

Japan Diary

Fit The Third

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1 Doctors, Trash, and Glue

Cathy woke up one morning looking like a rabbit. Her eyes were both as red and infected as you could imagine. It didn't take too long to realize that this was going to need professional attention. Hence, our first interaction with the Japanese medical community.

Professor Inoue, who works in the lab I am visiting, called and then escorted us to the Osaka University student health service. The doctor there took one look at Cathy's eyes and sent us over to the Toyonaka Municipal Hospital. Inoue-san drove us over, bearing a letter of introduction from the university doctor. Since it was 11 A.M.—after clinic hours—the doctor had also called ahead to make sure that Cathy would be seen immediately.

The hospital was surprisingly crowded (maybe it shouldn't have been a surprise, since it is Japan after all). The halls were drafty and full of wandering patients of all ages and diseases. It didn't feel like the efficient Japan that we've become accustomed to. After examining her for about 45 seconds, the doctor diagnosed Cathy as having acute conjunctivitis. He prescribed some antibiotics for her and Inoue-san took us to pay for the visit and to get the medicine. He said we were supposed to follow the blue line to the cashier. After following it down a long hallway, the blue line split into two blue lines—bureaucracies are the same everywhere. The visit and medicine together cost about 6000 yen (about \$40). The drugs took a couple of days to do the trick, and I can now look Cathy in the eyes again.

Everybody tells us that winters get cold in Japan. They haven't really so far, but apartments like ours, which are called mansions, are essentially uninsulated concrete blocks. So the real problem is that the temperature inside is not so different from the temperature outside. We do have a heater in the kitchen/dining room combination, but it's costly to heat concrete that way. So, Cathy purchased a used kotatsu from an Irish friend who was leaving Kyoto and returning to where they warm themselves the old fashioned way—with a six pack.

What is a kotatsu? It's the traditional way that Japanese heat their houses and apartments. It's a small, low table with a heating element under the tabletop. Traditionally kotatsu were heated using coal, but now they are electric. To get the most benefit from the heat, you use a fireproof blanket between the heating element and the tabletop. The blanket is wider than the table, hanging off a foot or two in each direction. You sit at the kotatsu with your legs under the blanket, where you can read, eat, watch TV, and write these stories

on the Macintosh. It really does keep you toasty, seems to be energy-efficient, and we're thinking about using them when we get back to Seattle.

Even though daytime temperatures have recently been in the forties, school kids wear the same uniforms as they did in autumn. In many of these cases, especially for the younger children, this means that they are running around in shorts. Even the one morning we had some snow flurries, I saw a couple of kids wandering around wearing shorts. We've heard that the reason for this is to make the kids strong. Frankly, I preferred getting strong by eating Wonder Bread and Wheaties.

Cathy wanted to build a demonstration solar box for a Japanese environmental fair that was held during Aki-matsuri, a fall festival. A solar box is a sun-driven oven that is made of glued together foil, cardboard, newspaper, and glass. Now, you might think that it might be most difficult to find glass, or foil, or even cardboard. But you'd be wrong. It was glue that took Cathy two days to find. She first went to a small household goods store. They understood her Japanese without problem, but they had no glue. They said, "You'll have to go to a *big* store to get glue." So, she headed off to Daiei, a K-Mart style department store one train stop away. There she was told—by a clerk who had called their information desk—that Daiei had no glue anywhere in the store. Well, Cathy was more than a bit flabbergasted and perplexed. But she wandered around Daiei for a while and found a corner that was a mini do-it-yourself carpentry section. And, lo and behold, they had glue. Cathy's theory is that most families in Japan don't use or need glue, since there is a strong tendency to throw things away rather than fix them. And why else would you need glue?

One night the doorbell rang. This is always a traumatic experience. This time, it was worse than usual. One of our downstairs neighbors came by and talked to Cathy for a long time about the holidays and about garbage. Then she gave Cathy a key, saying something about garbage being our job for a week and to pass the key onto another neighbor the following week. At least that was Cathy's best guess about the conversation. We took the key out late at night and found the door the key opened: it was the pump room, just as the key ring said. But there was no garbage, which was good, since we had no idea what we would have done with it. The next morning, which was combustible garbage day, we searched each of the six floors of our building for garbage, since Cathy thought the neighbor had said something about doing this. Indeed, there were two or three bundles that we took out in front, where we always leave our own garbage. There was nothing later in the week, and we passed the key on. Nobody has marked our door with rotten orange peels yet, so maybe we didn't screw up too badly.

There are four different kinds of garbage days in Osaka: combustibles, non-combustibles, "big" combustibles, and "big" non-combustibles—or something close to that. There is almost no residential recycling, except for beer bottles. A lot of people burn paper and lawn debris in open fires, which makes some autumn days pretty smoky. This is especially bad in Osaka and Tokyo, where pollution is a serious problem anyway.

2 Hanukkah, Bonuses, and Bonenkai

In December we decided to have two Hanukkah parties for Japanese friends. On the third night of Hanukkah Professor Torii, my host, his wife Keiko, his daughter Kazumi, and his secretary, Satomi Nishida, came bearing gifts. To be honest, we weren't surprised, since the "gift wars" here are fierce. They brought a bottle of Beaujolais. (The Japanese are one of the world's biggest consumers of Beaujolais. Bringing the Beaujolais from France was more complicated than usual this year, since the imports were halted for nearly a week due to strict security measures before and during the Emperor's Enthronement.) They also brought incredible flowers, which Kazumi arranged in traditional Japanese style. In fact, all four of our guests are trained in ikebana, so Kazumi had some kibitzing from them. Keiko also brought a homemade Christmas wreath made of bread, as well as a sweet Christmas cake. The main course, of course, was lots of potato latkes (with sour cream and homemade applesauce), which everybody liked a lot. We lit the holiday candles, told the story of Hanukkah, and played dreidel for chocolate Hanukkah yen.

Three nights later we peeled a lot more potatoes to feed a bigger and more eclectic group. The guests were Diane, an anthropologist, Satomi, a sociologist, Thomas, Satomi's boyfriend who had just come in from Germany the day before, and two researchers (Inoue-san and Matsumoto-san) and two graduate students (Iida-san and Kusumoto-san) from Osaka University. Fitting all these people into our place was a little tight, especially since we only own four chairs. But we borrowed two more chairs from the university, and used our new kotatsu, so everything worked out great. The general menu and activities were the same. (Well, Cathy slipped in some cranberry sauce and kim-chee to put on the latkes. This was a big hit: try it sometime!)

Of course, everybody brought presents, including plum wine, dried fruits, huge apples, and a sinfully rich pudding. The hit, though, was "Hyakunin-issu" a traditional New Year's Japanese card game that Inoue-san brought. The game is based on one hundred poems written by one hundred different poets. All schoolchildren in Japan must memorize all one hundred poems. (Just the other day, we saw stacks of this game in one of the department stores. Some included audio tapes so students could practice on their own for the big yearly tournaments. There were even CDs with the chanting available.) To play the game you lay out a hundred cards that have the second half of each poem written in hiragana, one of the Japanese phonetic alphabets. One person chants each full poem (from another set of cards). The object is to grab the card corresponding to the one being chanted. Of course, the Japanese guests had two advantages: they read hiragana much faster and they actually remember some of the poems. However, we gaijin didn't do so poorly. Cathy got 12 cards, Diane got nine or 10, I got eight, and even Thomas got three (which pleasantly surprised Satomi, who had no idea that he could read any Japanese at all). Kusumoto-san won with 27. In Japanese-style, the players are ranked from top to bottom. The losers make a pile of their hands on the floor, with the second best on the bottom and the worst on the top. The winner winds up and slaps as hard as possible at the pile of hands: some people were soothing their hands for quite some time afterwards. The prize structure is quite an incentive

to win.

Early every December and June workers receive a significant bonus: almost always more than a month's salary and sometimes three months or more. (I have heard that the difference between academic and industrial base salaries isn't so different, but the industrial bonuses are significantly larger.) At the branch of Nippon Electric Glass where Cathy taught English, there are several hundred workers. Their bonuses, *in cash*, were brought to the site in a paper bag by two company officials on a commuter train. Imagine that happening on a New York City subway.

Late December in Japan is party-time. In particular, it's bo-nen-kai ("forget the (past) year") time. There are lots of easy ways to tell this. For instance, you start to see women in kimono, some of whom are keeping warm with the unusual combination of mink stoles and rabbit furs. Another interesting combination is Japanese workers and alcohol. Although there is quite a bit of drinking all year long, after bonuses are distributed it gets out of hand. The late trains are filled with red-faced men who are only able to stand up because there are so many of them packed together. Riding on the trains can get you drunk on whiskey vapor. It's even less pleasant when you get off the train, since you run the risk of stepping into "platform pizzas", which are the result of individuals who had too much sushi, too much yakitori, and too much sake.

Cathy's English students took her out after the last class. Since it was during regularly scheduled class hours, Cathy decided to teach them some drinking vocabulary. So, now at Nippon Electric Glass bonenkai, intermediate English students can be heard saying things like: "I can drink you under the table", "Your sister drinks like a fish", and "Let's get shitfaced." It seems especially curious that there seem to be very few similar phrases in Japanese—at least nothing that they're willing to tell us—even though drinking is such a popular activity here.

Christmas. The Japanese know about Christmas. They know it's a time to go to parties, to play Christmas music, and to sell an incredible amount of Christmas paraphernalia, including trees, cakes, wreaths, stuffed snowmen, and presents. That doesn't sound so different from the U.S., except that here Christmas is an entirely secular holiday. It's not at all clear that many Japanese have any idea about the religious significance of Christmas. Indeed, Christmas Eve is the biggest night of the year for dating. Guys rent fancy cars like BMWs and Mercedes, reserve \$200/night hotel rooms months in advance just in case, and give their girlfriends expensive presents (this year's hot item was anything from Tiffany's, which has a branch in one of the department stores). Hot places for dates are Disneyland, expensive restaurants, Christian church ceremonies for a taste of the exotic, and even short trips to Korea or Hong Kong.

Our neighborhood was in full Christmas swing. The loudspeakers on the shopping street played secular Christmas carols hour after hour. Once in a while, they played Japan's most famous Christmas song: Beethoven's Ninth. The bakeries all sold Christmas cakes (cakes decorated with snowmen and Santa, for instance), and many stores advertised Christmas specials. Many clerks wore Santa outfits. One night, even our pizza was delivered by a thin, black-haired Santa.

All signs of Christmas are quickly removed by the 26th to prepare for the most important Japanese holiday, New Year's Day. But that's another story entirely.

3 Happy New Year!

The most important Japanese holiday (with the possible exception of O-Bon) is New Year's Day. One of the most prominent aspects of New Year's here is gifts. Lots of gifts. The first sign of this came at the university in the form of calendars. Every company prints and distributes calendars. I understand that Matsushita has a full-time, all-year staff of twelve to arrange for the design, printing, and distribution of their calendars. Although I only received a couple, my host professor seems to have received dozens and dozens. Lots of these come by mail, but many are delivered personally, usually by two men who stay for tea. I can't guess how many cups of tea my host had to drink to accept these calendars in the necessary manner.

Traditional gifts for the New Year's include assortments of boxed (and beautifully wrapped) food, especially coffee, salad oil, and soy sauce. The quantity of gifts that people give and get is incredible. We read that one government official bought four refrigerators in anticipation of the onslaught of gifts he would get. Universities have a special office where people can bring in 14 boxes of coffee and 23 boxes of salad oil, banking points to exchange for a more useful gift later on. So far we've been thrilled to remain largely outside of the New Year's gift wars: our only major present so far was a huge box of oranges from our friend Mayumi. Even at her quota of ten oranges a day, Cathy hasn't made a dent in the box yet. (Her hair is getting a bit redder, though.)

In addition to exchanging gifts, people send New Year's cards, too. This is done not only with personal friends, but with everyone your aura touched during the year (or in past years, most likely). The most common approach is to send postcards that you or your company designed. If you put a special symbol on the card, and mail it by a specified date, the post office guarantees delivery on January 1st. Many people send specially marked postcards that are actually tickets for a big nationwide lottery held on January 15th. So far, we haven't checked to see if we won anything. If we did, it'd more likely be another box of oranges instead of a couple of million yen. We received only about 20 cards on New Year's Day, but we saw some mailboxes in our building with stacks and stacks of them. (A couple of our cards were written entirely in Japanese, and we still haven't figured out who one of them is from.) Every card we've seen has a sheep theme, since 1991 is the Year of the Sheep (*hitsuji*). The post office had lots of rubber stamps with sheep on them, so people could decorate their cards. You could also buy your own stamp—of any shape or size—from department stores. We bought a cute little one with a sheep holding a letter in its mouth.

One of the most traditional foods for the holiday is mochi: white rice gluten that sticks to the roof of your mouth and the bottom of your stomach. Mochi, arranged in stacks of two or three round mounds sort of like snowmen, is used as a decoration in temples, shrines, and homes. Also, taking slurps of long thin buckwheat soba noodles on New Year's Eve and Day is a traditional way to wish for a long life. Eating a special kind of herring

roe is also traditional, since herring swim in large schools indicating the New Year will bring abundance.

There are several traditional New Year's decorations. Inside most homes is a kagami-mochi, which is mochi cakes, konbu seaweed, a piece of urajiro fern, and dried persimmons stacked on a wooden stand. This is crowned by a mikan (a citrus fruit sort like a tangerine) with green leaves. Shimekazari, another traditional arrangement, is a wreath of rice straw (wara, for those of you who've been keeping up with these stories) and urajiro, again crowned by a mikan. We've seen shimekazari, large and small, on our neighbor's doors, on store fronts, and even as a car hood ornament (including on a Cadillac Seville parked at the nearby Denny's). There is also a traditional New Year's flower arrangement called a kadomatsu of green bamboo, rice straw, ornamental purple and white cabbages, and cotoneaster.

Over the vacation, Cathy and I visited Osaka and Himeji castles. Osaka Castle, which was originally built around 1600, was almost entirely reconstructed in the 1950s. The castle itself is nice, and the view of Osaka from the eighth level of the pagoda is wonderful. The really impressive part is the huge rocks used in the original construction. These rocks came from all over Japan, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the famous warlord who built the castle, demanded that feudal families contribute labor and the rocks. Some of the rocks—many of which have special names—weigh much more than 20 tons. The task of getting them to Osaka and placing them so beautifully and soundly is even more impressive than the rocks themselves.

Himeji is about an hour east of Osaka by train. In contrast to Osaka Castle, this is an original castle instead of a concrete reconstruction. Luckily, we went on a cold winter day and missed the crowds. (Our Japanese friends always think we are unusual since we visit places when they are not crowded. The Japanese always flock to popular places at the same time.) The castle itself is what you think of when you dream about castles. It is really incredible. We entered the massive wooden gates and saw the main pagoda looming over the grounds. We soon entered a corridor several hundred meters long, with original wooden floors worn smooth by slippered feet over more than 300 years. Off the corridor were rooms for the medieval castle families, separated by sexes. Exiting the corridor, we followed several more paths and went up a couple of levels to the main pagoda, which consists of six levels. In contrast to Osaka Castle, which has modern stairs in addition to an elevator, you climb stairs and ladders up each level at Himeji Castle. The lower levels had some museum pieces, but farther up it was relatively bare, except for a few weapons racks and a small shrine at the top level. The top level truly towers over Himeji and gives a sense of the security that the castle must have given to the warlords. The exit leads you back to the castle grounds, which are supposed to be even more beautiful in spring when the cherry trees bloom.

An important Japanese New Year's tradition is to do the equivalent of our spring cleaning. In the last week or so of the year, everyone cleans their homes, offices, cars, etc. In my laboratory at school, the cleaning took place on a Saturday. Everybody showed up at 10 A.M. dressed in work clothes. They then proceeded to empty every office and lab room (probably a dozen or more all told) and then to sweep, mop, wax, buff, and polish everything in sight. Windows were washed, too. The furniture was dusted, the hallways

cleaned, and in about six or eight hours, everything was spotless for the New Year. As usual, the hierarchy was clear. The undergraduates did the grungiest work, the full professor was in overall charge, the associate professor took inventory, etc.

The Saturday before New Year's our friend Diane offered us a chance to go to a town called Koyasan in Wakayama Prefecture (about 50 miles from Ryujin Onsen, which we visited in October). Diane had been there several times before, and she thought a winter visit would be nice both for us and for her friend Ernie, who was in Japan for the first time. And she couldn't have been more right.

We hopped another train, which wound its way up into the mountains of Wakayama. As in our previous trip, the vistas alone would have made the trip worthwhile. At the last stop on the train, we transferred to a five minute cable car ride up a very steep slope to Koyasan Station. Koyasan is a small plateau surrounded by a set of peaks said to be shaped like a lotus leaf. It was founded in 816 by Kobo Daishi (or Kukai), the founder of the Shingon Buddhist sect and one of the most famous priests in Japanese history. The town consists mostly of approximately 100 temples, all of the Shingon sect. Koyasan was especially nice when we visited, since the town was largely empty of tourists (all our Japanese friends said, "Koyasan is wonderful, but why would you go there when it was cold!?") and had a fresh coat of snow. You've seen those pictures of Japanese temples in the snow, and each temple in the entire town looked like it was perfect for a picture postcard.

From Koyasan Station, we took the bus to Ringeijo-in, the temple where we stayed. Diane usually stays at the temple next door, but they were especially busy getting ready for O-Shogatsu (the New Year), and arranged for us to stay here instead. Our room looked out over the 150 year old garden, giving us the feeling of peace and calm a temple garden (covered with snow) should give. After having some tea in our room, we took off to tour town before dark.

We wandered through the center of town and past many temples towards Okuno-in, a cave where Kobo Daishi is said to be alive, in meditation as a living Buddha. Needless to say, this is one of the most sacred spots in Japan. And the cemetery that leads to it is by itself worth a trip to Japan. The path through the cemetery to Okuno-in is about 2 kilometers, through a forest of massive trees (mostly cedar) that make the path dark but not depressing. Along the paths are literally hundreds of thousands of tombs and memorials. (We heard estimates ranging from about 200,000 to over 500,000.) These used to be primarily from areas (actually families) of Japan, but now there are memorials for major corporations, clubs, and so on. Many people who are buried elsewhere (or cremated, as is common in Japan), have some hair or a tooth or something buried at Koyasan. After viewing Okuno-in, we hurried back to our temple through the snow falling at dusk.

Dinner was held in a private room in another part of the temple. The room was a spectacularly decorated temple room, with good tatami, wooden carvings, and simple but exquisite shoji screens on three sides. The only heat came from a space heater, and Cathy and Diane quickly kneeled close to it. Dinner was brought in by two monks. We each were given our own little lacquered table that we could kneel in front of. As we lifted the lids of our ceramic and lacquer dishes, we revealed one beautiful serving of food after another.

The meal itself was never-ending, with dish after dish after dish, all vegetarian. Great pickles, vegetables, seaweed, soups, custards, goma-dofu (a speciality here, sesame-based tofu), tempura, and, of course, rice, tea, sake, and beer.

Just before we started back to our room, a woman came in to talk to us. She is the wife of the previous head priest of the temple. When he died three years ago, their eldest son took over. She apologized to us that the screens in our room were not decorated in the style of those where we were eating. The reason was that we were in the new wing with (slightly) better heating, and that they had to put fancy screens in bit by bit, since each panel cost more than \$1000 (and our room had eight panels, I think). Finally, she said that the morning service was at 6:30 A.M., and we were welcome to join.

Back in our room they had set us up for the evening. The kotatsu was in the center, and there were four futon laid out, each with its foot under the kotatsu. This was good, since the place was awfully cold: in the hallways and at the communal sink and bathroom, there was no heat at all: we could see our breath at all times. We wandered on down to the o-furo (bath), washed up and soaked for a while, and hustled back to the warm futon and kotatsu.

At 6:30 A.M., Cathy and I went to the sanctuary. It was *really* cold, and when we got there there was an assistant monk preparing incense and bells and one other crazy person ready to pray. Kneeling, which is how they sit for the service, was a little easier due to the electrically heated rug on top of the wooden floor. The chief priest came in soon and started chanting. Several others, including Diane and Ernie, came a bit later. I left after about 15 minutes, and missed the priest's rundown on the sect and on Koyasan, which he gave to Cathy, Diane, and Ernie after the service was finished. We had breakfast in the same room as dinner. The food was standard Japanese fare, with miso soup, rice, and a variety of dishes, beautifully presented, similar to the previous night.

We settled our bill (it was 8000 yen, about \$60, for each of the four of us) and checked out around 9AM. We headed for the main temple, the museum (which was closed), a couple of other temples, and the Daimon (or Great Gate) that marks the entrance to Koyasan (where Cathy and I briefly joined a snowball fight with a friendly Japanese girl and boy). At lunch, we decided we wanted to go back through the cemetery one more time, since it was so overwhelming. And it was no less so the second time. At the last moment, we grabbed a taxi back to Koyasan Station, caught the cable car, and got the express back to Osaka. Koyasan gets about a million visitors each year, and after seeing and feeling it, it's easy to see why.

On New Year's Eve, we went to Kyoto. Aftering meeting Diane and Ernie, we wandered around looking for a place to eat. Diane knows tons of places, but everything was either packed or else had an outrageous cover charge. (Ernie was happy, though, since he collected a lot of Kleenex while we wandered. How? Well, it's quite common for stores to hire people to stand on the street and pass out small packages of Kleenex, presumably as an advertising ploy. It is a great thing since many toilets in Japan have no toilet paper. You quickly learn to pick up as much Kleenex as possible, just in case. Ernie thought getting free Kleenex on the street was one of the major signs of the advanced Japanese culture.)

Diane finally led us to a small jazz place called Sesamo. It wasn't too crowded when we got there. Diane drank martinis, Cathy margaritas, Ernie hot sake, and I had brandy. They brought us a selection of food ranging from small patties made of fish eggs to nacho chips. Later on a band consisting of a trombone, a piano, a bass, and a percussionist played. We stayed for one set, which was really great, and then headed off. The whole thing cost just over 10,000 yen (\$75): not bad for good booze, food, and jazz on New Year's Eve.

We headed off towards Yasaka-jinja, one of the major shrines in Kyoto. (This is where our friends Naomi and Glenn were married in October.) Shijo-dori, the main street to Yasaka-jinja, was made into a pedestrian mall to handle the crowd. It was raining lightly on and off, though, and Diane said it was far less crowded than in previous years. People were happy and lots of women (and a very small number of men) were dressed in traditional kimono. We got to the main entrance to the shrine around 11:50 P.M. and shuffled by the stalls selling candy, calendars of seriously half-naked women (seriously), grilled octopus, and so forth. People were buying good luck symbols, including wooden arrows called hamaya (with a special Year of the Sheep placard for making New Year's wishes), small bookmark-like charms called o-mamori to pray for marriage, health, success in school, etc., and many more. Cathy bought two o-mamori to help with studying. Lots of people were buying o-mikuji, or fortunes. For 100 yen, you get to pick a long stick out of a box. The number on this stick is given to the seller, who hands over the appropriate fortune. After reading it, the buyer ties it onto a tree or a special fence, along with about a billion other o-mikuji. And everybody was going to one of the shrines to pray.

We also saw lots of people swinging rope incense: a special kind of rope that stays lit and burns extremely slowly. Some people would swing it in circles, while others would simply swing it up and down. On our way out of the shrine, somebody stopped and gave me half of his rope (maybe we got 2 feet worth), lighting it from the other half. We then made our way up to Kiyomizu-dera, a temple that is about a 20-30 minute walk. It was well past midnight by now: in contrast to the U.S., there was no easy way to tell when it hit midnight. Given the wonderful spirit, beautiful kimono, dancing spots of light from rope incense, and the many sonorous bells in the background, we didn't miss the midnight fireworks at all.

Going into Kiyomizu-dera, the guards stopped me at the entrance. After a brief while we worked it out: it's a wooden structure and they don't permit burning rope incense inside. So, they took me to the side of the entrance, where they had a hitching post to which you could tie your rope and pick it up again on the way out. Wild! Just inside, the temple bell was ringing. Every temple rings its bell 108 times on New Year's Eve. There are lots of explanations, but the simplest seems to be that there are 108 human sins and this atones for them. This temple's bell was huge. It is rung by a mallet, maybe six feet long, hung from two heavy ropes. A priest rings the bell using a third rope hanging down from the middle of the mallet. He swings the mallet back and forth several times, building a lot of power and momentum, hauls it back one last big time, and smashes it into the bell. The whole ceremony is incredibly exciting. We then walked around the temple grounds, which are nestled in the hills overlooking Kyoto from the east. At the entrance once again, I picked up my rope incense and we headed back to the train station.

The train back to Osaka runs all night on New Year's (in contrast to most nights, when they stop around midnight). They don't run so frequently, though, and the 2:30 A.M. train we got was jammed. Luckily, Cathy got a seat. (She is now a world expert in elbowing people in order to get to a seat first—in this case, though, we should have been given seats anyway, since we were probably the oldest people on the train.) Although it was packed and everyone was tired, it was still great seeing people wearing kimono, carrying arrows, green bamboo branches, and other New year's symbols. When we got out at our transfer stop, 55 minutes away from Kyoto, I was surprised to see two empty beer cans rolling around the floor, since nobody drinks (anything) on the commuter trains and since nobody litters the trains, either. We finally made it home around 4 A.M. I didn't mind, though, since the few bowl games that were shown on New year's Day were shown on tape delay around midnight on January 2nd. (Go Huskies!)

The next day, we wandered to a temple about 15 minutes walk from our apartment. Just like the night before, there were lots of people praying, buying fortunes and arrows, and generally milling around. One new thing (to us) was a big fire burning in the middle of the temple grounds. We saw people burning parts of home shrines, last year's arrows, and bags of whatever. (At another temple, we saw a big shed where people were dropping off similar things to be burned.) Apparently this is a way to break with the past and start clean for the new year. In addition, we finally bought an o-mikuji, since these were in English as well as Japanese. The summary of ours, at the top of the sheet, was "Barely Good", in contrast to others we saw that said "Good", "Very Good", "Not Very Good", etc. Over all, it said we'll just have to keep working hard at things. In Japanese, they would say, "gambatte", which means "push on!" (you hear this all the time when climbing Fuji-san). Cathy and I thought that this was more than a "Barely Good" fortune, and we were happy to push on and start the New Year with it.

4 Shin-nen-kai and Matsumoto-san Visits Kansai

On January 2nd, we went to our first shin-nen-kai, or "beginning of year" celebration. Professor Torii, my host in Osaka, and his wife traditionally invite student and staff to their place soon after New Year's. Their mansion is on the 15th floor of a complex consisting of five or six buildings. It's about a 15 minute train ride and then a 15 minute walk.

Anticipating 15-20 people, they had taken some sliding doors out, nearly doubling the size of their living room. There were two long tables set up, complete with three or four burners for cooking sukiyaki, the main dish. Indeed, when we got there around 2 P.M., about half a dozen students had already started eating. Mrs. Torii must have been slicing vegetables, tofu, and beef for hours, since there were massive bowls ready to be cooked. There was lots of beer and sake, too: when the sukiyaki needed extra liquid, somebody would just pour in a couple of shots of beer. We also had o-zoni, a special soup for the New Year's, which (in the Kansai area) includes some white miso.

The party was relatively informal, for a Japanese party. There were no speeches and people mingled quite a bit. On the other hand, when ex-students of Torii's came he almost

always introduced us formally, kneeling on the tatami, and made sure we exchanged life (meaning education and work) histories.

During a brief break from eating, the games started. People played Pente on a go board, traded card tricks, once again played Hyakunin-issu, the 100 poem game. Cathy held her own in a couple of the games (I didn't play), to the continued amazement of the Japanese. But we were even more amazed by one of the players, who consistently got more than 50% of the cards, even when there were four-to-seven other players. After several games like this, the two best other players challenged him again: they would play against him as a team. He beat them handily. But I was glad to hear that he had in fact wasted much of his youth playing games like these: he took eight years (the maximum allowed) to finish his undergraduate degree, which I had thought was unheard of here.

Later on, we ate and drank more, and then headed home stuffed and happy.

The next day we had a visitor: Matsumoto-san, the secretary from Tokyo Institute of Technology who had taken us to her house, to her tea ceremony teacher, to the baseball game in Yokohama, and more. She was bravely taking the big trip from Tokyo to Osaka to see her American friends for a couple of days.

We met her at the bullet train tracks at Shin-Osaka Station, and we immediately left for Kobe, where an architecture professor Cathy knows was hosting a shin-nen-kai. Matsumoto-san was alternatively asking us to be her guide to Kansai and being amazed that we knew our way around. The party at Professor Ohno's house, who is on the faculty at Kobe University, was wonderful. He and his wife dressed in kimono, and there was great food, great drink (including some strange and wondrous kind of Chinese alcohol with herbs in it), and a relaxed group again. In addition to Ohno, his wife, and their two sons (aged 14 and 9, I think), were two women undergraduates and another professor (all from Kobe University).

Both undergraduates still live at home, even though one of them has a two hour commute each way every day. She said it was fine, especially because her mother did all her cooking, cleaning, and so forth. The American idea of trying to become independent by leaving home just didn't make much sense to them. (American parents may punish children by sending them to their room. Japanese mothers punish children by sending them outside the house, which is punishment because being part of the group is so essential in Japan. The kids next door often scream "O-ka-san! O-ka-san" (Mother, Mother) to try to get their mother to let them back in the house.)

The big hit of the afternoon, for the Japanese, was when Cathy read palms. (On weekend nights we often see long lines of young women waiting to consult with mysterious looking palm readers sitting at small tables on busy street corners.) Cathy, looking not so mysterious, read Matsumoto-san's, both of the students, the other professor, and both of the Ohno sons. The big hit of the afternoon, for us, was seeing the two sons help out (including the elder son doing dishes), which is almost unheard of in Japan. All in all, it was a relaxing and pleasant afternoon.

It took us about an hour to get back to our place, which Matsumoto-san was dying to see. We settled in, accepting presents she brought for us (mostly food, including some

pickles her mother made and some exotic kinds of mushrooms and fish wrapped in seaweed). We ordered a seafood pizza (shrimp, squid, and tuna fish) and drank beer while watching the “Wizard of Oz” on video. We ran a hot bath for Matsumoto-san, and she washed and showered and sat it in the o-furo while Cathy and I played Yahtzee. And more Yahtzee. And more Yahtzee. After Matsumoto-san finally finished, she came out, corrected a couple of mistakes we had made in laying out her futon (like the cover sheet was on inside-out), and we all hit the sack.

Matsumoto-san got up early, and we dragged out of bed soon after: the bo-nen-kai and shin-nen-kai were getting to us. After breakfast we walked over to Osaka University, so she could see the campus and the offices in the Torii Laboratory. From there we took a bus to Senri-Chuo, a big shopping center, where we caught the monorail. Matsumoto-san was just like a kid, amazed at anything and everything. When we crossed train tracks, she wanted to know what line it was and what color its trains were. She wanted to know the name of every “ku” (which is a city district) we were in. She wanted to know which ku was the biggest. She wanted to know which stores were most popular. She wanted to know where the stores from all the big Tokyo chains were. And so on. By the time we got to Kyoto, Cathy and I felt like we had heard every question the “Japan Help Line” had ever been asked. And more.

We tried to eat lunch at Knuckles, the deli, but it was closed. We found a nice noodle shop, though, and then headed off to Dai-toku-ji, a complex of temples in the north part of Kyoto. It wasn’t very crowded, which made it even easier to enjoy the traditional grounds and gardens. We entered a few of the temples, especially a couple with famous rock gardens. Cathy had visited in November, during the one week in the year when the general public has access to some of the most special gardens and to a very famous teahouse. In fact, this teahouse was the reason Matsumoto-san decided on visiting Dai-toku-ji, since it is an important teahouse in the history of her practice of the tea ceremony. At one of the most well-known temples, we sat and had tea (the bitter kind for the tea ceremony, made one at a time by the staff).

Afterwards, we took a taxi to Shimogamo-jinja where another festival was ongoing. We were too late to see a traditional game similar to hacky-sack, but there were lots of people in traditional garb, including more young men than we had usually seen. Matsumoto-san made a special prayer that she would get married this year. She’s getting a bit old for marriage here (we think she’s nearing 35), and she worries about this constantly. (The very first time we met her, in 1988, we learned in fewer than five minutes, literally, that she was unmarried and that we should keep an eye out for eligible, Japanese men for her. If any of our readers know anyone...) We then headed off to Gion and Yasaka-jinja, the shrine we’d visited on New Year’s Eve.

It wasn’t as crowded as New Year’s Eve, but there were lots of people still buying arrows, praying, and wearing kimono. Matsumoto-san prayed for a husband, and then she bought an o-mikuji. Although it was in Japanese, she made it clear that it was *not* a good fortune, and she became really quite depressed. She cheered up a bit when we wandered back into Gion and she bought some o-miyage (presents to take back home), first at a handicraft

store and then on the food floor at the Hankyu Department store. She took about 30 minutes at one stand in Hankyu, picking out five special kinds of candy for tea ceremonies. At least twice she decided on what she wanted but, after the clerk had wrapped everything, changed her mind. She spent less than 6000 yen here (under \$45), but got lots of service. And a smile. Amazing.

We took the train into Osaka and ate okonomiyaki, which are sort of like noodle-omelet pizzas served on a table with a hot grill built in. We all had quite some appetite by the end of this day, and washed it all down with a cool draft beer. We took the train home, looked at some photographs and some picture books of Washington State, and ran a bath for Matsumoto-san. While she washed, showered, and soaked, Cathy and I played Yahtzee again. And more Yahtzee. And more Yahtzee. And even more Yahtzee. It is really good that Japanese baths are separate from the sink and the toilet, since the average bladder could not last through the average Matsumoto-san bath.

Saturday was Matsumoto-san's last day with us. We headed off to wander around Umeda, in Osaka, before lunch. We found the special pickles she wanted to bring her mother in one of the department stores. (The previous day, in Hankyu, she hadn't found them, and had scolded Cathy for looking at one display of pickles because they were "from the wrong prefecture.") Later we were walking along a main street and Cathy and I crossed a little alley. Well, it turns out that there was a traffic light at the corner, and the light was red. Matsumoto-san would not cross the alley against the light, even though probably 50% or more of the people were crossing without much thought. When it *finally* turned green, she crossed and scolded us for doing something incredibly dangerous. She said that we must have crossed since we were Americans, even though she had just seen (or, I guess, had not seen) maybe 40 or 50 Japanese cross against the red, too.

We had made lunch reservations at the *Little Carnival*, the restaurant where the waiters and waitresses sing opera. We figured Matsumoto-san would enjoy this, and we were right. The seafood was decent, and the all-you-can-eat salad bar was a treat for her. She told the waiter that it was my birthday (it was only off by a couple of days), and sometime later three servers brought a small cupcake with lighted candles to me and birthday babies at two other tables. In full operatic form, they belted out "Happy Birthday" (to Dabidosan, for me), shook my hand, congratulated me, and handed me yellow roses. After they sang a couple more opera numbers, we finished up and headed to Shin-Osaka Station to see Matsumoto-san off to Yokohama.

We then headed to a dinner at our Chinese friends, Feng and Chien. They had an incredible dinner cooked for us at their apartment in the Osaka University International House. They made their own wonton (which they call wondon), but filled them with shrimp instead of pork so Cathy could eat them. There were tofu dishes, fish dishes, some strange kinds of duck eggs, and lots more. The only thing I couldn't manage to eat was the pigs feet: the problem was that they looked too much like pigs feet. I figured that they were a real delicacy, and that they'd be happy having an extra one to share. After dinner we looked at a some pictures from China. Feng's family still lives in what looks like a mud house outside Shanghai. Both of them have done incredibly well. They might well be in the top .1% of the

population in China in terms of education, which literally makes them “one in a million.”

The next day, Mrs. Ishizeki, the mother of our friend Naomi who was married in Kyoto in October, invited us back to her house. Once again, we got there by taxi after meeting our friend Mayumi at the cosmetics department at the Hankyu department store in Senri-Chuo. Also as before, Ishizeki-san was prepared with a day-long feast. The first course was a Japanese obento, or lunchbox. A set of five bento boxes was laid out, each exquisitely lacquered. But the insides, which Ishizeki-san made entirely by hand, was even more incredible. Vegetable rolls, plump shrimps, carved lotus roots, and much, much more was laid out perfectly. She apologized because she had only spent about five hours putting them together!

After another course or two—each on a different, beautiful set of dishes—the doorbell rang. Cathy and I stared at each other and said, “Sushi.” And we were right. A huge tray of sushi had indeed arrived, just to keep us busy between courses. Around 5:30 P.M., we started making sounds like we had to go, since we had arrived around noon and didn’t want to overstay our welcome. But wait! We hadn’t had dinner, and Ishizeki-san has already started to prepare a new feast. Anyway, “Chibi Maruko-chan”, the most famous TV cartoon in Japan, was on soon, so we (quite happily) stayed for dinner and the show. Chibi Maruko-chan is Japan’s answer to Bart Simpson: she’s a little bit of a bad girl, often inciting her friends to make trouble, and she’s an under-achiever in school. These are *not* generally acceptable traits in Japan, but somehow she seems to get away with it all (and still be popular with children and parents alike). She is sufficiently famous that lots of salarymen sing the theme song at karaoke bars. This year, at the snow festival in Sapporo (in Hokkaido), there was a larger-than-life-size ice sculpture of her, too. In any case, dinner was, of course, scrumptious: delicious fish soup, handmade Chinese-style egg rolls (made without meat, specially for Cathy), and a beefsteak for me. (I don’t eat that much beef anymore, but this was quite special.) Afterwards, Ishizeki-san rolled us out of the door, ran us to the bus stop, gave us bus tickets in case we didn’t have change (and you don’t even need exact change here), and sent us on our way. Whew.

The following week, we got to return the favor. In mid-afternoon, I met Ishizeki-san, Mayumi, and her trusty chaperone at Ishibashi station and walked them to our apartment. Mayumi brought some wine, the chaperone brought some fancy (sweet) dessert, and Ishizeki-san brought stunning flowers and (oh no!) more oranges. In about five minutes, Ishizeki-san arranged the flowers in an way that still impresses us almost a month later. (The flowers are still almost like new: this is one benefit of uninsulated Japanese apartments.)

Cathy was inspired (and a bit awed) by Ishizeki-san’s feast, and had cooked up as much of a storm as is possible in our small, under-supplied kitchen. We sat at the kotatsu and started with vegetables & dips, moving right on to the minestrone. Later on, we moved to the table for the main meal: spaghetti, stuffed mushrooms, and italian bread. The mushrooms were the biggest hit: they all wanted the recipe. Mayumi’s red wine went perfectly with it all. (Ishizeki-san had about three sips of wine, and it went right to her face. This happens to lots of Japanese, including her daughter Naomi, when they drink. But in her case it’s even more extreme than usual.) The chaperone’s dessert, Ishizeki-san’s oranges, and some

ice cream finished our bellies off for the evening. Back at the kotatsu again, we pulled out several picture books about Washington State and started taking reservations for their promised visits to Chez Nottle.

I walked the three of them to train and taxi, and headed home. Cathy and finally felt that the New Year parties were over, and we could start trying to make our resolutions come true.

Art or Cheap Imitation?

Donald Chinn

Music, dance, words, pictures – these alone do not an art make. Just as science must fend off advances by would-be suitors to its name, the arts must distinguish facsimile from the genuine. Each summer thousands of youngsters participate in drum and bugle corps, an activity that mixes music, dance, and moving forms, an activity largely unknown outside the marching band and music education community – a madness that sweeps across the country from mid-June to the third Saturday in August. As it is in vogue to label, categorize, and stereotype, the curious might ask, “What aspects of drum and bugle corps, if any, qualify it as an art?”

A subtly obvious characteristic of drum corps is its military tradition. The performers march. They wear quasi-military uniforms. The origins of drum corps date back to the American Revolution, when musical units led military units into parades and battle. They became widespread when World War I veterans organized drum corps to maintain the camaraderie formed during the war.

Even the terminology is martial: “dressing a line,” “company front,” “color guard.” The company front is a single horizontal line of performers who are typically generating a wall of sound by playing *fortissimo*. As a Wall Street Journal article describes, “As the front moves forward, the crowd invariably cheers. It’s a thrilling, momentary union of sight and sound.” The color guard is the part of the corps that wields the myriad of hand-held equipment, such as flags and their variants. Their name, now a misnomer, is a throwback to the early 1980’s, a time in drum corps before which the color guard was charged with presenting their country’s flag during their corps’ performance.

The terminology and much of the tradition is hidden from view in a modern performance, as the careful observer looks beyond the leaves of the trees and can see the forest as well. Drill design, the way in which the performers move on the field and their placement, underwent radical change in the early 80’s. The military geometric forms – squares, lines, and triangles – yielded to asymmetry and freeform. At first, symmetric forms were placed at an angle on the field. Pushing the idea to its logical extreme, drill designers then designed asymmetric forms; the movement into and out of them were necessarily asymmetric. A richer interpretation of the music (gasp!) via constantly changing forms was now possible, especially after color guards had abandoned their ascetic carriage and embraced modern dance, jazz dance, and ballet as part of their regular repertoire of movement.

Musical selection also changed. Music is much more likely to be by Duke Ellington, Ron Nelson, Tchaikovsky, or Pat Metheny than John Philip Sousa. And what color guard is to the visual, the percussion is to the musical. Complicated rhythms played on all kinds of percussion instruments add musical color to the already sophisticated music.

No other corps exemplifies this trend toward the abstract better than The Cadets of Bergen County from Hackensack, NJ. In 1983, they performed a show primarily consisting of parts of Bernstein's eclectic and ethereal work, the *Mass*. In 1986, they continued performing "hard sell" Bernstein music with music from *On the Waterfront*. In 1991, the corps ventured into minimalism with a piece by John Adams called *A Short Ride on a Fast Machine*. This year, the Cadets will perform a show based on the music of a contemporary symphonic wind piece entitled *To Tame the Perilous Skies* by David Holsinger.

Einstein (I believe) once said, "To know what is possible, you must try the impossible." This corps perhaps more than any other is not afraid to take risks, to perform music that the general public may not like, to appeal to artistic tastes, to try to discover what the true limitations of drum corps are. The entire organization is committed to this attitude, which is why they are primarily responsible for the sweeping changes in drum corps of the 80's.

Sophisticated music. Notes played so softly that the wind can almost be heard above them. Freeform and frenetic movement. Color guard, dressed like ice skaters, jeté-ing across the field, adding visual texture via dance and role portrayal. These images are seemingly incongruous with the sight of quasi-military garb, the look of people marching in step, the driving beat of drums, and the sound of blaring brass. Drum corps is an exercise in expression through contrast.

But in the attempt to classify drum corps, the gnat-like question still persists: is drum corps as legitimate as the symphony or ballet? "The biggest reason it's not legitimate is that it's too restrictive. It's too defined. We're too concerned about saying, 'Drum corps is *this*.' It's *this* number of people that perform from *this* age limit with *this* type of instrumentation on *this* kind of a field with *this* many minutes. Art has no restrictions." So says Marc Sylvester, the show designer for The Cadets of Bergen County.

Is drum corps art or a cheap imitation? The answer is clear: it is an imitation. But there are groups across the country, and in particular there is one in a town called Hackensack, NJ, that challenge the boundaries drum corps has boxed itself into and explore for new ideas and new ways to communicate those ideas. This is the essence of the artistic and scientific mindset.

Lost and Found

Franz Amador

Damn! Lost again.

This time, though, I was not standing, supremely confident of my location, in the exact spot where the object of my search absolutely must be, but wasn't. This time, my surroundings plainly were not part of the normal universe. A mere two hundred meters earlier, the leaf-covered autumn hills had exactly matched my map, but no longer did they bear any resemblance to it. Plus, it was starting to rain.

Fortunately, my little piece of the Twilight Zone contained a trail shelter, and, even better, another participant jogged out of the mist to join me briefly under its roof. "I'm a little confused," I reluctantly volunteered. "This symbol must represent the shelter, but that small craggy hill just behind doesn't seem to be on the map at all. It doesn't make sense." He looked briefly at his own map and said, "The hill is this cliff symbol here, just behind the shelter," and ran off as the rain passed.

Oh.

Right.

Suddenly reality and the map snapped back into accord. Man, I've way overshot the control, I thought, heading back up the ridge under chill grey clouds. Sure enough, tucked behind the second boulder I checked was the familiar orange-and-white marker dangling the card punch. I punched the proper box on my card, checked my map, and trotted cheerfully down the ridge toward the next control.

This one was easy, hanging from a tree at the outlet of a marshy pond, as were the remaining three: a stream junction, below a huge boulder, at the edge of a meadow on the lake shore. And then I was done, finished with my first orienteering meet. I'd even come in under the three-hour limit, though the sign-in sheet showed that many people had times much better than mine. I'd found most of the controls easily, but some had been hard. Two I'd nearly abandoned, but I persevered and found them too. The "green" course had been right for my abilities.

The "orange" course would have been a little too easy, though it shared many controls with the green course. On it, all the controls were placed at prominent landmarks: hill tops, stream junctions, lone boulders and outcroppings. I'm a good enough map reader to have found them without much trouble. The green course added controls hidden in shallow depressions in featureless woods, tucked below boulders scattered along gentle ridges, and other places requiring carefully following a compass bearing from the nearest identifiable spot. Enough harder for some challenge and frustration, but still manageable.

I'd passed a few controls not marked on my map that had to belong to the yellow course, as they were all on or near a trail and at obvious landmarks. As I walked from the start/finish area to warm up by the fire in the lodge, I could see many controls of the white

course peeking from the edges and corners of the sloping meadows of the little state park ski run - a good place to start for someone not yet familiar with maps, especially the extremely detailed, symbol-covered topographic maps used by orienteers.

Where the red and blue courses went I had no idea, but I was impressed that anyone could run more than ten kilometers cross-country over rocky hills, reading their map and planning their route as they went, find more than a dozen carefully-hidden controls, and finish in under three hours.

Dorothy soon appeared, looking happy. Newer to maps, at her first two meets she had done the yellow courses. She fell in love with the sport and arranged today's outing to the meet at Harriman State Park, near West Point, when I came east to visit her during her fall quarter internship at IBM's New York research labs. This time, she'd chosen the orange course and found it difficult but ultimately within her abilities. Like me, she'd had the frustration of being convinced that a control is nowhere to be found and the satisfaction of finding it. Like her, I wanted to do this again.

And, fortunately, we can, and so can you, if this article has whetted your appetite, because there are several active local orienteering clubs with meets throughout the Puget Sound area. Ask us about it.