

Bob Ruud
(1981~84, 88~90)
LIOJ Director: 1988~90

I first came to LIOJ as a teacher in July, 1981, accompanied by my wife, Jane Prestebak. I was hired by Lance Knowles just as I was finishing graduate studies at SIT. In September, Lance offered me the position of academic supervisor, and I worked in that role until July 1984. Jane and I had our first child, Lorentza, on March 1, 1983. We returned to the US in 1984, and Jane started graduate school that fall in Denver. Jane and I had another child, Anna, in October 1985.



In the summer of 1987, John Fleischauer, who was then LIOJ director, called me and offered me the position of director, to start in February 1988. I went to LIOJ for a week to talk it over, and accepted the position shortly after I returned to the US. I moved back to Odawara in January 1988, and Jane, Lorentza, and Anna joined me in June.

My impression of LIOJ when I started as director was that a definite shift was underway in the focus of the programming. Part of this had to do with the market for the intensive, residential Business Program. Since 1981, many companies had developed their own training programs. Also, companies seemed to have fewer resources to commit to language and cultural training than they had when I first came to LIOJ. Also, the Community Program had been growing steadily, and the Team Teaching Program with the city of Odawara had just begun, thanks to Nobu Seto, the LIOJ business manager.

Enrollment in the Business Program was quite steady over the two years that I was director. Nevertheless, we could sense that we had to work harder for the enrollment, and that enrollment was going to become more of an issue as time passed.

The Community Program continued to grow, with more interest and commitment from the city and the public schools with whom we had team teaching arrangements.

As director, I felt during my tenure that these movements downward in the Business Program and upward in the Community Program were very strong and natural, given the market conditions at the time. The Community Program was a top priority for Nobu, who had made very strong and productive connections in the city and the local schools. The LIOJ staff was very well suited to moving with the two trends, accommodating the uncertain enrollment of the Business Program, and learning a great deal about teaching English in the public school setting, and collaborating with their Japanese counterparts. As director, I tried to encourage the growth of the Community Program, while maintaining the Business Program as well as we could. I was more active in the curriculum and programming details of the Business Program, and Nobu played a more central role in the Community Program.

One issue that came to be important during my tenure was the condition of Asia Center. The building was becoming old and difficult to maintain. Mr. Shibusawa responded quickly to our need to do some renovation, and it was done. I understand that it continued after I had left LIOJ in 1990.

As director, I placed a high priority on the host program for international scholars. I tried hard and generally succeeded in having at least one visiting scholar in every Business Program term. LIOJ had had visiting scholars from Thailand and Korea for many years. During my tenure, we also had guests from Hong Kong, the Philippines, and China.

I enjoyed my travels representing LIOJ. I visited Thailand, Hong Kong, Scotland, and England, in addition to doing the annual recruiting trip in the US.

As had been the tradition, the highlight of each year during my tenure was the Summer Workshop for Japanese English teachers. In each of the three Workshops held while I was director (1988, 1989, and 1990), we had an impressive group of presenters from all around the world, and I recall that the presentations by the Japanese teachers reflected the growing strength of language teaching skills in Japan.

I was the first LIOJ director to have children with me during my tenure. Lorentza and Anna attended Ohoribata Yochien in downtown Odawara, and Lorentza attended first grade in the local public elementary school. Needless to say, they were the only non-Japanese children in those schools, and they quickly became fluent speakers of Japanese. They benefited greatly from their experience in Japan, and still treasure their memories of it. I think they also offered a nice experience of everyday life for their Japanese friends and classmates, and their friends' families.

Jane played a crucial role in my work as director. Besides being my solace, comforter, and wise counselor, she was the primary gracious hostess for our steady rotation of international guests. Some of my fondest memories are of the first night in Japan for a new guest, and our routine dinner at the director's house, prepared by Jane, often with collaboration by our guest, and enjoyed over fascinating conversation into the late hours of the night.

I had developed an immense respect and admiration for Mr. and Mrs. Shibusawa while I was at LIOJ the first time. As director, I learned to venerate both of them. They were always so patient, generous, wise, humorous, and respectfully amused by the interesting comings and goings of the everyday business of LIOJ. It's not an overstatement for me to say that they are at the very top of my list of people who have influenced my life. I have the deepest gratitude, respect, and admiration for both of them.

I completed my time as director with the Summer Workshop in 1990. I climbed Mt. Fuji a few weeks prior to leaving Japan, and it seemed a fitting metaphor for my experience there: It was hard to see the big picture at first, and it was hard work to move upward, toward a better view. But with skillful, friendly, and funny colleagues, and firm support of a loving family, the journey was not only possible, but intensely enjoyable and satisfying. Standing at dawn on the mountain top, tired from the journey, but glad I had come, I saw the sun rise over Japan, and thought of Nihon, the source of the sun, and how it and the special people I had known and worked with there would always be part of me. Thank you, Shibusawas, and LIOJ, for giving me such a profound and pleasurable experience.

Bob Ruud lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, with his wife Jane and daughter Anna, who is a sophomore in high school. Lorentza is a freshman at the University of Minnesota; she lives on campus near downtown Minneapolis. He is principal of World Learner School, a Montessori elementary school, in Chaska.