of an auto industry that no longer relies on gasoline-powered vehicles. The company said the taxis will cruise Tokyo's streets for three months to test their safety and reliability, and officials said they will then decide whether to continue or expand the program. (Wall Street Journal)



5/4/10: Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama has said it will not be feasible to entirely remove a controversial U.S. base from the island of Okinawa, which is home to over half the 47,000 American troops based in Japan. The U.S. Marines' Futenma base is deeply unpopular with many residents, and removing it had been a key election pledge of the prime minister. But on a visit to the island, Hatoyama said "realistically speaking, it is impossible" to fully relocate it. (BBC)

5/11/10: The Central Japan Railway Company took the visiting U.S. transportation secretary, Ray LaHood, on a maglev train test run—a 312-mile-an-hour tryout for the lucrative economic stimulus contracts that the United States plans to award to update and expand its rail network. Japan has also been keen to market its high-speed rail technologies to emerging economies. (New York Times)

5/14/10: The approval rating for Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama plunged to its lowest since his party's landslide election victory in August, according to a new poll released. Support for the cabinet and its center-left leader—who has been embroiled in a damaging row over a U.S. airbase and criticized for his weak leadership style—plunged to 19.1 percent in May, a Jiji Press news agency poll showed. (AFP)

Wynne Wu (1975-2010)

As many of you have heard, JetWit.com founder Steven Horowitz's wife, Wynne Wu, passed away on April 23 after living with metastatic breast cancer for four years. Here is a list of information and ways you can help support Steven and their daughter Helen during this difficult time.

Lotsa Helping Hands Web site - this is the central repository of info. Everything is posted on this site and you need to sign up to get access. The info below can also be found here: www.lotsahelpinghands.com/c/624820

Wynne's blog - Steven is posting some very beautiful things here about Wynne. It is a poignant homage to her life and passions, and a great way to get to know Wynne if you didn't have the privilege. <http://wenren.wordpress.com>

Donations - For those interested in donating, there are two funds that have been set up in Wynne's honor:

Wu Fund - In consultation with Wynne and Steven, BHSEC (Bard High School Early College, the school where Wynne taught since 2002) has established the Wu fund which will honor Wynne's contribution to BHSEC by funding students who study in China or take intensive Chinese classes. To contribute, send checks made out to BHSEC PTA with "Wu fund" in the memo. The address is: Bard High School Early College, 525 East Houston Street, New York, NY 10002, Attn: David Clark/Wu Fund. All donations are tax deductible.

Third Street Music School Settlement - Gifts received by Third Street Music School Settlement in memory of Wynne will support tuition assistance programs that provide need-based financial aid and merit-based scholarships to students in need. To contribute, please send a check payable to: Third Street Music School Settlement, 235 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003. Memo Note: Wynne Wu. www.thirdstreetmusicschool.org

Donors may also make contributions online with Third Street by clicking the link to Network for Good, and noting Wynne Wu in the dedication section.



JETAANY Election Recap



JETAANY Team 2010-11: From left, Kelly Nixon (treasurer), Shree Kurlekar (country rep), Megan Miller (president) and Monica Yuki (vice president), with new secretary Janelle Jimenez at right.

With April comes spring, and that means JETAANY officer elections! The upcoming fiscal year finds most of the same officers returning, with new face Janelle Jimenez taking up the secretary's quill.

Janelle currently works at the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, where one of her main tasks is attending meetings, workshops and seminars, and briefing senior



Janelle's letter of rec clinched it for us.

diplomats. As a JET, Janelle was a CIR in Shimane-ken from 2005-08. During that time, she launched over fifty events, including a monthly cooking class and several annual events, and established and maintained the International Exchange Fund which allowed the city budget to be expanded.

JETAANY would also like to thank outgoing secretary Amber Liang for all her contributions this year, including spearheading the mentoring program, assisting with the Author Showcase, and many other events and activities!



Amber's Goodbye

I leave this year as secretary of JETAANY with much appreciation of the collaboration of the entire JETAANY executive committee and membership and satisfaction of the many things that we were able to accomplish this year.

It was a privilege to serve as the 2009-10 JETAANY secretary, and even though I will no longer retain this role, I hope to stay involved in other ways—as I hope many other members will try as well. *Honto ni osewa ni narimashita.*

Your loving former secretary,

Amber Liang

That's Gorgeous Entertainment! By Anthony Waldman (Mie-ken, 2005-09)

For those looking to broaden their horizons in the theater and film arts or experience more Japanese culture stateside, the collaborative U.S.-Japan projects of Gorgeous Entertainment have much to offer. For the past 13 years, this established company has succeeded in building cultural bridges across the globe. Based in New York City, this production enterprise specializes in film, theater and special events that reach out to audiences worldwide. JQ got the lowdown from company founders Kumiko Yoshii and Michael Wolk about this unique and progressive company.

Tell us about Gorgeous Entertainment.

We are a New York-based theater, film and special events production company, founded in 1997. Since its founding, Gorgeous has had a particular interest in projects which promote cross-cultural understanding and collaboration between the United States and Japan.

The company has produced numerous theater projects that span Japanese and American sensibilities, including Amon Miyamoto's 2005 Tony-nominated *Pacific Overtures*, also presented at Lincoln Center and Kennedy Center; and Miyamoto's *Up in the Air*, commissioned by and performed



Gorgeous founders Kumiko Yoshii and Michael Wolk. (Courtesy of Kyle McKeveny)

at the Kennedy Center in 2008, featuring a score by *Dreamgirls*' Henry Krieger. This season, Gorgeous will present Miyamoto's staging of *The Fantasticks*, America's longest-running musical, in London. Gorgeous also acts as the production liaison for the presentation of Broadway musicals such as *The Producers*, *Urinetown*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, and *The Sound of Music* in Japan.

In film, Gorgeous has produced the award winners *Yukie and Oriume*, both released theatrically in Japan; and *You Think You Really Know Me: The Gary Wilson Story*, on Plexifilm DVD. Special events include Japan Day @ Central Park, now entering its fourth year; The Festival of Japanese Food and Culture, and the Anime Masterpieces series, which presents the best in



Japanese animated feature films at universities and museums.

What sets Gorgeous apart from other production companies?

There is a strong Japanese sensibility and understanding of Japan within the office, as well as Japanese language capability, which makes the company uniquely suited for U.S.-Japan collaborations.

What is Gorgeous' connection to Japan?

Through its co-founder and president, Kumiko Yoshii, the company has fostered and grown relationships over time with many top Japanese production companies and corporations.

What are some of the challenges Gorgeous faces as a production company featur-

ing Japan-related productions?

It is a particular challenge developing audiences for work that crosses the language barrier, whether it be Japanese-language productions in America, or English-language productions in Japan; it is often equally challenging to develop audiences for work that crosses cultural barriers. For example, *Up in the Air*, which is based one of the most beloved novels of the venerated Japanese author Mizukami Tsutomu, is a well-loved story for young audiences in Japan. But in America, its somber presentation of death as part of life is largely viewed as too "dark" for family audiences.

What effect has the global financial crisis had on Gorgeous or its productions?

We've been amazingly fortunate in that our projects have proceeded without impediment by the global recession.

What Japan-related projects can we expect to see in the near future?

Please join us for Japan Day @ Central Park on June 6! We will be producing *The Fantasticks* on London's West End beginning May 24, and we are currently developing *Iron Chef: The Musical* and *Deep Cover*, a musical by Gorgeous CEO Michael Wolk that was presented as part of the 2009 New York Musical Theatre Festival, and will be staged again during the 2010 season.

For more information, visit *Gorgeous Entertainment* at www.gorgeousentertainment.com.

Shakai Spotlight:
International Center of New York
 By Pamela Kavalam (Shiga-ken, 2007-09)

Founded in 1961, the International Center of New York is a unique volunteer-driven community where newcomers to our country practice speaking English and learn more about U.S. culture. Their supporters include immigrants, U.S. citizens, refugees, asylees, diplomats, visiting business professionals, international students, temporary visitors and families.

With a full-time staff of 13 and 1,000+ volunteers, they offer New York's largest one-to-one partnership program, a variety of discussion and lecture classes, structured eight-to-ten week English courses, practical skills training workshops, and cultural programs that help their 2,000 members build new lives here.

JQ sat down with Beverly Brown-Ruggia, ICNY's managing director and COO, at their beautiful and vibrant space in Chelsea to talk about ways that JET alums can get involved with them.

What makes ICNY different from the city's other international organizations?

The programs we offer are for immigrants, students, and visitors and people working in New York temporarily, which puts us at an advantage. We work with all of these groups together—it's a healthy mix and dynamic.

We reach out to universities, survivors of torture, refugees, asylees. Those groups would otherwise not interact; it's a wholly educational experience. There is a common struggle among people from different economic backgrounds. It's eye-opening for students to meet immigrants and vice versa. How they integrate into the city sets them apart.

We have a highly diverse group—aged from 18 to 80, immigrants and students, artists, bankers, architects, teachers, retired people, actors....Many are college-educated; some have limited education. However, we don't take beginners, only people with intermediate to advanced levels of English.

What has your relationship been like with JETAA?

We've had a number of JET alumni on our staff—at least two people in the recent past. Also, many of our

volunteers have come from JET. We have a good representation of Japanese members. JET alums have enjoyed maintaining that connection with the Japanese culture.

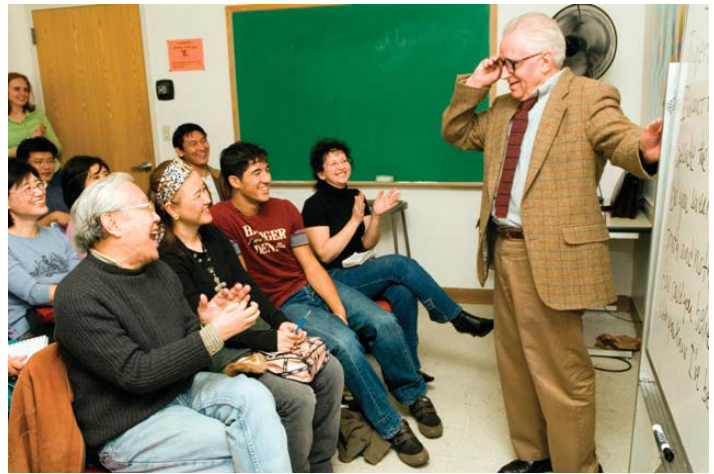
People also come when they're interested in possibly doing the JET Program—it's a chance to get your feet wet, meet people from Japan, and practice teaching. Also, for the past six or seven years, we've held an Exploration Abroad Fair in the spring. Representatives from different programs such as the Peace Corps, Cross Cultural Solutions, as well as the JET Program speak to our community about study and work abroad.

What is the volunteer application process like?

There is a vigorous screening process. You have to fill out an application, do a short individual interview, and attend a group orientation. We work with applicants to see if this is a good fit and make sure they understand what is expected of them. We're looking for people with a philosophy in sync with our own—volunteering at the International Center not just about teaching but also about peer learning and cultural exchange without judgment. We look for people who can listen and who are sensitive to cultural differences.

Because of the current economy, there has been an increase in volunteer applications. The commitment is two hours a week for six months. Our biggest volunteer need is for conversation partnerships, particularly on weekday afternoons. If you're looking for work, put that on the application. You can begin volunteering and finish your six month commitment and then see if you can still fit it in your schedule. If you're busy, it might be possible to volunteer in the summer, when several of our regular volunteers go away. The best idea is to check the Web site and see what kinds of volunteer spots are open.

We match people according to their availability. Partnerships meet on-site at the center. You can change the time with your partner if you both agree on it, but we can't guarantee that. Some volunteers go on ICNY trips with their partner. It's a great opportunity for partners to enliven their conversations. We have about 800-1,000 volunteers a



English workshop in action at the International Center of New York. (Courtesy ICNY)

year with good retention. We find that a number of our volunteers will stay on for years.

Is it possible to choose a conversation partner based on a country? For example, if JET alumni wanted to find a Japanese exchange partner?

We can't make partnerships based on a volunteer's preference for a particular country or culture; it's just not logistically possible. None of our volunteers or members have ever complained about this. In terms of volunteers' language ability, volunteers must be fluent in English and having a sensitivity to the language learning process is helpful and definitely a plus. However, the conversation partnership program is strictly in English. Students who participate in the conversation partnership program must have some conversation skill and are usually at an intermediate or advanced level.

Can you talk about some of ICNY's community outreach programs?

We have been running the conversation partnership program for a number of community-based organizations for several years. We've done programs in Brooklyn and Queens, and in the spring we'll do some daytime programs in the Bronx.

It's great for volunteers who prefer to volunteer near their homes or offices. You can mention on your volunteer application that you'd be happy to volunteer in a specific borough or neighborhood, and we'll notify you of opportunities that pop up.

The International Center of New York is located at 50 West 23rd Street. For more on volunteering and ICNY programs, visit www.intlcenter.org.

Japan Society's Artistic Director Speaks
 By Lyle Sylvander
 (Yokohama-shi, 2001-02)



Yoko Shioya of Japan Society.

In April, Japan Society received a one-day record of 3,000 visitors for its inaugural j-CATION, a day-long open house celebrating the culinary and the cultural in Japan. JQ spoke with Yoko Shioya, Japan Society's artistic director and coordinator of the event, to learn more about the institution's approach to its performances and activities.

Tell me about your background. What did you study in college?

I was born and raised in Tokyo. My parents were very dedicated to Western music, especially opera, and I learned to play piano at an early age.

In college, I wanted to study contemporary dance but, at that time, you couldn't study dance academically in Japan. So, I enrolled in the musicology department at Tokyo University of the Arts, which was the only university in Japan devoted to this.

I belonged to the [Con't. on 11]



Wide Island View editor Gail at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial.

Gail Cetnar Meadows (Hiroshima-shi, 2007-present) is one of the editors of Hiroshima JET Webzine the **Wide Island View**, recently named the Best Online Resource of the year by National AJET. She is a contributor to **JetWit.com**, a **blogger**, and a former **newspaper journalist** from Ohio. This is Gail's first piece for **JQ**.

Since moving to Hiroshima, I've learned quite a large number of intriguing things from the Wide Island View. Things like the following:

- Not only does the Japanese Big-foot (a.k.a. Hibagon) live in the mountains bordering the northern end of Hiroshima prefecture, but the beastly creature is rumored to wield ungodly pungent B.O. and even, possibly, lay little baby Big-foot eggs—which the townspeople of Saijo have turned a pretty profit replicating as *omiyage*. Interestingly, though he may be a "Big"foot, he remains, like many of his Japanese brethren, distinctively pint-sized, standing just five feet tall.

- If you ever have the bad fortune to be hospitalized for surgery in Japan, it's a good idea to bring your own chopsticks and utensils because they won't be provided (except at an exorbitant price), and you should also bring your own clothing to wear after the surgery, since the hospital only gives you that sexy paper gown to wear while you're actually in surgery. Lest you think Japanese hospitals have taken a cue from American ones, however, you can rest assured that, should some schoolgirls show up to giggle you back to good health, the hospital will generously loan you a dainty cover to hide all the bits you don't want them to see.

- When taking the exam for a scooter license, be prepared to correctly answer to the following true/false statement: "You like to break

rules."

- Dolphin tastes like liver.

- All the roles in Japan's famous Takarazuka Theater in Hyogo-ken are performed by women, including the male roles. The ladies who train to play men can only play men, and they cut their hair short, practice how to walk and behave like men and even lower their voice. This was particularly interesting knowledge to have when reading media reports about new prime minister Yukio Hatoyama and his wife Mi-yuki, who, in addition to believing she once traveled on a triangular-shaped UFO to Venus, was also once a member of the Takarazuka Revue. (As a side note, I now know that any headline containing the phrase "Japanese ladies in drag" will never cease attract hits.)

- That long, bumpy green vegetable I see in the supermarket—you know, the one that looks like it suffers from an extremely unfortunate case of VD—while extremely bitter, actually becomes quite tasty when properly prepared into the famous Okinawan dish of *goya chanpuru* (emphasis on "properly"—the part I've not yet mastered).

I could go on forever about everything I've learned from my fellow JETs. Without a doubt, the sharing of knowledge through the Wide Island View and other JET publications like it (particular favorites being the **Hyogo Times**, Shimane-ken's **Black Taxi** and Hokkaido's **Polestar**) enrich the JET experience in a very important way. (Hey, who else but other JETs ever would have thought to clue me in on the difference between the seven varieties of citrus fruits of Japan? There's apparently a whole world of citrus beyond the mikan!)

When Joshua Zimmerman (Hiroshima-ken, 2005-09) and I took the reins as editors of the Wide

Island View in 2008, it was a 1.5-year-old PDF publication that was being e-mailed to JET subscribers every other month. Looking back through the old issues, we saw a treasure trove of articles about Japan that were up to that point just sitting buried in the dark corners of a small number of people's e-mail inboxes. So we decided to shine some light into those dark corners. It was obvious that much of what had been written over the years would still be interesting to JETs today and well into the future, not to mention anyone else with an interest in Japan. That being the case, moving the publication out of e-mail inboxes and onto the Web just made sense.

Being a gadget lover and a bit of a techie, Josh was able to get the Wide Island View Web site off the ground using WordPress. It launched last June and took off from there. Traffic has been steadily growing, and currently it's receiving more than 7,500 visitors and 25,000 page views per month—not too shabby when you consider that as a PDF, the publication was read by just a couple hundred JETs on the mailing list.

Now, not only are all the articles easily accessible anytime to anyone seeking info on a specific topic, but the Web site also gives JETs the capability to share more than they could before—videos, podcasts, and most importantly, teaching materials. There's also a forum for making announcements, sharing ideas, giving advice, and just in general creating a stronger JET support system and network. The icing on the cake has been the photo contests made possible by the prizes donated by advertisers.

Over the past year or so, we've started to see other prefectures develop a stronger Web presence as well,

with new online magazines popping up in Kyoto and Nagano and the launch of a community blog for Ishikawa-ken JETs. Editors have done a bit of cross promotion to share content and boost awareness about our respective publications for all JETs, and the Wide Island View has gotten positive feedback from JETs in other parts of Japan who've said they wish they had a similar type of publication in their own prefectures.

All of this is encouraging and leads us to think there might be a place for a kind of national JET Webzine. It could be a site where all the prefectures could easily create their own page, and certain content from the various JET publications could be centralized into a shared space. This is a project that's currently being discussed by the various publications' editors and National AJET. We're hoping that by putting all our heads together, we can launch a Web site that would become a valuable resource for all of us to share our Japan experiences, and strengthen the whole JET community.

What does all this mean for the future of the Wide Island View? That's not totally clear yet, but whatever happens, Josh and I have been delighted by what Hiroshima JETs have been able to accomplish together this year, and are really excited about the potential for a new resource for JETs where all of us can learn a little more about our *tomodachi's* exploits in the Land of the Rising Sun. And of course, we're looking forward to learning more from the fellow JETs who share our home away from home—even if it does mean learning we share it with a stinky, egg-laying brute.

Visit the Wide Island View at www.wideislandview.com.

Bruce Feiler: The JQ Interview
By Justin Tedaldi
(Kobe-shi CIR, 2001-02)

(Portions of this interview were originally published on Examiner.com.)

Award-winning bestselling author, journalist, and—in his own words—“professional traveler” Bruce Feiler (Tochigi-ken, 1987-88) has been writing books for nearly 20 years, the most recent of which focused on social issues and religion. His new book, The Council of Dads: My Daughters, My Illness, and the Men Who Could Be Me, was inspired by his diagnosis with cancer two years ago. Faced with an uncertain future and concerned about his family, he asked six of his peers to form a “Council of Dads” to help guide his young daughters through their lives. JQ spoke with Bruce about the start of his writing career, which began with 1991’s Learning to Bow, an account of his time living in Japan as an English teacher on the inaugural year of the JET Program, as well as his thoughts about the program today.

You’re now cancer-free. When did you receive this prognosis, and what was your treatment like?

I was first diagnosed in July 2008, and I had osteosarcoma, which is so rare that only one hundred adults a year get it. Twenty years ago they would have cut off my leg and hoped, since there was a fifteen percent survival rate. They determined that one cocktail of chemo could be effective, and I had that. I basically had four months of chemo, a 15-hour surgery to rebuild my leg, and then four more months of chemo. So I’ve technically been cancer-free since my surgery when they cut the tumor out of my femur. I’ve been cancer-free now for about 15 months. I’m full of hope walking forward.

Congratulations on your recovery. What were the most important things that you and your family learned by forming the Council of Dads?

I think that, first, there’s great power with sitting down with your closest friends and telling them what they mean to you. So I feel like what we did with the Council of Dads was kind of build a bridge between our family and our friends, and figure out a way to get our friends intimately involved in our children’s lives. When I asked each dad what’s the one piece of advice that you would give to our girls, I felt like we ended up with this sort of guidebook of wisdom that is not only valuable for our children, but really valuable for us and guides how we’ve been in our lives. So I feel like the life lessons we’ve learned have really been the biggest gift.

What made you want to write *Learning to Bow*?

It kind of grew out of a series of letters I wrote home, of the “you’re not gonna believe what happened to me” variety. And when I went back to Savannah six months later, everywhere I went, people said, “I just loved your letters,” and I said, “Have we met?” It turned out that my grandmother had copied them, and they got

passed from person to person—they went viral in the 1980s, if that’s the word—and I thought, wow, if that’s interesting to me and to these other people, I should write a book about it. It really was the sense that this story from this point of view wasn’t being told. In the 1980s, you couldn’t pick up a newspaper without reading an article about Japan or education, and the fact that here was a book that combined both, but had some sense of humor, I just think it was the right book at the right time, and I’m amazed and touched that, so many years later, for a lot of people, it’s the first book they read when they go to Japan....This was before the Internet, before e-mail, before blogs, [and] the world seemed much bigger than it is today.



Author Bruce Feiler and family. (Nancy Heffernan)

What was it like finding a publisher?

I ended up with the name of an agent who was kind of a friend of a friend, and I sent my stuff to her....I wrote a proposal, and I sold it about a month later. I mean, it doesn’t happen that way, but it happened to me. I was 24 years old. And even more amazing, here I am—21 years later—essential the only thing I’ve ever done is write books.

Have you returned to Japan since your time there as a teacher?

That’s a really good question, and the answer is no. I’ve kind of been to every place around it, but I’ve never been back to Japan. I keep looking for the right assignment, because I really want to go back and kind of write something, but I haven’t been back.

One of your more recent books, *Walking the Bible*, was also translated into Japanese. Has Japan been receptive to your other works?

Korea and China have been a really good market for me. I’m not convinced that Japan has been a big market for me.

What kind of outlook did you take back home with you from your time in Japan?

People go to Japan today and they call me up, which still happens from time to time. I say the same thing that I’ve said for decades now, which is: don’t go over to Japan trying to change it, thinking that you know better. Go there trying to understand...I think that that essential way

of experiencing another culture—not going in as a sort of a haughty Westerner, looking down on it—but actually jumping into the deep end, completely immersed in yourself, befriending the people, and opening yourself up to the culture. That way of living is the thing that I would take from my experience, and pass on to my daughters today.

Since coming back, what developments in Japan with JET or just the society itself have you continued to follow?

I think that if you look back to the origins of the JET Program, it grew out of a philosophy: We need to educate and open Japan up to the West. Prime Minister Nakasone had an original idea of putting foreigners into the culture. That was something that was very awkward at the time, and many of the Japanese people that I knew who had spent time abroad and come back home were misfits at home, I would say.

And I think that Japan is much humbler now than it was in the 1980s. I think that the world is much smaller than it was...with the Internet and technology and business, everybody’s more integrated. So I think that Japan still lags behind, but compared to where we were in the 1980s, that Japanese people are much defter at integrating with the West than they were then. So in that regard, I think the JET Program, with all of its false start problems that it’s had over the years, has actually helped play a role there.

What advice would you give to this year’s new JET recruits?

Don’t get caught up in the Westerner ghetto. Plunge yourself as deep into Japanese culture as you can, learn as much as you can, and then come back and share your experiences with those who haven’t been, who aren’t able to do that. You are pioneers, but you will be most effective if you really step out of your comfort zone, really go deep, then be sure to come back and tell us what you’ve seen.

Have you ever referred someone to the program?

No, I don’t tend to hear—I know a lot of people have read *Learning to Bow* in colleges, so I know that it has inspired [people], and every now and then I’ll see something on the Internet or a blog on somebody who has been inspired to do the JET Program because of *Learning to Bow*, but I don’t get sought out by a lot of people.

Does the Japanese government ever ask you for advice or to speak about it?

That’s a good question, and the answer is no. Right when I was first published, the Japanese government was particularly interested and kind of summoned me to the embassy, but I don’t do that much talking about Japan...I’m not really a professional Japan person. I’m a professional traveler and Japan’s a big part of my life, but I don’t really excel as a kind of expert on Japanese culture, which I’m really not.

How does it feel to be known as the most notable or accomplished alumnus to come out of JET?

I think that it’s an incredible honor, and I like what it communicates to the JET community, which is that you can go from your experience as a JET into whatever you want [[Con’t. on 12](#)]

JETAANY Society Page Photos



Nancy Ikehara chills with George Takei at Ambassador Nishimiya's residence.



JETAANY VP Monica Yuki (center) teaches kids origami at Japan-a-mania.



Four teams of four participated in JETAANY's Quiz Night at Amber restaurant.



Quiz Night's first place team (Jon Hills, Kendall Murano, Elizabeth Bass and Ann Chow) with quiz master Pam Kavalam.



JETs practice drumming at PMT Studio with professional taiko group Cobu.



The JETAANY gang at Brooklyn Botanic Garden's annual Sakura Matsuri festival.

Nihonjin in New York: Dancer Nobuya Nagahama By Stacy Smith (Kumamoto-ken CIR, 2000-03)

Self-described dancer, performer, choreographer and writer Nobuya Nagahama is part of the New York dance troupe Feliciano Dance Company, which specializes in hip-hop. The 28-year-old is also experienced in the genres of ballet, jazz, tap and modern dance, and even appeared as a reality show contestant on So You Think You Can Dance. JQ talked to him about his dancing life and future goals.

Tell us about your journey from Japan to New York.

I am from Hachioji, which is a suburb in the western part of Tokyo. When I was young, being a teacher was a dream that I started chasing in middle school. Becoming a dancer was also my dream, and I began dancing when I was in high school. At that time it was very hard for me to decide which way to go, dancing or teaching. But I figured that you can't really make money as a dancer in Japan so I decided to quit and become a teacher.

I taught home economics and enjoyed it, but I couldn't stop dancing. While teaching I still practiced, both outside of school and in a *bukatsu* (club) that I was in charge of. After a year I opted to quit my job and pursue dancing full-time in New York. This was a difficult decision for me as I was a young teacher loved by my students, but for the sake of my study of dance I had to come.

Was it your first time in New York and was it what you expected?

I had been to New York once before as a tourist, so I kind of knew what to expect. I'm here only for dance, so if there are slight inconveniences about the lifestyle I have to bear them. I think it is easy to get around whether by public transportation or taxi, which are not that expensive. Some people say the atmosphere of the city is crazy and that it is no place to live but I am in Woodside, Queens which is both quiet and safe.

The food is definitely better in Japan, but because of my home ec background I can make my own Japanese food as it's something that's expensive to go out for. In the beginning when I did go out to eat I couldn't quite get used to tipping, especially when the service was worse than what I was used to in Japan. I have come to understand how important the tip is for service

workers.

It was tough when I first got here four years ago in terms of adjusting. My first shock was going to McDonald's and not being greeted



Nobuya performing with the Feliciano Dance Company. (Takahiro Ueno)

with a smile like in Japan. Also, I was a smoker at the time and I was surprised to find that this is a real communication tool here! For example, people would ask me for a cigarette or a light even though we didn't know each other.

Also, I couldn't believe how open-minded people here are. I would be complimented on my glasses, bag or coat and I didn't know what to say. Now I am able to graciously accept the praise and often compliment the person back in return! Also, the hugging culture was awkward for me at first, but now I love using this as a greeting.

Were you able to find success in dance right away?

I was studying dance at the Peri Dance Center, and one of the teachers there was the artistic director of a dance company called the Feliciano Dance Company. He invited me to join, and this was my professional start. Our company is based on hip-hop, but not the street version so much as a theatrical version geared toward the stage. In Japan I had only done hip-hop on the street and at some clubs, so this was new

for me.

Though I enjoyed hip-hop, it was just for fun and I wanted to be involved with other genres that would be more connected to business. So I began studying ballet, jazz, tap and modern dance, and I am still in the process of learning these techniques. I initially came over here with the intent of staying for

You Can Dance! It was the show's fifth season, and I made it to Vegas where they select the top twenty. Unfortunately I couldn't get past the final cut, but people will sometimes notice me on the street because of my moment of fame.

Wow! Did you become famous back home as well because of that?

Well, in Japan the show is known as *American Dance Idol* and can only be seen on a special cable channel, so there was limited access. But there was a clip of me on YouTube so people back home were able to see my audition. In Japan dancing is not as much a part of the culture as it is here. There are dance shows, but they are only aired late at night. Plus it is not as pervasive in terms of having many movies or shows about dance. It is still a somewhat minor culture that is becoming popular, but it is not quite there yet.

I think in Japan if you want to be a dancer you have to have other jobs to support yourself, whereas here there are more opportunities due to the sheer amount of auditions available. In New York it all seems to be part of business, like if a certain company has a party they might invite dancers to come perform but this is not something you would have in Japan.

It sounds like you have had a lot of success already. Do you have any more dreams?

Ideally I would like to serve as a cultural bridge between Japan and America. Like spend three months performing in New York, followed by three months performing in Tokyo. Then have three months of producing a show in New York, followed by a two-month workshop in Tokyo. Ultimately, I really want to connect artists from Japan and New York.

Nobuya featured in New York Times article: www.nytimes.com/2009/02/07/arts/07feli.html

Nobuya's So You Think You Can Dance audition: <http://myrealitytelevision.com/2009/05/nobuya-nagahama-sytycd-5-audition-locking-video>

Check out Nobuya's (Japanese) blog Nobuya's Dance Life in New York: <http://ameblo.jp/nobuya-ny> and his MySpace page: www.myspace.com/nobuyan

Visit the Feliciano Dance Company at www.showthemovement.com/blog/about-2.

[Con't. from 6] ethnomusicology department but also studied more conventional Western music theory, music history and composition. Still, I was able to do research and study modern dance through the period between Isadora Duncan and the Judson Church movement. I wrote my thesis on the relationship between modern dance and the visual arts.

Why did you come to the U.S.?

I came in 1988, when the environment in Japan was not supportive of artists. My husband at the time was a visual artist and had dual citizenship. New York was a great place for artists to mingle and meet and there was a support network for them. None of these things existed in Japan at that time. Nowadays, though, the situation has improved, at least for Tokyo.

What was your first job in New York?

I stayed in the design business for a while, receiving work from Japan as a coordinator between the U.S. and Japan. But I gradually got fed up with working in a commercial industry. I was always interested in art for art's sake and began writing articles for major Japanese magazines to introduce America's art support systems, and I received commissions from Japan to do research on this subject. Gradually, I established myself as a freelance researcher, writer and critic for Japanese newspapers and agencies.

How did you get your job at Japan Society?

Well, that's a funny story because I was not looking for a full-time salary job when it was offered to me.



At Japan Society this spring: Yamamoto Kyogen Company performs a scene from *Shido Hogaku*, a classic comedic Japanese play; j-CATION special guest Takeru Kobayashi talks about life as a competitive eater. (Yoshiaki Kanda, George Hirose)



In 1997, a director from the Asian Cultural Council told me that someone in performing arts at Japan Society wanted to meet me. That was the 90th anniversary of the Society and they were looking for full-time staff for the busy season.

I initially turned them down, but changed my mind when told that the performing arts department would give its staff members a lot of comp time because it involved a lot of overtime work. I accepted the job when I realized I could use the free time to continue my own outside business. In 2003, I became director of performing arts and in 2006, I became artistic director of Japan Society. It is a vice president administrative level position and prior to that, there was no such position at the Society.

What are your main responsibilities?

My main responsibility is programming for performing arts. Once a month, we present some sort of performing arts in our theater, varying from contemporary dance,

music and drama to the traditional performing arts. We recently showcased a kyogen company from Japan. I've also been responsible for managing the U.S. tours of Japanese dance and theater companies. So far, we have produced tours for Rinko-gun, Seinendan, Ku Na'uka, SPAC, Kayoko Shiraishi's *Hyaku Monogatari*, Takashi Kawamura's *AOI/KOMACHI* and the company Yubiwa Hotel.

I also manage the film program but I don't handle the actual curation, since film is not my specialty. I set the program's general direction and also handle part of the programming of the lecture series. For instance, I started the Japan Cuts festival focusing entirely on new films made in Japan. I did this to recognize the recent surge in Japanese filmmaking.

Many of these films were unavailable in the U.S., so my staff made translations and subtitles and projected them onto the movie screen. This was a unique program that only the resources of Japan Society

could manage and it differentiated us from other film venues in the city. Actual selection of the films, however, was handled by the film staff. In today's environment, it is impossible to be a performing arts programmer without business skills.

This is where my experience in the design industry has come in handy. I am constantly dealing with budgets, schedules, coordination, writing contracts with artists, and making proposals to attract donors and corporate constituents for fundraising.

What are your current plans?

Well, in order to accurately plan for the performing arts, I have to plan two and a half years ahead of time. So right now I'm consulting with some dance and theater companies in Japan to come here in 2012. I need time to raise money, since it's so expensive to bring performers to the U.S. This summer, we are getting ready for another Japan Cuts festival.

We recently completed j-CATION, which was our biggest event ever. It was an open house that involved coordinating all of Japan Society's programming areas, from performing arts and film, to the visual arts, education, politics, business and industry. I was in charge of the whole event and had to coordinate all of the different Japan Society areas together. It was a great success, and I look forward to doing something similar in the future.

Visit Japan Society's performing arts page at www.japansociety.org/performing_arts_program.

Echostream: Rocking the Anime Circuit and Beyond
By Earth Bennett
(Aomori-ken, 2000-03)

On an April night in Brooklyn at Williamsburg's Knitting Factory, the five members of Echostream are warming up backstage before a show. In a space smaller than the average Manhattan studio apartment, the band members are splayed out along a piecemeal set of sofas and chairs that look like they were salvaged from various sidewalk corners over the course of the year. They're relaxed and chatty—a group of seasoned musicians in their element. Between breaks to apply stage makeup and tousle hair, they take the time to answer my questions about their music, their history, and their experiences playing at various Japanese pop culture festivals across the country.

Echostream has been a fixture in New York City since 2005, in the interim pro- [Con't. on 12]



Echostream live with guest bassist at the Knitting Factory. Foreground from left: Tony, Ryoko, Tomo, Jen and C.J.

[*Con't. from 8*] to do. If you want to go into Japanese business, if you want to go into education, if you want to go into media, if you want to go into anything, this is a stepping stone to making whatever dream you have come true, so I think that's the message...I've written nine books, I've had four near-types of sellers, and I have this stature, but I didn't have it then; I was just a guy writing letters home, and I just had this dream. So I think it's a way to communicate to young people who are confident and bold enough to go off deep into another culture early in their lives—it is a great message to them that you can go from there to whatever platform you want.

Have you thought about writing another book about Japan?

Sure, I would like in my life to go back and revisit that. I mean, we're coming up on twenty-five years since I was living and working in Tochigi-ken, and I would love the opportunity to go back, walk those streets, seek out friends, maybe some of those students, and use that as a prism to talk about how Japan has changed in the last quarter century. I think that would be

a great privilege, and if anybody reading this wants to send me on assignment, I'm ready to accept.

When JET has its 25th anniversary, they'll probably be looking for keynote speakers...

Oh, I'd love to do that, that would be a great thrill...I have to say, I was [recently] on the cover of a big magazine here, *USA Weekend*, and one of the first people to write me was someone I knew in Tochigi-ken in 1987.

Looking back on *Learning to Bow*, is there anything you'd like to change or add to the book?

[Laughs] Yeah...I've written eight books since then, so I hope that I've learned a few tricks of the trade since then. But you know what? [quotes the book's opening line] "I dropped my pants and felt a rush of cool wind against my legs"...when I wrote that, I really kind of felt like, wow, this is a really natural thing, I like writing stories like this...I'm sure the overwriting and the bad ideas and the sloppy sentences and some of the awkwardness is there. I don't think I would change anything in the book off the top of my

head. I think what I would change is, I didn't go to Japan attempting to write a book, so I have lived my life slightly differently having written that book. I found out I was very good at describing scenes and places that I was at, even if it had been a while. I was less good in dialogue and in conversation, so I think in subsequent experiences in my life, I've written down snippets of conversation so you kind of capture people's real voices. That's the one thing that I would have done differently, but that was before the book.

It's great that you were able to get a sense of your skills through your experiences there. What was your best and worst memory of Japan?

I'll say my best memory was climbing Mt. Fuji, and the worst memory was...trying to fit my feet into the free giveaway slippers at Japanese schools.

Yeah, those are tough.

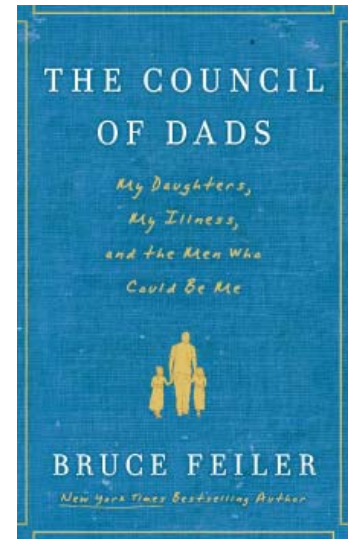
[Laughs] I haven't thought about that in a long time.

What's next for Bruce Feiler?

I don't know...I'm actually sitting here at what looks like a Hollywood

auction shaping up for *The Council of Dads*, and I guess my first priority is to keep myself healthy and be around for my girls, and to keep finding ways to travel and to tell stories.

Visit Bruce's homepage at <http://brucefeiler.com>. Watch an interview with Bruce and his wife Linda from the Today show at <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/26184891/vp/36823506#36823506>.



[*Con't. from 11*] -ducing two albums and performing for large crowds at countless Japanese-themed events. At the core of the band are keyboardist Tony and vocalist Ryoko, who met at the Royal Academy of Music in London where they studied classical performance.

They began writing music together there in 1999. Ryoko signed with a major label in Japan, and Tony moved there with her in order to produce music for her and other artists on the label. Tony and Echostream lead guitarist Tomo began also working together around this time as well.

After about five years of producing for various artists, Tony and Ryoko decided to move to New York to make a new kind of music. This is when Echostream truly began, and it was at this point that their first album was released. Shortly thereafter, Echostream began playing at anime festivals across the U.S. Tomo moved over from Japan shortly thereafter, and Jen and C.J., the two drummers who perform onstage simultaneously and help give the band its unique sound, then completed Echostream in its present form.

So what's it like playing the so-called "Anime Circuit"? Thanks to the recent Japanese pop culture boom in the U.S., bands at conventions like the New York Anime Festival and Katsucon Japanese culture festival in Washington, D.C. are guaranteed throngs of instant admirers, oftentimes dressed in cosplay standards such as Lolita Gothic or *Dragonball Z* iterations.

It's a crowd like no other, and the band has been

amazed time and again by the loyalty and creativity of their fans, from surprise requests for autographs in supermarkets, to a unique set of Echostream dolls sent by one fan. Although it's growing steadily, the Anime Circuit scene is still relatively small, so a lot of the bands get to know each other from playing multiple events together. For those interested in checking out other bands in the scene, Tony and Tomo recommend Japanese/English electronic group FAKE? and J-rock band Grapevine.

The main showroom at the Knitting Factory is about half full, and it's easy to tell that a decent number of people have arrived early for the next band: In the middle of the opening band's set, a Japanese couple with matching puffy brown hairdos and combat boots waits patiently in the back for Echostream to go on. By the time Tony and Ryoko take the stage, the room has filled up significantly. A trio of photographers is now poised at the base of the stage.

Echostream's sound defies easy categorization. The mix of Ryoko's ethereal vocals, Tony's electronic patterns and Tomo's crunchy guitar riffs may call up comparisons to Evanescence or Curve, but the songs' efficient, interlocking parts and sonic minimalism give the music a Radiohead-like feel at times. Although there's no overt Japanese influence in Echostream's music, it's the Japanese members of the band that stay in your mind long after they've left the stage.

Of the many shots that the trio of scuttling photographers takes of the band, a large amount are

centered on Tomo and Ryoko. At center stage, Ryoko is a dark angel in a black and white dress, belting out haunting vocals. To her right, Tomo has a Johnny Ramone-like stage presence: thrashing at the Gibson guitar on his knee, the energy he pours into his playing conveys to the eyes what the raw emotion of his craft conveys to the ears.

Toward the end of the set, the band launches into some new music in order to give their fans a taste of their upcoming third album release. Echostream is branching into new directions for this next album, looking to replicate the circular rhythms and cinematic scope of electronic sound, but without using electronic instruments.

For one of their last songs, Tony, who has been behind his keyboard and sound mixer for much of the show, steps out from behind his equipment, playing a vintage French horn for the crowd. The Japanese couple, which has moved to the front of the crowd, is mouthing lyrics to the song—an impressive display of fandom, considering the song had been released on MySpace just a few days prior to the show. Japan is well known for these "superfans," and the band is thankful for them. While Echostream may not have the name recognition of a U2 or a Beatles quite yet, can either of these groups claim the honor of performing in front of a thousand screaming fans with blue hair and handmade silver jumpsuits?

Visit Echostream's MySpace page at www.myspace.com/echostream.

Restaurant Review

Robataya Breaks Out Paddles of Fun and Flair

By Nancy Ikehara (Yokohama-shi CIR, 1994-97)

The T.I.C. restaurant group does it again. The same folks behind Sakagura, Cha-An Teahouse, Sake Bar Decibel and others, brings another unique dining experience to the East Village. Opened last October, Robataya is a charcoal grilling establishment with an unassuming flair about it. The shop's exterior not only bears its name in kanji only, but its simple wooden doors are flanked by a single wall-mounted lantern, looking more like an izakaya entrance you'd find in remote areas of Japan.

The serene entrance, however, contrasts sharply from the rowdiness within. As you enter, you're not only greeted with a hearty "*ir-rashaimase*," but are immediately struck by the sights and sounds (and smells!) of an open grill area with two small charcoal hearths. This is where all the action's at.

Here, the wait staff yells your order to the *genki* grillmeisters, who shout it back in jubilant confirmation. The chef then wields a long-handled wooden paddle to deliver food and, to my surprise, bottled

beer over the hearths to any area along the 26-seat counter, providing a unique interactive experience that connects you to the master and fellow seated patrons. (Don't be surprised if your neighbor asks what you've just ordered.)

The paddles are also used to transport ingredients to the grill from the bountiful selection of fresh produce and meats displayed in front of you. This feat often requires the grillmeister to climb over the fire pit—rather precariously—for some show-stopping theatrics.

Now for the food. My friend and I plowed through the *robatayaki* meats (chicken, duck, lamb, steak) and veggie menu. Standard skewered fare such as *momo* (chicken thigh) and *tsukune* (minced chicken meat) were a delight. Both are grilled with your choice of salt or teriyaki sauce (*tare*).

Everything was simply and deliciously prepared, but the flame-grilled *nasu* eggplant and smoky *enoki* mushrooms were the stand-out items here. We then caught



Robataya's grillmeister at work.

sight of *ayu*, or sweetfish, being grilled on skewers stuck vertically into a sand pit and just had to have one. Together with a few *yaki-onigiri*, it made for a nostalgic taste of Japan. Loved it.

These small tapas-style dishes range in price from \$5 to \$8, and our dinner tab for two came out to roughly \$70. Robataya also boasts an extensive seasonal sake menu with which to wash everything down. Depending on your choice (and in my case, volume!) of drink, the tab can run high. Selected warm sake averages \$13 for a carafe; daiginjo super-pre-

mium will set you back \$20 to \$30 a carafe. Check out the sake banner on Robataya's Web site for the drinks menu.

I suggest making reservations beforehand and trying to limit your party size to two to three peeps for counter seating. Larger groups may nestle into a booth in the larger, back dining area, but you will not regret taking in all the grilling action that the front room offers.

Robataya New York is located at 231 East 9th Street. For more info, visit www.robataya-ny.com.

Book Corner

The Niigata Sake Book

By Yukari Sakamoto
(Chiba-ken, 1989-1990)

Published by the Japan Times
90 pages
\$45.00 listed price on Amazon.com

The Niigata Sake Book

The Niigata Sake Brewers Association

The Japan Times



Sake aficionados will want *The Niigata Sake Book*. A conversation with its translator, Mike Masuyama, reveals that it is the first sake book to be originally written in Japanese and translated into English. Masuyama is a food scientist with a strong technical background in beer and wine.

Why Niigata for sake? According to Masuyama, Niigata is an excellent source for rice, and the climate zone is close to the Sea of Japan, which ensures cold winter months ideal for brewing sake.

Many Niigata breweries continue to use traditional methods of brewing, so many of the sake featured in this book are craft sake. Masuyama notes that Niigata sake are good for cold drinking to best showcase the delicate notes and aroma.

This book is actually more of a textbook than

a sake primer, and it's filled with technical information that empowers readers to take their sake knowledge to the next level. The chapter on rice varieties goes into great detail about unusual rice strains such as Gohyakumangoku, Koshitanrei, and Miyamanishiki.

When asked about any unique sake in the book, Masuyama points out Midorikawa, or Green River Sake, that is snow-aged. The sake bottles are aged outside in snow country, retaining freshness, and resulting in a sake that is mellow and well-balanced.

Other interesting information presented in the book includes tips for tasting sake, sake serving temperature, acidity in sake, the SMV (Sake Meter Value), and easy-to-understand tips for the classification of sake. The sake brewing process is covered in great length. And also, of course, why Niigata is ideal for producing sake.

What attracted me the most to this book is the first chapter's full color photos of the major sake breweries in Niigata with notes on each sake. This is ideal for non-Japanese who are challenged with reading the beautiful labels.

If you are passionate about sake, *The Niigata Sake Book* will be an essential resource.

Read samples of *The Niigata Sake Book* at <http://bookclub.japantimes.co.jp/act/en/Detail.do?id=1353>.

**Will Ferguson:
Our Canadian Cousin
By Joshua Graubart
(Yamagata-ken, 1998-2001)**

Will Ferguson is a JET Program alum and three-time winner of the Stephen Leacock Medal, which is awarded annually for the best humorous work of literature by a Canadian author. While Ferguson is best known for his books set in and about Canada, **JQ** asked him about his time in Japan in the 1990s.

Every visitor to Japan, and certainly every resident foreigner, has wondered at the tendency of the Japanese to costume themselves for their hobbies. Bruce Feiler, an American JET alum who faced off with birdwatchers in knee britches and survivalists in camouflage gear at Nikko National Park, concluded in his book *Learning to Bow* that the Japanese consciously dress the part in order to fully immerse themselves in their roles, whether as birdwatcher or survivalist, pilgrim or fisherman.

Will Ferguson, probably Japan's best-known hitchhiker, takes a more nuanced view. Encountering bus tour pilgrims on Shikoku, dressed up as if they were 19th century pedestrian pilgrims in outfits complete with white vestments, straw hats and walking sticks, Ferguson posits four possible explanations:

First, the romantic explanation: the one advanced by Feiler, that costume betokens an immersion in one's role.

Second, the cynical explanation: that the Japanese are wholly superficial, authentic appearance masking an empty ritual.

Third, the realistic explanation: that the Japanese are culturally disposed to treat uniforms seriously, and there's often a fine line between uniform and costume.

And fourth, "the Will Ferguson Explanation": that dressing up is fun! And it's way more fun to do it with a group. "The bus pilgrims are like a travelling Shiner's convention." Buddhism is just an excuse.

When **JQ** asked if he had further insight, Ferguson replied that to him it "seems that both the cynical and the romanticized explanations reflect more on the person observing than on the subject itself." In other words, the position of the observer is the key to understanding the observed. Ferguson's habitual position is itinerant, intimate and sardonic.

In the spring of 1994, Ferguson, the author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to Japan*, hitchhiked from Cape Sata, in the far south of Kyushu, to Cape Soya, at the northern end of Hokkaido, following—and sometimes outpacing—the cherry blossom front as it moved north through the country. Based on that trip, Ferguson wrote *Hitching Rides with Buddha* (previously published as *Hokkaido Highway Blues*), in which he describes his odyssey from south to north, and muses on Japan, pizza toast ("neither pizza nor toast...it is decidedly less than the sum of its parts") and the dilemma of the expat. It was JET that brought Ferguson to Japan. In his final year at York University in Toronto in 1990, Ferguson signed up with the JET Program, which

he describes as at that time "still very much a work in progress." (JET was officially formed in 1987 from the merger of two other programs.) He was posted to Amakusa-shi, on an island south of Nagasaki off the west coast of Kyushu. "When I first arrived," said Ferguson, "I was the only non-Japanese person working on the island south of Hondo," except for the local Catholic priest. "I loved Amakusa...it was one of the most beautiful places I have ever lived. Having worked in South America, it reminded me a bit of Ecuador," where Ferguson once lived. Elaborating, he said Amakusa had a "semi-tropical feel" to it: "I rode my bike everywhere, and especially loved the coast to Sakitsu, a small Catholic village in a fishing cove."



"I loved Amakusa. It was one of the most beautiful places I have ever lived." (Genki Alexander Ferguson)

Regarding life as a JET in Amakusa, Ferguson said, "I never found it hard getting involved with the community because I was in a small village." He remembers his role carrying a *mikoshi* (portable shrine) in Amakusa's summer festival: "I was invited to take part in the festival. The AET before me had, as had the AET before her. It was a neighborhood invitation. In villages you're always dragged into the local festival. I helped carry several *mikoshi*, always ended up sprayed with water."

In *Hitching Rides with Buddha*, he movingly described one such festival, and the classic expat frustration of never quite fitting in:

The shrine was both our glory and our burden, like being born Japanese I suppose. We...hoisted it onto our shoulders and entered a traffic jam of other such shrines. We elbowed our way into the throng. We chanted challenges. We swerved and collided. We battled our way down main street and, as we went, people threw buckets of water at us and sprayed our heads with beer. We were running a gauntlet and at the end of it we collapsed, soaked in sweat and water and alcohol. We were triumphant. We ranted and raved. We congratulated ourselves hoarse and far beyond the level of actual achievement. Damn, it was fun. Then one of the men turned to me and said, "You foreigners are so much stronger than we Japanese," and instantly I was outside the circle again, looking in.

Ferguson—shrine carrier and pilgrim-consider-

er—is no stranger to the spiritual side of Japan. In *Hitching Rides with Buddha*, he recounted his chance meeting with Akihira Kawahara, a retired schoolteacher, amateur philologist and—according to Ferguson—"the worst driver in the history of the universe." Kawahara-sensei insists that in 1980, he was visited by a vision of the Buddhist saint Kobo Daishi, who instructed him to write and publish an English-language guide (now sadly out of print) to the 88-temple pilgrimage circuit on Shodoshima in the Inland Sea, a miniature version of the circuit on Shikoku.

Using that book as a guide, and accompanied partly by Kawahara-sensei and by a series of Buddhist priests whom he met on Shodo Island, Ferguson described the "song of Shodo"—a beautiful, mountainous island—as "the hollow *tonk-tonk* of wooden Buddhist clappers and the low mantra of pilgrims."

Regarding his personal kinship for Japanese religion, Ferguson said, "I was married in a Shinto shrine, but remain generally agnostic. I do like Shintoism, though; it focuses on the magical in the everyday world. No soaring cathedrals or obtuse theology, but sacred trees, sacred islands, sacred mountains."

Ferguson's chance meeting with Kawahara on Shodoshima reflects a theme in his Japanese travels. Hitchhiking meant meeting and talking with people the length of Japan, and the opportunity for insight. One of the priests on Shodoshima invited Ferguson to stay in his home, where Ferguson noted that the priest's son's Transformers toy "was the perfect talisman for anyone traveling in Japan." After all, he noted, Transformers are "a form of 'identity origami': they 'don't hide their true self, they rearrange it entirely to fit the situation.'"

The often astounding generosity of Japanese—particularly rural Japanese—to foreigners is, of course, well known to **JQ**'s readers (while traveling as a JET, the interviewer himself was once taken in by a family on Shodoshima). However, when trying to get a room at rural inns, Ferguson sometimes found it necessary to grease his path with a useful ruse: what he calls his "cousin routine."

When faced with locals apprehensive about dealings with a foreigner, he claimed to be the cousin of the local ALT. Instantly, doors opened. "Even the [hotel] service usually improves. After all, I am one of the family." Asked if he ever ran into any problems as a result of the ruse, he recalled that, surprisingly, it never did. "It never really backfired on me," he said, "though I kept expecting it to."

So if you can recall an instance from your own time in Japan when a neighbor insisted he met your mysterious cousin, Will Ferguson might have been the culprit. If that mysterious cousin ran up your tab at the local izakaya, though, Ferguson swears it wasn't him. After all, "I may be a travel weasel, but I'm not some common grifter." That's his story, anyway, and he's sticking to it.

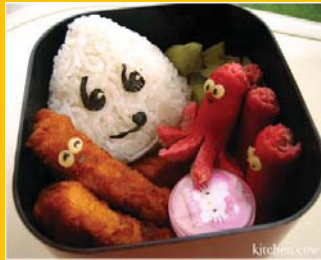
Visit Will's homepage at www.willferguson.ca. Cover photo courtesy of CBC.

THE FUNNY PAGE

With Golden Week behind us, JETs everywhere are now setting their sights on the next excuse to go out and party. In that spirit, JQ presents these completely ridiculous...

Top 11 Reasons We're Looking Forward to Summer

11. Been practicing how to make character bento since October



10. Launch that Southern All Stars tribute band you've been rehearsing in parents' basement

9. Office workers: get crazy! Roll up those shirtsleeves!

8. Who needs *Eclipse* when you've got the 13th(?) *Pokémon* flick dropping in July



7. You heard this might be the year they roll out that rainy season commemorative *chuuhai*

6. "Atsui, naa" becomes a more legit excuse for forgetting work commitments, birthdays, etc.

5. Show new friends that Indestructible Fly Swatter you brought back from Japan

4. It's totally not exploitative to fill the mag with photos like this -->

3. Six words: Kitty-chan in a two piece



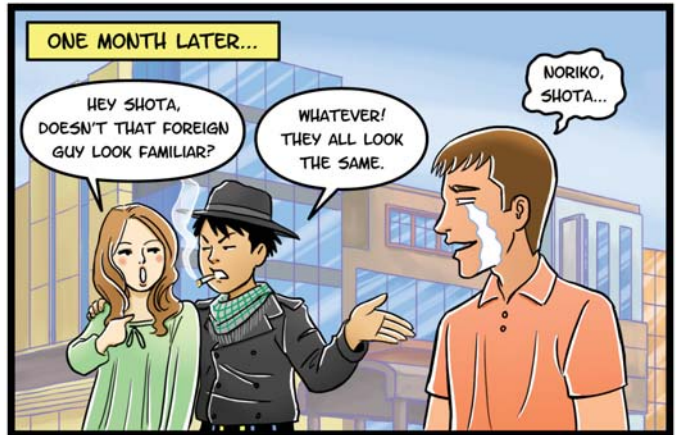
2. On a clear day, you can see Godzilla

1. With this handy chart, finally win your annual "Kobayashi kooky hairdo" office pool (cut JQ in on 15% plus a case of Asahi)



Life After the B.O.E.

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



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