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(1968~69)

In 1968, I was one of four American students invited to teach at the newly established Language Institute of Japan (LIOJ). The charter class there was due to commence study in mid September, and we arrived a week or so prior to that. As undergraduate students, we were neither teachers by trade nor were we studying education as a discipline at the time. Attending the same college in the United States, we were participants in what was called an "Extended Residence Program," a program that allowed us to spend a semester or a year abroad pursuing private research or taking classes in a specific area in a country of our choice. While the four of us were all pursuing different areas of study, we were to assist with the teaching at LIOJ.

While there were other more mature, experienced teachers lined up to teach at LIOJ. Our main claim to fame, I suppose, was that we were young representatives of American culture. (In those days, there was a strong demand in Japan for teachers to be not only native speakers of English but that they be American as well.) Understanding that we were not trained teachers, Mr. Roland Harker, the head of LIOJ, arranged a three-day crash course in teaching prior to our arrival in Japan. We were fortunate to be able to do this at the University of Southern California, receiving the undivided attention of Dr. Sumako Kimizuka, a leading researcher of linguistics and instructor of ESL teachers. Not only did Dr. Kimizuka prepare a very condensed and illuminating course for us, she also designed a program of research and practical study so that we could, if we wished, acquire college credits for the time we spent teaching in Japan. Dr. Kimizuka also took a personal interest in us, kept in touch with us throughout the year and even invited us to her parents' home in Kokubunji on her brief visit to Japan. In addition to arranging this introduction to ESL for us, Mr. Harker and the other teachers of LIOJ also planned regular training sessions for us, as well as meetings to discuss and share teaching approaches.

While we had a relatively light teaching load to allow us time to do our own study, we were heavily involved in extracurricular activities. We had all our meals with students and often spent weekends together as well. There were many memorable outings and trips—swimming off the rocks in Atami, hiking in Kamikochi, ice skating in Gotemba, relaxing at hot springs, and even going out with the fishing boats in Odawara in the wee hours of the morning. With a charter class of only about twelve students, we were more like family than a school. Although we were given the title of "teacher," we were constantly learning about Japan and Japanese culture from our students.

Witnessing the progress of the students' English-speaking ability was an exciting experience for me, especially since I had never taught before. In a matter of four months, many who had not been able to put together a simple sentence were speaking with confidence at meal times and even having successful arguments with us. As young pseudo-teachers, my classmates

and I felt thrilled to be involved in the students' learning process. In addition, there was no doubt in our minds that, while the classes were essential, it was the extracurricular English that made the critical difference in the students' motivation to learn and their increasing facility with language.

Our time at LIOJ was at the height of the Vietnam War and there were student riots both in the United States and Japan. It was all very frightening, and we were often in a state of turmoil about our own futures and our stand on issues. News was not as frequent or as comprehensive as it is today and communication by telephone was expensive. At those psychologically trying times as well, the staff at LIOJ showed special sensitivity. We had many mentors and people who took the time to talk with us about pressing issues of the day.

Although we were initially contracted to stay a semester, we all decided to stay at LIOJ for the entire academic year or longer. All of the staff at LIOJ took a special interest in us and assisted us in our research and study.

There is no doubt that my time at LIOJ was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Over the years, I have kept in touch with many of the students and have gotten together with them on many social occasions. While my experience at LIOJ dates back more than 30 years and while teachers there today are far more qualified than I was, I imagine that the intrinsic essentials of LIOJ remain the same: the care of the teachers and staff and an exciting learning environment.