

**Paul Cook
(1973~74)**

Some experiences define a moment, some exert an influence that lasts a lifetime. For me, the year I spent at LIOJ in 1973-74 and a subsequent year in Komatsu have remained in my heart and mind. Memories of LIOJ and Japan: the smells, sounds, tastes; they revisit without invitation, sometimes drifting in on their own, sometimes reawakened by some association with an event in the present. However and whenever they arise, they are welcomed with joy and excitement.

As with many, the first manifestations of LIOJ to appear before me were Roland and Terttu Harker. They happened to be sitting across a table in the Toledo Airport, conducting an interview of my wife, Marty, and myself—two recent college graduates—both of us nervous, yet excited with the possibility of traveling to the other side of the world.

The next manifestation was at the Tokyo airport, Mr. Kehara, so quiet, escorting us to a van that carried us to the MRA center in Tokyo. We arrived in the dark of night, unable to see all that surrounded us. The next day we traveled to Odawara with eyes straining to catch all that passed: the houses, shops, mountains and seacoast. My new home was room 409, with a spectacular window seat looking out east, over the castle, the city, and the Pacific. I tried to imagine the shores of California far across the waves. Much closer, the rhythmic droning of unknown insects cut through the heat and humidity of summer in Japan.

Around me was an amazing new environment to explore: LIOJ, an “Island of English in a Sea of Japan.” Mr. Kimura, Toni, the secretaries and staff, Mr. Shibusawa, Dr. Sohma. Gradually, I learned the names to associate with the friendly smiling faces. I remember meeting the Joys in the teachers' lounge, a comfortable environment where I would spend many an hour. Other teachers stopped in, introductions and short life stories were exchanged.

It wasn't long before someone took me to the place I grew to love the most: the rooftop...on top of the elevator shaft...the highest point around...a 360 degree view! From there I would spend hours looking over the city, watching boats in the harbor and trains moving to and fro, fast and slow. My favorite was the little train to Gora. I remember watching it at night as it slowly wound its way through Odawara, moving up the mountain valley toward Hakone, its lights glowing yellow, looking so much like a toy.

So many lasting memories. The first trip to town: the hidden smiles of the *kamaboko* shop women as I asked to buy just one piece, thinking it to be a pastry treat, and their giggles as they saw the shock on my face when I bit into the cold, rubbery fishcake. The first trip with other new teachers to the tip of the Izu Peninsula: staying in a *minshuku*, awakening after a night of celebration, being roused out of my bedding which disappeared into the closet to be replaced by a table upon which plates of food were placed—dried fish with their heads still on, a bowl of rice, a raw egg, something that looked like green plastic sheets. The 4th of July trip to an island off the coast. Skiing at Akkakura. Kazou's rooftop beer garden near the train station. The temples. Trying to keep up with Mr. Harker on one of the many walks. Unosan's

minshuku in Kyoto. The Odawara fish market at dawn. Camping with the teachers. One Night Castle. Alison's house.

Not to be overlooked are all the memories of the LIOJ students and teachers. The welcome parties. English 900 classes. Radio plays. Lunches and dinners with the students where both learned of each other's culture and traditions. The "Formal Dinner" with candlelight. Nights on the town with the students. The farewell party. It was a wonderfully full schedule, a cycle repeated with each new class.

Lastly, I will never forget my experiences traveling throughout Japan. I believe I saw it all—or so it seemed. Riding the *Shinkansen* and the local trains. Hiking in the Southern Alps. The countryside, the mountains, and the seacoast. Phil Como let me borrow his little motorcycle for a two-day trip in the Hakone mountains. I later purchased a larger version and spent my time trying to get lost on the narrow windy roads visiting small fishing villages, looking for the colorful banners that let me know there was going to be a festival at a temple later that evening. My quest to discover the small local festivals was almost as consuming as my need to visit as many *onsen* as possible. The *ofuro* is possibly the greatest gift that Japan has made to the world...saaaahh! How could I forget the pottery!

The effect of LIOJ and Japan on my life is immeasurable. For over twenty years I have held cherry blossom viewing parties for hundreds of friends in Washington DC, West Virginia, and now Madison, Wisconsin. My breakfast of choice would be the traditional Japanese one that so revolted me at first sight. While I have not translated my experience in Japan into one of the workplace, the experience so touched my soul that it will always be a part of my life. The friends that I made there will forever travel with me.