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(1987~89, 91~94)
LIOJ Director: 1991~94

I first heard about LIOJ a few months after arriving in Japan in 1978. I had just begun working for Mitsui Engineering and Shipbuilding in Okayama Prefecture, and several of my better students who had been to LIOJ raved about the experience. One fellow even went so far as to suggest I should try to get a job there. Little did we know! In fact, I worked for two different periods in Odawara, the first from July 1987 to March 1989 as program supervisor under John Fleischauer, and the second as director from April 1991 to March 1994. (I frequently get both periods muddled in my head and, when I meet ex-LIOJers, am never quite sure if we are talking



about the same events and staff members.) To be honest, I am sure all former directors will agree with me when I say both of my stints ‘up on the hill’ were filled with both terrific and not-so-wonderful experiences. I will try to focus on the former, but for honesty’s sake, the latter should also be addressed. Here goes.

What was the “bad” side of LIOJ for this former director? As one of my co-workers put it, LIOJ was the wrong size. With a staff of between 25 to 30 during my time, it was too big to be run like a family operation and too small to make impersonal decisions. If you had to rake someone over the coals, you were subjected to his or her glares for days, including over meals in the dining room. With three unique programs (Community, Business Communication and Team Teaching) running on different calendars, I found my own schedule straddling *all three*. Holidays were short since I foolishly felt one of the programs might need me and was also afraid of being perceived as favouring one program over the others—not the best mindset for going on vacation.

During my tenure, LIOJ and Asia Center underwent an amazing amount of upheaval, including the renovation of the entire facility resulting in the suspension of LIOJ’s operations for several months. The few remaining teachers and office staff were ‘lodged’ in Mountain (View?) Room during this period. Initially, everyone moaned at

the idea of being crammed together for so long with boxes piled high full of LIOJ materials and supplies. But they soon discovered we all got along very well together, thank you, and protests were again voiced, this time *against* separation, when renovations were completed. As the saying goes, "You can't win."

Perhaps the most upsetting episode during my time at LIOJ was the closure of both *Cross Currents* and the Business Communication Program for economic reasons. The entire process was agonizing. As BCP teachers left, I filled in the teaching slots, at times feeling like the Little Dutch Boy trying to put a diminishing number of fingers into an increasing number of holes in the dike. I would go home each night hoping teachers could find another job in time (most did), but not immediately. When I finally walked out the doors of Asia Center on March 31, 1994, I was suffering from insomnia and a duodenal ulcer.

Having read the forgoing, you probably assume I regret having taken the top job at LIOJ. Wrong. The personal and professional rewards far outweighed the pain. I was given the opportunity to work with an amazing number of dedicated people who were fascinated by the learning process as much as I was. We seemed to be constantly experimenting with ways to do things more effectively and, frankly, I feel we generally succeeded. Each program evolved in ways which benefited the entire staff, and even the community at large.

The first major innovation was a change in hiring policy and procedures. During my first stint at LIOJ, the staff was essentially comprised of younger Canadians and Americans working in Asia for the first time. Upon becoming director, I noticed that students of all ages in all programs were becoming interested in the wider world and, in the case of BCP students, being sent there. Given the political changes in Eastern Europe, many BCP participants were heading for Germany as the jumping off point for promoting Japanese industrial ventures in the region. Southeast Asia was another popular post-LIOJ destination for many of our graduates, in particular Indonesia and Thailand. Female students, who had always been a staple of the Community Program, were also increasing in numbers each BCP term thanks to the progressive training policies of such companies as Proctor and Gamble. Given the above developments, we formed a very clear hiring policy for the school: whenever possible, equal numbers of men and women instructors from around the globe and of all ages.

I say "we" because the hiring process had also changed completely. In the past,

directors had dictated who made it on to LIOJ's teaching staff. During my tenure, however, the process was restructured and included three stages: a first vetting of CV's by supervisors and teacher representatives from each program, which allowed staff to identify appropriate candidates for their particular program; an initial interview (in person when possible or, if not, over the phone) conducted by a supervisor and instructor; and the last interview with myself and the supervisor of the program concerned asking a few final questions before formally offering a position. The benefits of the above approach were many. Staff, including myself, could submit the resumes of friends for consideration without feeling the candidate was being given special, biased treatment; new teachers arrived feeling less intimidated having already "met" several staff through the hiring process; and the responsibility for staff who did not work out (yes, there were one or two) was accepted by everyone who had been involved in the hiring process. It wasn't just "the director's fault." In fact, by the time I interviewed the applicant, it was a formality since the people who would be working closest with him or her had already approved the person. I was simply the rubber stamp at the end of a very close scrutiny. As a result, during my three years as LIOJ's director, we had employed staff ranging in age from their mid-twenties to early sixties originating from countries in Europe, North Africa, South, Southeast and East Asia, and the Pacific, as well as North America. Sometimes there were more men, other times more women, but generally there was a balance. Some of the perks of having such a demographically mixed staff were the greater variety of opinions at faculty meetings based on different cultural and generational perspectives, and the creation of LIOJ's first "International Night" held at the 25th Summer Workshop in 1993- which was *really* international. Rather than tell endless anecdotes (something former directors have a tendency to do), I will try to encapsulate the changes in each program, as follows.

The Community Program, which often considered itself something of a plain stepsister beside the Business Communications Program, expanded with a strong group of dynamic instructors supervised by Mary Ann Maynard. They met frequently and were forever coming up with ways to maintain quality while "spicing up" their lessons in order to deal with the peculiar pitfalls of the CP, including an age and energy range which ran the full gamut from hyperactive pre-schoolers to worn-out "salaryman" types cramming in a class before heading home after a long day at work. There were special evening programs (something that had always been a fixture of LIOJ's CP), as well as entirely new programs, including high school intensives which continue to this day. I still have fond memories of our first intensive: standing on top of a dining room table with Aldona Shumway to demonstrate the latest disco steps

as a few hundred high school students watched transfixed (school was *never* like this!), then imitated the routines.

The second program which came into its own at this time was our Team Teaching Program in which trained LIOJ instructors worked with Japanese public school teachers to conduct English classes jointly in selected secondary schools in the Odawara area. As many of you probably know, today in Japan there is a nationwide program which works on the same principle; however, at the time LIOJ pioneered this process, we were one of a very few institutions undertaking this joint approach to teaching languages in secondary schools. And we were considered one of the best. This can be attested to by the numerous presentations and workshops we gave, as well as by the number of articles written based on our project. Ultimately, the success of this program depended upon the quality of our teaching staff and the majority were pretty amazing. Given the size and nature of the classes, LIOJ's best TT teachers possessed limitless energy, patience and sensitivity to the local culture. After all, he or she was "invading" another person's classroom and it was imperative that the local teachers' efforts were not being overshadowed by our staff. The program worked and I know of certain ex-TT teachers who have kept in close contact with their Japanese colleagues to this day.

Which brings me to the Business Communications Program. In many ways, the BCP was considered the jewel in LIOJ's crown. It was certainly the first program I knew about before coming to work in Asia Center. On the other hand, when I arrived to serve as director, the BCP was also in trouble. Numbers were beginning to drop off and what had once been a unique venture in Japan was now suffering from the greatest form of praise—imitation. In-house language programs were becoming more sophisticated, while every fly-by-night language school seemed to be conducting intensives of one form or another. To compound the problem, as mentioned above, the economic "bubble" was in full effect with the yen going through the roof as the dollar dropped through the floor. It had become cheaper to send someone to San Francisco for four weeks than pack them off to Odawara and clearly changes needed to be made if we wanted the program to survive, which we all did.

The first major BCP innovation was the shortening of the standard term from 4 weeks to 3 weeks. This was much easier said than done since it meant scheduling programs on Saturday's (i.e., a 6-day week) to ensure participants were still covering the essentials, while the entire BCP year had to be restructured to allow a week off after each term so that our staff wouldn't fry. Rewriting the schedule was a

tremendous effort (Thank you, Maureen Pilon, wherever you are!), but in the end BCP teachers had the same number of days off as their CP counterparts, while the wear and tear produced by the former system (three 4-week terms in a row followed by a frantic two-week break) was visibly lessened. Companies approved of the fact they were losing their employees for one week less than before and, based on our observations and tests, participants were achieving comparable results. Best of all, the teachers found they could put all their energies into each term since there would be time to recuperate afterwards and even see a bit of the country.

The second BCP innovation was the standardization of BCP evaluations. When I first arrived at LIOJ, “the evaluations” were a dreaded task awaiting every BCP instructor at the end of the term. Arguments would occur (we all think our style is best, eh?) and some instructors would literally stay up all night to finish their dreaded one-page-for-each-student. By analyzing the written evaluations from earlier terms, we were able to standardize the format and phrasing. As a result, teaching teams could easily complete their “evals” for each student, while the format still allowed for tailored comments from the core classroom teachers.

And what was a “core classroom teacher”? The final innovation, which I feel benefited students and staff the most, was a complete redesigning of the BCP program to allow for tailored courses, or “electives”. In the morning and early afternoon, the standard “core” classes were still in place based on the years of expertise and materials contained in LIOJ’s filing cabinets. In the late afternoon, however, students took electives chosen in consultation with an instructor at the start of the term. In fact, given the limited number of teaching staff, we managed to offer an amazing variety of electives, deciding what to offer after counseling sessions with participants on the first day. (One term, five participants were heading to Germany and we were able to provide “Survival German” as an elective thanks to our international staffing policy.) I strongly feel this new course format addressed the individual interests and needs of the participants more effectively, while allowing staff members the opportunity to explore areas they had or wanted to develop expertise in. Yes, the BCP was exciting—and it was heartbreaking to have to close it down.

As Japan’s economic bubble began to burst, the company training budgets were the first to go. I and Miyuki Ohno, my manager, were told this over and over at the numerous companies we visited. Also, the limited training funds available were being used to send businesspeople overseas for the kind of courses we provided. Personnel coordinators knew their employees would get more out of attending LIOJ,

but at the same price, the West Coast looked more impressive in the eyes of management. And in the end, both the Business Communication Program and *Cross Currents* met their demise to stop the flow of red ink at our end.

During this time of upheaval I was understandably upset. We had all spent a great deal of time and energy, (blood, sweat, and tears?) to create a greatly improved BCP and now it was going to be thrown away. But given the years that have passed and the time to reflect, I now realize it is in the nature of all things, including institutions, to change. For myself, one major personal benefit was the realization that I wanted to be back in the classroom full time. I now know I can never be an effective administrator since I find it impossible to separate my work life from my private life - and feelings. (For the same reasons, I would not want to become a social worker!) This was a valuable lesson. Another personal benefit gleaned from my time at LIOJ was the opportunity to develop and test ideas some of which are still evolving, including “generic” language learning software which I am developing in my present position as a professor at Shonan Institute of Technology in Fujisawa. But perhaps the most precious gift of all from my time spent “up on the hill” is the network of close friends I have maintained around the world. I keep in touch with a surprising number of former colleagues and students, and each time we meet, can still wax nostalgic about “the good ol’ days”—the cocktail parties that deteriorated into disco dances; the all-night movie viewings at the Orion-za cinema; the retreats at Masami’s Hakone Guesthouse where we would stay up all night playing board games and soaking in the hot spring. *These* are the things that are really important: the enjoyment of life in the pursuit of personal growth, and the wonderful, precious memories we collect along the way. Thank you LIOJ!