

**Liz Neblett  
(1981~83)**

*Konnichiwa.* I went to Odawara on July 4, 1981. I stayed until July 1983. I was hired at the March TESOL Convention, which was at Boston University, as I was looking for a job overseas, either in Japan or Colombia. Yes, two very different places, but the majority of my students were from those two countries, so those were the places I wanted to go.

What attracted me to LIOJ was the residential aspect. I'd been a dorm counselor for groups of Japanese English teachers, so I thought it'd be fun to be in such an intensive residential program. I was right. It was probably the most intense teaching experience I'll ever have.

I recall that my race (African-American) was an issue in the interview. Lance and the right-hand man at the time, Masami, were concerned that I might have trouble finding an apartment in Odawara. No trouble at all, and I think it was good for the students to find out that not all black people sing the blues (or can sing the blues to begin with). I lived in the apartments across from the *keirin-jo* at the bottom of the hill. Tom and Fran Smith lived in the opposite building. Bicycle race days were not a pleasant experience for me, and I think I would've moved if I'd decided to stay beyond the second year.

I had a great time at LIOJ, especially from the middle of the first year through the winter of my second year. There was a big turnover when I came, so there was a large group of new teachers. We seemed to get along very well together. That was part of the fun. My best memories are of dancing at the late night monthly cocktail parties, dancing in Roppongi discos with Lori, Warrick, and former LIOJ students, and of a July '82 "A" class, with a student named Mr. Agari. Mr. Agari worked for Shimizu Construction, which always sent me the most enjoyable "A" class students. I taught the morning class, Amir Avitzer taught the business class, and a summer teacher taught the afternoon class. Mr. Agari was so low that he rarely said more than "Good morning," "Good afternoon," and "Good evening" even after three weeks. He could also say "How are you?" and "Fine, thank you." But, could he sing! At karaoke bars, Mr. Agari sang like Louis Armstrong in perfect English. He was a big favorite at the cocktail parties (he stayed two sessions). I even have a cassette tape that I recorded while on a trip to a downtown karaoke bar named "Fishing Paris." I can hear Mr. Agari singing "Summertime" in the background, and the other students speaking English at the top of their lungs. This same class made a videotape called "The Karaoke." The theme was that a businessman works hard every day and takes a lot of abuse from his boss, but at night, when he goes out to the karaoke bar and sings, he becomes a star. It's a great tape, and when I see it, it brings back a lot of good memories.

I've kept in close touch with Ruth Sasaki, Metha Bos, and occasionally Lori Brooks-Manas. At TESOL and other education/technology-related conventions, I usually run into Lance Knowles, Andy Blasky, and occasionally, Bill Gatton, Jim Bergstrom, and Jane Prestebak-Ruud. Every now and then, I get an e-mail from Mike Kleindl. I saw Tom and Fran Smith at their New Year's Day party a couple years ago.

What's new? I've been teaching ESL at a community college in Elizabeth, New Jersey for the past twelve years. I've co-authored a grammar book series and am in the process of a major revision of the series. I went back to school a couple years ago and got a second master's in educational communication and technology. As for overseas experiences, I mostly travel for pleasure, but I did spend six months in southern Italy on a Fulbright grant. For a long time, I kept my hands in the Japan experience by teaching Japanese culture in the Japan Orientation for Youth for Understanding exchange program. *Owari.*