

Japan Diary

Fit The Fourth

Cathy Tuttle and David Notkin

1 Sumo, Bikes, Ninja and Buckets

In late January Cathy and I went to Tokyo for a week. She had a couple of appointments, and I had a workshop to attend. Although our first meetings were on Monday, we left our apartment at 5:30 A.M. on Sunday to get a 6:30 A.M. bullet train. Why? Because the sumo tournament was on, and it was time to go in person! We were worried, though, since we knew that the few tickets available on the day of the match would probably be sold before we even reached Tokyo. But I figured that there would be scalpers, as there are at every popular sports event I've ever dealt with. So we snoozed on the train ride, waking up only to goggle at the snow-capped, crystal-clear view of Mt. Fuji. Somehow, we weren't inspired to think about climbing it again, at least not yet.

We put our luggage in lockers in Tokyo Station and headed off to the sumo stadium. We got there around 10 A.M., which is when the first matches start. The main matches don't start until past 3 P.M., though, so we were quite surprised to see the area bustling. Underneath colorful banners over 20 meters high there were people handing out free sumo calendars, sumo wrestlers (in top-knot and wearing yukata) walking from the train station and getting out of taxis, as well as lots of people just milling around.

As we expected, there were no tickets available at the gate. We had heard (from several sources) that sometimes there are tickets available inside the main gate, but that you have to talk your way into this area before you can buy those tickets. Yes, this is as confusing to us as it is to you, and we couldn't work out what was really meant. (To me, this is just a reasonably straightforward instance of the problems I often have about understanding what is happening here in Japan.) We were a bit disappointed, but it was a beautiful day, we had nothing else planned, and there was a lot of activity that was fun to watch. So we started milling around with the others.

Cathy soon came up to me and said, "There's a sleazy-looking guy on the corner who keeps mumbling something to people who are walking by." Bingo! Scalpers. Dafuya, if you prefer Japanese. We moseyed on over and watched a little bit, and then Cathy went over and said we needed two tickets. He was a little skeptical of dealing with a gaijin, but he finally quoted her a price of 15,000 yen (more than \$100) for each ticket. Well, this was steeper than we had planned for, so we talked it over a little. Cathy then offered 10,000 yen (yeah, we *really* wanted to see sumo). He wandered off to his boss. Quite a while later,

he came back and said, “No, 12,000.” We thanked him and backed off for a little more discussion. In a few minutes, Cathy countered with 11,000, and he said, “No, 14,000.” It’s hard to tell how much of the trouble was language and how much was outright haggling. Cathy suggested that we actually pull out the money, since that often makes negotiations like these smoother. (How she knows all this, when I’m the guy who misspent a portion of my youth wheeling-and-dealing in Knicks and Rangers playoff, and Pittsburgh-Baltimore World Series tickets, I still don’t know. But I was impressed. They are skills that I hope are serving her well during her visit to India.) After we pulled out wads of yen, he checked once more with his boss, gave us the tickets, and then took our money. I tried to count it out for him, but he was clearly worried (about the police, I assume, not the safety) and just took it and shoved it in his pocket.

Tickets in hand, we went right into the stadium. During the early matches, the arena is nearly empty. One benefit of this is that you can go and sit as close to the ring as you want. We sat down about 10 meters away. Not only are the early wrestlers young and generally scrawny, but the referees, the announcers, and the other attendants are all younger and clearly in training. In contrast to the later matches, where there is three or four minutes of foot stamping, salt throwing, toweling off, and staring down the opponent, the early matches (after some ceremonial foot stamping) start immediately. We must have watched over 100 of these, some of which were between kids that couldn’t have been 15 years old, and many of whom weighed less than my 185 pounds. (We just read in the paper that to move to the two highest divisions, you have to be 173 cm tall. A guy who was to be promoted to this rank was only 170 cm, so he failed his physical. A few weeks later, he passed it, having—and (in the immortal words of Dave Barry) this is the truth—injected 3 cm worth of silicone into the top of his head.) Of course, a couple of these kids had bellies that Santa would be proud of, but few of them could move very effectively. We each took a few minutes on the mats right next to the ring. It was a little scary when the bodies came crashing down in our direction.

As it came closer to the main matches, the wrestlers were bigger and bigger, and the referees and attendants were older and more confident. We were finally kicked out of our ringside seats and relegated to our assigned places in the very last row of the upper level. (The people sitting in the seats near the front were of all kinds, ranging from sleazy guys to little old ladies to business men in suits to a girl, around six years old, wearing a full length, beautifully tailored mink coat.) Although the view from upstairs wasn’t nearly as good, the excitement started to build as the two top divisions started. Wearing their incredible aprons, they performed the special ring-entering ceremony. And then they started briskly bumping bellies. From watching TV, we’ve developed a couple of favorites, and we were pretty good about knowing what to watch. Indeed, a couple of times we each ducked downstairs and watched from the back of the lower level, getting an eyeful of some of our favorites from closer up. This was the eighth day of the 15-day-long tournament, and the likely winners were starting to be separated from the likely losers. Fans made their feelings known, usually by simply shouting the name of their favorite. But all in all, it was quieter than most sporting events I’ve been to. There were a couple of great matches, although we were disappointed that Konishiki (the biggest wrestler, at well over 200 kilos) and Chiyonofuji

(the wrestler who is one away from tying the all-time record of 32 tournament wins) were out of the tournament. But when we got back to the hotel and watched the highlights on “Sumo Digest,” we were happy that we had gotten to see sumo up-close and personal.

A couple of weeks later, back in Osaka, we decided to try to buy *regular price* tickets for the tournament that is here in March. The tickets went on sale at the prefectural gym at 9 A.M. on a Saturday morning. On Friday afternoon, Inoue-san found out that there were already some people queued up, ready to stay the night. So, he and I met at Umeda Station at 7 A.M. Saturday and headed to the gym in Namba. The line was incredible, in length, in diversity of people (well, for Japan), and in the small campsites some of the early folks had set up. Oh yeah. And it was orderly. Incredibly orderly. And cold. Incredibly cold. Well, we finally got tickets. At 1:30 P.M.. After about six hours in line. The tickets aren’t great: they’re for the fourth day and for the third tier of boxes. But they were “cheap” and we earned them.

Because Cathy spends so much time in Kyoto, she decided to rent a place there, too, to reduce her commuting time. She’s found an apartment-share with another American woman. Although the place is tiny for two people, it’s convenient and is working out well. One night when I went to visit her we were pretty hungry. We went out wandering to find a restaurant. Along a couple of rice fields, we came across a ramen restaurant that Cathy hadn’t seen before. It turned out to be just a small van that they park each night and transform into a restaurant: open the sliding side door, put down a single long table, and drop a canopy over the whole thing. The kitchen, including propane stove, is in the van. So we sat down with the neighborhood locals (including a guy dressed in his yukata, clearly on his way home from the local sento) and had a couple of wonderful bowls of hot ramen. Yum.

Cathy wants to tell you about her new Japanese bicycle: “It’s a standard housewife/high school student special. Except for the color (black or dark red), they all look the same: one speed, reinforced “girl’s” style, so you can wear skirts and get on and off with dignity. The standard features are well-designed. A sturdy wire front basket, raised handlebars and seat angle that makes riding comfortable, a bell convenient to the fingertips, a kick-on front light protected by a wire cage, an easy locking kickstand, and a quick lock front wheel. All this for 19,000 yen (less than \$150)!” Now Cathy wants to bring it home. Oh no.

Since bike lanes are unheard of, despite a large number of bikes, you usually ride on the left hand side of sidewalk (just as cars ride on the left hand side of the road). Riding on the left isn’t a problem, of course. Until people see that you’re a foreigner, that is. Then they immediately expect you to ride on the right (even if you are already on the left), so they move to their right. Then you play a game of chicken. (The same kind of thing happens with umbrellas in the rain, when people see you’re a foreigner, assume you’re tall, and then raise their umbrellas up high. Usually exactly high enough to ram right into your umbrella.) Most intersections with little streets are blind, and people slow down and ring their bells when approaching. Amid the cacophony of bells, when you yield to pedestrians and other bicycles, you learn the acrobatic feat of bowing while on your bike. The worst obstacle is the same as the world round: little boys. They don’t stop at intersections, they careen madly

around blind curves, and they never even bow when they cut in front of you. Despite this, people don't wear bike helmets here. In fact, you can't even buy helmets in bike stores. (The few times we've seen a helmet, there's been a foreigner underneath it. This is somewhat true of mountain bikes, too, although these seem to be becoming somewhat more popular.)

Parking bicycles is a problem in Japan. The most crowded spots are at train stations. In general, you must park legally or the police will impound your bike. In Kyoto, if you don't retrieve an impounded bike within two or three weeks, it is literally crushed and thrown out. (You might think that they'd resell them at least, but people generally avoid buying anything "used" in Japan.) Some legal spots are free, but many are paid for, either by the day or by the month. I think a monthly fee for Ishibashi Station, near our place in Osaka, is 1000 yen (about \$7). Lots of foreigners have figured out how to beat this problem: 'U' locks. Since they aren't common here, the police just leave bikes locked with them alone. I wonder how long this trick will survive.

A couple of weeks ago Cathy made reservations for us to go to a 350-year-old Ninja house near Nijo Castle in Kyoto. We showed up about 10:45 A.M. for the 11 o'clock tour. There were some folks already waiting in the uninsulated, unheated anteroom, huddling around a big ceramic pot with hot coals. A dozen of us took the tour, which was entirely in Japanese. Although this caused us to miss a thing or two (Cathy is still puzzling over what she thought was a discussion about "red water"), most of it was pretty clear. There were special locks on the shoji (sliding screens). For advanced warning of someone entering, the floor boards were made intentionally squeaky, and little metal pendulums went click-clack when the shoji were opened. There were lots of hidden rooms and compartments, and many of them had several unexpected entrances (often used for eavesdropping). In addition to several trap doors, there was an incredible hidden ladder to the second floor, which was a little hard to find even after it had been exposed for us. The second floor contained special pipes for water, perhaps to drink if under siege and perhaps to boil and pour on enemies who were attacking. We understand that there is even an escape tunnel that runs underneath the pond in the garden, but it wasn't on the tour.

From there we dashed over to Nijo Castle. The castle itself seemed less impressive to us than Himeji (or even Osaka) Castle. This was in part because it is not a defensive castle (with the associated ramparts, etc.) but was instead a place for the Shogun to meet visitors and for troops to stay. Also, the decorations were much fancier and less consistent, which didn't seem as castle-like as the others we've seen. The associated gardens were quite nice though, and will likely be quite beautiful when they bloom in spring.

About two kilometers north of the castle is a tiny little shop run by Tomii-san, one of the last traditional bucket makers in Kyoto. It's a one-man operation (unfortunately, with no apprentice in sight). Immediately upon our arrival, he stopped carving a bucket, jumped up and pulled out several English language stories about him and his shop. (We had seen one of these, which is how we found this hole in the wall.) He also pulled out a large pad of paper covered with English language business cards, addresses, and comments about the shop. Among these were quite a few names from CBS news, including Bill Whitaker. Cathy signed his book with our names and, "All other bucket shops pail in comparison." Tomii-san

had buckets for Japanese-style bathing (which is what Cathy wanted), for sushi, for drinking sake, and lots of stuff we couldn't figure out. Apparently a great deal of his business is making props for the samurai movies made nearby. After a few minutes, he took us to the back of the shop and plopped us on cushions in front of his TV, and he started showing a CBS news clip about the ongoing disappearance of the old trades in Kyoto. Of course, there was a short clip of Tomii-san, and he was thrilled to see himself again. On American TV! Walking back to the front of the shop, Cathy noticed that he had a well inside the house. He gets all his water from this seven meter deep well. We bought a bath bucket and a sushi tray (he's a good salesman, too!), and he threw in a small sake cup, which he signed and stamped. Watching him carve buckets and draw water from his well gave some perspective on how Kyoto used to be, and on what might well be disappearing now.

2 Pocky's and Other Food for Thought

Valentine's Day is a pretty important holiday in the U.S. You give cute little valentines to your friends and hope for chocolate. In Japan, you get chocolate and more chocolate. If you're a man, that is. That's right. On Valentine's Day in Japan, women give men chocolate. Not only friends and sweeties, but bosses and (whoopie!) teachers. I only got three boxes, but men who work in places with lots of office ladies get enough to stock a Godiva chocolatier. Late February is the season of zits.

What about the women? Don't feel sorry for them. Their day comes a month later, on White Day. It used to be that only white chocolate was given in return by the men to the women, and this is still not uncommon. But the gift-giving spirit has been extended to include some new and unusual White Day gifts. Our favorite was the glow-in-the-dark panties, which, while not as ubiquitous as chocolate, was apparently a very big seller this year. Surprising to us, this gift was not necessarily given only to sweethearts. Of course, I gave chocolate; I suspect this made Matsumoto-san and my other valentines happier than if I had chosen otherwise.

We had such a good time at our first sumo match in Tokyo that we bought tickets for the Osaka tournament. The big day for sumo finally arrived. We had a four person box that we shared with our host's son, Hiroo, and a graduate student. Inoue-san was in the adjacent box with his family. On our way in, Cathy and I stopped at the case displaying the trophies to be awarded to the winner at the end of the tournament. It was filled with two or three dozen big trophies donated by various companies, in addition to the giant Emperor's Cup. Our favorites included: the big Coke bottle, the keg of sake, the large glass jar of strange dried mushrooms mounted on a gold base, and the large glass jar of pickled sour plums (called ume) also mounted on a gold base. Where these go in a Japanese house, we have no idea.

Although it was only the fourth day, the tournament itself was very exciting. Akebono, one of the two top-ranked Hawaiian wrestlers, turned in a dashing performance by beating the yokozuna (grand champion) who ended up winning the tournament. When a lower ranked wrestler beats a yokozuna, they win a "kinboshi" or gold star. Not only does

this have prestige, but it means that every tournament from then on, the winner of the kinboshi gets an extra 25,000 yen or so; this amounts to roughly \$1000/year extra for the rest of their career. One wrestler has over 10 kinboshi.

The highlight of the day was when Cathy and I fought our way to the main floor where we got to see some of these superstar wrestlers up close and personal. They are big. Really, really big. We're talking big. After seeing a couple of the "small" guys, escorted by two lower-ranked, but sometimes even bigger, "bodyguards," we saw the biggest wrestler in the world. Konishiki, the other Hawaiian, is ranked just below yokozuna. He weighs in at about 240 kilos (over 520 pounds). A lot of that is muscle, but let's be honest folks, the man has more blubber than your average Hawaiian. When we were close (say three or four feet away), he was bending and stretching, warming up for the fight. Cathy was upset because she had forgotten to bring her wide-angle lens. Still, she managed to get some shots that we can't wait to see developed.

Our host's son had come to sumo as literally the first break he'd had in three years of studying. He's been trying to pass his college entrance examination all that time. He finally passed on his third try, gaining entrance to Osaka University. When his mother told me about his success this time, she was the happiest and the most relieved person I've ever seen. It's a bigger deal in Japan than in the U.S., for several reasons. First, the exams are nothing like the SAT's. For instance, they might include incredibly detailed geography questions such as, "In what province of France does the Rhine River first enter?" Second, the examinations are the sole criterion for college entrance. So you had better be pretty damn knowledgeable about the Rhine River. (While writing this, Cathy and I spent a few minutes remembering which continent the Rhine River was actually on.) Third, the idea of going to work first and then later coming back to college is essentially unheard of in Japan. So once you miss the college track, you're off it forever. (In this case, our host's son had applied to a number of lower-ranked private universities as a backup. He was accepted into them, but the public Osaka University is much more prestigious and cheaper to boot.)

As another way to compare American and Japanese universities, we were talking to a friend of ours who is here on a Fulbright Fellowship, representing the finest of American scholars. We were telling her how amazed we were at how unwilling the Japanese were in general to talk about the Gulf War. She said, "Golf? But the Japanese love golf. I just don't understand why they won't talk about it." Never mind.

How did the Gulf War play in the media here? Since almost all of our Japanese friends really were unwilling to discuss the war in any depth, we got most of our information from reading *The Japan Times*, the nationwide English language newspaper. Here are some not-so-deep observations. One, the Japanese government and culture are not set up for quick decision making in the face of crisis. Decisions are made by consensus, which require lots of meetings and negotiations. Two, the issues of self-determination, oil independence, and so forth were hardly discussed. What we read and heard about most was how Japan was perceived by the international community. Three, the issue of Japan's constitutional injunction against non-defensive military action is real here. Both the far right and left-wing parties were adamantly against involvement of any kind. More moderate groups were

generally willing to send money, although the limits of sending non-combat personnel were, of course, a matter of great discussion. (Now, in late April, there is significant protest against sending minesweepers to the Gulf. We were woken out of a sound sleep in the middle of the afternoon by a caravan of trucks blaring music and messages against this action. There were several bombings in Tokyo, also in protest.)

The other day Cathy was biking along in Kyoto and got a fierce thirst. So she pulled up at the nearest vending machine and perused the selections. Her eye was immediately caught by the attractive khaki camouflage can of “Desert Storm.” Being so patriotic, she decided she’d try it, especially after reading the teaser on the can: “New carbonated beverage for active people with fighting spirit.”

With the exception of “Desert Storm,” Coke is it (except for a few strange sodas like Yogurina, Peach Squash, and Jolt—yes, Jolt). But Pepsi is trying to get a bigger share of the market; Coke earns more from selling liquids in Japan than they do in the U.S., in part because they sell lots of canned coffee and tea. As part of this effort, Pepsi sponsored a concert tour by Hammer. Hammer also appears in a number of Pepsi commercials. (It is remarkable to see celebrities who peddle products here—George Lucas sells for Pioneer, Frank Sinatra says “ANA [All Nippon Airways] does things ‘My Way’,” and Arnold Schwarzenegger slurps ramen noodles.) What is most interesting about the Pepsi commercials is that it is the first time in Japanese TV history that a name-brand comparison was done. Essentially, Hammer got thirsty during a number and was given Coke, which caused him to fade out; when given a Pepsi instead, he roared back to life. Since many Japanese commercials don’t even show their own product, knocking a competitor’s product is quite controversial.

Advertising in Japan comes in lots of forms. One that we really detest is the Godzilla-sized vending machine that sells Godzilla-sized Pocky’s. Pocky’s are inedible: they are thin, not-quite-pretzel sticks half dipped in not-quite-chocolate. Usually Pocky’s are sold in 100 yen packages a little smaller than a Crackerjacks box. But the Godzilla-sized Pocky’s are about a foot long in a box to match. When you purchase them, the vending plays a special bonus: “It’s a Small World After All,” in its entirety. This bonus makes Cathy and me run the other direction, but it does seem to do the job, since there are often as many as 30 people ready and willing to spend 1000 yen (about \$7) and a half-hour listening to their favorite tune over and over and over and over again. What a treat.

Pepsi and Pocky’s are not really the most traditional Japanese foods. (Yet.) Indeed, a month or so ago we went to a party at my Aikido school. The party was actually held in the adjacent Buddhist temple (the Aikido instructor holds two other jobs, junior high school social studies teacher and Buddhist priest). All the food was made by women in our teacher’s wife’s yoga class. There was the usual sushi, pickles, rice balls, beer, and such. But there were at least two special treats. The first was sake. The sake itself was just sake, as far as we can tell. But it was served from a four-foot long, green bamboo flask with leaves still attached. We drank from smaller, similar bamboo cups using the leaves as handles. The other treat was oden (a winter stew consisting of tofu, potatoes, vegetables, and weird stuff like devil’s tongue and occasionally whale). But this oden was Greenpeace-approved. The oden cooked in a big iron cauldron on the veranda. Not only was the whale absent, but

there were whole apples and unpeeled bananas floating in it. You just went out and speared your favorite piece of tofu and banana, washing it down with more sake. Get your minds and stomachs ready, since it's a party idea we may be trying.

A family invited us out to spend a night at a house they had recently bought. The house is in a New Town, consisting of about 2000 big (in the Japanese sense) houses located in a completely isolated community. New Towns in Japan are constructed by placing the houses and people first, hoping that stores and services will follow. Right now, there are the schools (which are required in advance) and one convenience mart run by the company that built and manages the entire development.

Our friends had entered many lotteries over many years, hoping to get the change to buy such a place. They finally won the opportunity to buy land and build. Their lot is about 215 square meters (about 50x40 feet). Most of it is house. They decided to place the house as close to the road as possible, leaving a backyard of about 10x40 feet. The house behind them opted to put their house at the back of their lot, so it's right at the edge of our friend's yard. (We don't know the price of this house, but there are new houses being sold just up the way in the same development for well over 100,000,000 yen, or between \$800,000 and \$1,000,000. The entire development will ultimately have 2200 homes.)

Our friends were deeply involved in the design of the house, and it has a couple of interesting features. For instance, Japanese circumvent building codes just like Americans. In this case, the attic was only permitted to be a crawl space, since the total square footage was limited by code; so, after getting approval for the crawl space, the builders raised the ceiling to the roof and created a real room on the third floor. Also, there's no basement or garage for storage (although there is a one-car covered parking space). They do have several unique storage areas. There are two or three doors on the kitchen floor (covered by rugs), which open to cold-storage. One is large enough to hold the whole family of five, and provides a ladder for them to escape after they've chilled out. The tatami mat room also has two storage areas hidden under the floor. They are each the size of one mat, about 3x5 feet, and are opened electronically. Although they seem high-tech, the (Japanese) manufacturer didn't think it through perfectly. The batteries that control the opening mechanism are located inside the storage areas, so if the batteries wear out the compartments have to be opened using old-fashioned methods.

There are some other high-tech features in the house. The kitchen houses a video-intercom-security panel that seems a little excessive in a country where crime rates are so low. We guess it's to everyone's benefit to see the sushi delivery arrive at the front door on video. The panel also has a remote control for the ofuro (Japanese bath). Without leaving the kitchen, you can start filling the bath, controlling the temperature. When the bath is filled, the remote beeps so you know it's bath time. The bath itself is pretty advanced, including not only a nice Jacuzzi (which makes enough noise that our friends are worried that the neighbors will complain—the houses are that close together) but also an automatic system that filters, refills, and heats the bath. Remember, every night the whole family uses the same bath water. It has been traditional for the father to bathe first, when the water is hottest and cleanest, followed by sons and then mothers and daughters. With this new

technology, all baths are equal. Talk about a revolution.

When Japanese move, foreigners become scavengers. Japanese seem to throw away perfectly good stuff (even when they aren't moving). Right out on the street you see bookcases, dishes, and lots of electrical appliances. We've mostly ignored it, but we have many friends who have furnished entire apartments from what is called "sodai gomi" (big garbage). A couple of weeks ago, Cathy joined the scavengers, finding a huge brass teapot in a gomi pile. She had to carry it all over Kyoto on crowded trains, but she finally got it to Osaka, where it is sitting on the balcony as a watering can. Our friend Maggie found a color TV just last week; now she can watch Sesame Street in Japanese. A foreigner who has lived in Japan for a long time says that when he first arrived, he used to call the garbage collection company to find out which days were sodai gomi days. It turns out that this question was pretty common, and they had a prepared speech for foreigners about the topic. Basically, people are welcome to scavenge. Japan has even more of a garbage problem than the U.S. Japanese consume a lot, overpackage like you wouldn't believe, and burn (not recycle) most waste. Osaka and Tokyo are about to be swallowed by garbage. Places for landfill will be exhausted in two or three years. Is this a chance for the U.S. to change the balance of trade?

Remembrance of Bus Commutes Past

David Hubbell

Over the summer I worked at a small start-up over in Redmond. The cheapest commuting option was the bus, so I bought a 3-month two-zone peak time pass. (I wasn't a registered student, so no U-pass.) For July, August, and September, all King County was mine for the taking. Unlike the last installment of notes on bus riding, I *did* remember to keep a bus diary.

7/1 And I thought commuting by bus in the suburbs would be dull. Ha! It's my first day and I've already seen the craziest bus rider I've ever encountered at the Kirkland transit center. He talks to himself almost constantly, and will interrogate you for your life story if you let him. As soon as he got on the bus, the driver said, "Pay your fare" in an irritated tone, as if he knew the man. Other than the crazy man, it was a nice stop. Strangers talk to each other more in the 'burbs.

7/2 Bus passes are addictive. I took the 74 for just 5 blocks down 55th street.

7/3 Left my bicycle helmet on the bus, or at Montlake Station.

7/6 Left my umbrella on the bus, or at Montlake Station. If someday you find a human brain on the seat when you get on the bus, it's probably mine, but don't bother to return it because I'll have gotten a better one.

7/7 I took the 74 downtown to Metro's lost & found. Downtown is always fertile ground for pathos. A homeless man on crutches got on with a woman dressed in white-collar clothes. I didn't give them a second thought until the woman went to the back door to get off and said, "Nobody, come on," as if Nobody was the man's name. The man on crutches caught up with her and they left together. As they walked down the sidewalk together (past Nordie's, I think) I saw that the man's left leg had been amputated.

By the way, I got the helmet back, but not the umbrella. Score 1 for human nature, 1 for entropy.

A mother and her (twin?) sons got on the 74 in the U-District with me. Soon afterward an old man sat down next to one of the boys, and I thought, 'Uh oh.' He proved to be a benevolent, jolly type, however, as he pulled a battery-operated toy out of a paper bag and mutely proceeded to show it to them. The mother laughed and the man did hi-fives with the kids repeatedly. Then he started to talk. To do so, he needed to hold one of those

electronic voice boxes to his throat. This made it hard for me to understand him, but one thing I did catch was that he told the kids not to smoke.

This was black and white day. In the pathos story, Nobody was white and the social worker (?) was black. The old ex-smoker was white and the mother and children were black.

7/9 I ended up at the Kirkland transit center because the 254 is the first bus by my stop going home, and once again people were talking. I heard a woman say that just that day she had taken her 2-year-old daughter and left her abusive boyfriend. She said that he would be finding out about it just about then, as she was talking.

7/10 I was at the Kirkland transit center again, and a slightly rangy man in a fringed suede jacket started to talk to me about my favorite subject: bus commuting. For some reason we just weren't on the same wavelength, though. He seemed to have even fewer interesting things to say about it than I do. What's more, he says he remembered seeing me there before. I find it mildly alarming that rangy-looking people are beginning to learn my face, so I promised myself never to take the 254 to Kirkland again.

7/15 Going home on the 251, I got the driver on stimulants. He hauled booty, made lots of sudden stops, and cut corners. I'll have to remember to take that same bus again.

7/16 My good deed for the day: While waiting for the 253 this morning, I saw a woman locking her bike to the overpass railing. Suddenly I saw a small metal object fall from her bike onto the freeway. Luckily it didn't hit any cars. The woman appeared to be looking for something and slapped her thighs in exasperation. Over the noise of passing cars I shouted at her that she dropped her lock on the freeway. (I suppose the really chivalrous thing to do would have been to go out on the freeway and get it for her, but I was feeling particularly chicken this morning.) After sneaking around the bushes and waiting for a gap to arrive, however, she retrieved the lock and finished locking up her bike. I didn't see her on the 253; I hope that wasn't the bus she wanted to catch. Since I've done my good deed, I think I'll enjoy being evil for the rest of the day. If I'd been reading papers like I was supposed to, I might have missed seeing the lock fall.

At the Bellevue transit center, a girl got on and said hi to me. I wondered what she meant by this, because even in the suburbs it's a rare occurrence. I figured that since I had my hair down and my shades on, she was trying to figure out what gender I am. (It shouldn't be that tough, actually; I shaved in a hurry this morning.) A few minutes later she asked me for the time. As she got off, I raised one eyebrow at her over my shades (nudge, nudge) but it didn't seem to register. She quickly said, "I've gotta go now. Bye." She didn't get to the front of the bus before it pulled away from her stop, but she somehow managed to persuade the driver to let her off. I get the impression that she wasn't all there.

I saw a "goose crossing" sign in Redmond on the way home, but the spelling was, to say the least, highly modified: GUS XING.

7/19 This morning I dreamt I was driving the bus. Everything went swimmingly until I had to let somebody off. The driver, who was sitting right behind me, wouldn't tell me how to turn on the flashers or open the doors. The passengers got cranky. Then the brakes failed as we went downhill. The bus slowed down, but no matter how hard I stepped on the brake, it wouldn't stop. I even tried pushing off one of the overhead bars with my hands while pushing on the brake with my foot, but to no avail.

7/20 On the way home the 253 driver was in a suspiciously good mood, talking to passengers, announcing lots of stops, and stopping at corners for people. Whatever he's on, I want some.

7/23 I got the same driver for the 253 again, and he was so cheerful this time I started to wince. It was a long ride home. When I asked him how he did it he said, "We try." I think he's gunning for Operator of the Year.

7/29 The bus commute as Purgatory: Sometime before 6:00, one of my co-workers came into my office and attempted to talk me into a stupor. I started looking at my watch and claimed I had to catch the 221. Actually I had only a vague idea of when the 221 came by, but I wanted to get out of there. After crossing the street and waiting for a while, it occurred to me that said co-worker might see me from the office so I walked to the Redmond Park & Ride, where I just missed the 221. For my next trick, I got on a 251 under the assumption that it would head back to Seattle. But no. The route ended about a mile east of Redmond. The next bus wasn't due for an hour, so I took that hour to walk back to the center of Redmond (such as it is) where buses roam in vast herds. By this time my stomach thought my throat had been cut, so I grabbed a salad at QFC and rebelled against Metro by sneakily eating it out of the bag on the bus while sitting near the back. At least the traffic on the bridge was light by this time, which was about 9:00.

7/31 I can only catch the 221 from the 253 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, which confirms my suspicion that the UW is secretly running Metro.

8/7 The girl (she looked too young to be a woman, OK?) who digs me but isn't playing with a full deck cornered me in the back of the bus and interrogated me briefly this morning. Here's an excerpt, all that I can remember:

"What do you do?"

"Uh, I'm a computer programmer."

"Where do you work?"

"Redmond."

That's about as exciting as I let it get. I think I'll start catching an earlier bus.

[8/10 through 8/14 I think I drove every day this week. Don't tell Greg Barnes.]

8/15 To my horror I've become conditioned to respond to buses like one of Pavlov's dogs. I'll run to catch any moving bus, even if it isn't the one I'm looking for. I ran and jaywalked to catch a 74 and got halfway down the Ave before I remembered that I was going to Broadway, not downtown. I've jumped on buses this way three times in the last month, but on only one occasion am I certain that I lost time.

These are only a few days out of a whole summer, of course. I found myself driving more and more as the summer wore on, and on those days when I did take the bus, interesting things seldom happened, so I didn't write anything for most of the later days. I found that many of my commutes could only be described by tedious kvetching, so I decided to spare you.

Musings on a Life in Sieg

Rick Noah Zucker

It's been how long?!? Over six years!?! Over six years since I gave up a decent paying job to move 3,000 miles to attend grad school, initially without funding, for reasons that are no longer particularly clear to me. A lot of stuff has happened since then. New things: The mural was painted (I was there), carpeting on the 4th floor, workstations and then several years later, Xterminals, the entire construction of the Allen Library, STAR, fighting to save trees on campus, the grandstand collapse at Husky Stadium, resurgence of bridge in the department. Gone is coke in bottles, the lounge, TGIF every week, the Stammtisch, quals as seven weeks of hell and then the melodrama of who passed, June being a VAX 11/785 and the only machine, TOPS-20 and ward, mark-sense registration forms, the Great Coke Can Wall, the Poker, Eden and HCS projects. I've gone through advisers, housemates, girlfriends, knee surgery, physical therapists and offices. I've been here longer than ten members of the faculty. Now that's scary!

What sticks in my mind from the last six years? The feeling of despair late fall quarter my first year, thinking that there was no way I could get through four years of this, and trying to decide what work from my three classes and TA to punt (little did I know it would take six years). Getting sick due to lack of sleep because of overwork during the last week of spring quarter my first year. Failing quals the first time. Passing quals the second time. Discovering that the woman in the department whom I was dating was now going out with a friend of mine in the department. Being advised by my adviser to change specialties. Passing generals and starting a relationship with a new girlfriend on the same day. Having my first paper accepted. A professor, who was having trouble with a concept, coming to me so that I could explain it, because I knew more than that professor on that topic. Winning the Bob Bandes Award after having started out as a terrible TA. Having my second paper accepted. Seeing a paper of mine cited. Someone at a conference knowing my name from my earlier work. Tasting my homebrew late into the evening at a conference with some of the top people in my field while talking about all manners of stuff. Realizing how much I've learned. Discovering confidence in my own level of knowledge and recognizing that I am a computer architect and am accepted as one by those in the field.

Would I do it over? Would I do it the same way? I don't know. It doesn't matter. Hindsight is 20/20. It's time to look forward. It's simply time to move on.