

**Gene Phillips  
(1974~75)**

I always tell people that I became an adult in Odawara. I took a position at LIOJ in the fall of 1974, just out of college and very naïve about most things, including Japan and career planning. I went mostly because I didn't want to go to graduate school in English literature and needed time to figure out alternatives. Going abroad seemed like a good idea, East Asia appealed to me in a vague way, and LIOJ offered me a job even though I had no ESL or other teacher training. My plan was to stay a year while I sorted things out.

When I arrived, I was both the youngest and least experienced of all the teachers, but I was willing and eager to learn. Fortunately, Mr. Harker was understanding, Bill Harshbarger was a very helpful academic coordinator, and I was paired with a terrific, experienced teacher, Sully Taylor. It was also a great year for parties. Early on, I joined with Liz Harmon to hold a poetry reading party at her house, we had a number of progressive dinners, and we joined the students for a number of class sushi parties downtown. I also went to my first academic-year-end bash at Hatsushima. That first year was a wonderful year of growth and learning about my fellow teachers (Bill, Sully, Alison, Liz, Mike, Gwen, and others whose names have not stuck with me), the staff (Masami, Yoshiko, and Yuko), my own strengths and weaknesses, and Japan. Some time in the spring, it became clear that there would be a shortage of teachers for the next year, and it was an easy decision for me to sign up for another year. Though I made the decision lightly, its results completely changed the course of my life.

During that second year, I fell in love and decided to get married. Sayoko Takada was my student for two sessions, and on the last day she was at LIOJ, I asked her for a date. I still remember the startled looks on the faces of some of my colleagues when I told them I was engaged. Within about eight months we were married, and two years later we had our first child. We just celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year.

I wound up staying in Japan for five and a half years, leaving LIOJ's residential program but remaining with the school as a community teacher. Odawara and Japan became my home. I vividly remember the first time one of the women in my neighborhood greeted me as I returned home from work with, "*Okaerinasai*." Many teachers came through, and I remember almost all their faces and personalities, if not their names. Over those years, I learned Japanese, developed better Japanese manners, was taught *go* by Lance Knowles, made friendships with families in the community (with the Amanos, the Ishibashis, the Suzukis, and many others), who were always very kind to us, and developed an interest in Japanese ceramics. That interest, which became something of a passion, led to my present career.

After spending some time in Seattle as an ESL teacher and amateur potter, I decided to go to graduate school after all; I went to Berkeley in 1986 to study Japanese art history. While I fully expected to make pottery my focus, somehow I shifted to medieval painting. Currently, I am an associate professor of Japanese art in the Department of Art History at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

I sometimes go back to Japan, but take no pleasure in going to Odawara. I barely recognize it anymore, growth has changed it so much. But I always consider Odawara my second hometown and remember it with the greatest fondness, as I do my years at LIOJ.