

Ann Frentzen
(1971~73, 75-76)

The following is an excerpt from an essay I wrote in 1980 on the LIOJ teachers' lounge while a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University.

...The room itself seemed to hold all those things we deemed necessary for a semi-secure psychological existence. Against one wall, stood shelves holding our ever-growing collection of used paperbacks. Some we had brought with us, some had been sent by concerned parents, but most had been collected through well-organized forays into the book-seller sections of Tokyo. It was here, I was introduced to the likes of Azimov, Christie, Clavell, and Delderfield. Our shelves in the office held those books with which we worked; the shelves in the lounge held those with which we escaped. Both were equally important.

Against another wall, and then expanding into various corners, was our state of the art stereo system. When we first began our work in Japan, the record collection was minimal and limited to those three Creedence Clearwater albums purchased by Stott, the Canadian. Day and night, constantly. Boom-boom-boom. Other albums began to be purchased, if only in self-defense. By the time we held our first wedding, a year and a half later, appropriate music was no problem.

Over in another corner was a sink, a small refrigerator, a coffee pot, and an oven-toaster. School management feared we would waste away on a purely Japanese diet and so provided its interpretation of a touch of home. Americana consisted of uncut loaves of bread, peanut butter, and strawberry jam. Tons of strawberry jam. Someone was always making toast, and, since at least four pieces could be squeezed into the toaster oven, group etiquette required that you cook for whoever else was present. If Stott was filling your order, you got huge slabs of bread, raw in the middle, with peanut butter and jam piled high and dripping down the sides. If Ebner was doing the honors, the results were far more fastidious. Dainty little slices, butter on the bottom, further additions only if specifically requested.

During our first summer, the staff expanded temporarily and included two British expatriots. Come four-thirty, religiously, they would appear in the lounge for tea and we were fascinated. It was a ritual soon adopted by all and we continued it after our guests' departure in August. Some of my best memories center themselves on those afternoon gatherings when we had the coffee bubbling, the toast toasting, and classical music coming from the stereo. Michael and Gwen would be sharing *The Japan Times*, Sully would be organizing a Scrabble game, and Nancy was invariably writing letters to someone somewhere. Almost all were together and it was a quiet time in what were otherwise incredibly hectic days.

This is not to say that times in the lounge were always quiet and sedate. The wee hours of weekend nights had their own stories to tell. Activities ranged from the staff's raucous introduction to square dancing to the contest to see who could kick the ceiling while swinging on a pair of crutches. Stott won hands-down despite the ten-pound cast on his leg. He of course had had more practice...

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