

Bill Crutchfield
(1968~69)

I was asked for a "a few paragraphs" about my time at LIOJ. Absolutely impossible. Where to start—or end. Where to begin—and how. Crossroads. The road less traveled—or never traveled. No, I will not be brief. Too much happened, and the sum of it changed my life. Or, more accurately, became my life.

In the summer of '66, I left home on a two-week "Sing Out" (the original name of "Up with People") youth conference in Estes Park, Colorado. Instead of returning to Arkansas, I spent thirteen months on the road with Glennie Close, the Colwell Brothers, and Herbie Allen.

From there, the natural step was Mackinac College (alias Camelot), where at the end of my freshman year, four of us were picked to come to Japan at the request of Mr. Shibusawa to start a new English school at the Asia Center in Odawara. The "Extended Residence Program" (ERP) provided for our plane tickets and room and board for four months of volunteer teaching as we continued our Mackinac classes by correspondence. I came to Japan on a four-month contract almost thirty-four years ago!

I'm still not sure how this happened. Perhaps the villain most responsible is Mr. Shibusawa himself. Near the end of my contract, he made me an offer I could not refuse: to travel along free with "Sing Out Asia" on their tour of the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, if I would agree to another four-month contract. I had no reason to refuse. I loved it in Odawara. The Harkers were two of the nicest people I had ever known. Also, at the beginning, we had about as many teachers as there were students, so our teaching load was light.

I was twenty years old and I felt so independent. But any time I needed a touch of motherly kindness, Terttu was there with crackers and peanut butter and jelly and the most wonderful, heart-warming smile. I guess if I had to pick the number one reason I fell in love with Japan, it would be the warmth and kindness of the Harkers. A new life—the pure exhilaration of a country boy living abroad, with the added benefit of living on the other side of the earth from my father. And I enjoyed teaching immensely.

So I took the offer of a free trip. And just as we were about to leave, one of the soloists left to return home and I was given his solo. That was fun, but I didn't realize its significance until six months later. After finishing another term at LIOJ, again I was planning my trip home when the 65-member "Sing Out Asia" broke up and a ten-member group was formed, called just "Sing Out." The contract with NHK to start a new one-hour music show ("Stage 101") to be on television every Saturday night called for eight Japanese and two foreigners. Again, the quirky hand of fate. One of the Americans left to go home and I was asked to take his place. Two months later, we won the Grand Prize at the Yamaha Music Festival with the Nakamura Hachidai tune *Namida o Koete*.

After one year with "Sing Out," I went back to Arkansas to change my visa and ultimately had to stay six months. By that time, "Sing Out" had disbanded. I had no job and nowhere to live. I really don't know why I came back.

Suddenly Mr. Shibusawa stepped back into my life, introducing me to an elderly Japanese who wanted to start an English school in Tokyo. This I did—at the age of twenty-two. Within one year, we had over 150 students and the owner decided to start one of the first English kindergartens in Japan—Ikegami English Kindergarten. I was head of the English School and assistant principal of the kindergarten from 1971 to 1997.

But let me back up a moment to 1971. In the summer of that year, Etsuko Ichikawa attended LIOJ. Several months later, one of the teachers (David Orr) invited her, along with other teachers and students, to his Christmas party on December 11 (my father's birthday). That is where we met, thanks to LIOJ! We were married at the Mitsui Club. (I also have fond memories of tea in the Mitsui garden beside the Asia Center. Of course, the Shibusawas were our *nakodo*.)

MRA; Up with People (our daughter traveled in its last full year); Mackinac College; the Asia Center/LIOJ; the Harkers; the Shibusawas; and the Sohmas; OCA—international exchange between Japan, the Philippines, and especially Thailand—these wonderful people have been the conductors that have enabled me to create the music of my life. They have guided me and cared for me. They have offered countless opportunities to learn and grow and serve. For opportunities to teach and to sing—and especially for the chance to meet my wife, Etsuko—I am eternally grateful.

Many years ago, MRA's four absolutes—Honesty, Purity, Unselfishness, and Love—were "stuffed down our throats" every day on the road with Up with People. Perhaps more important today than ever before they are meant to be our guide, like the North Star for the ancient mariner. This is what our leaders taught—by word and with their lives.

And Guidance—that quiet time when we stop to listen. When we open our souls for the inspiration, regardless of where we personally feel it comes from.

These things are as important and real to me now as they were in the summer of 1966 when I left home at the age of seventeen to go on the road with "Sing Out '66." Thank you! And CONGRATULATIONS for fifty years of making a difference—in my life and countless others!