

**Jim Sampson  
(1992~94)**

My career, before arriving at LIOJ, and been different to that of most language teachers: fifteen years as an officer in the Royal Air Force, followed by twenty-three years with a Canadian airline, and then retirement at age 60. I arrived in Odawara in July 1992 with no idea of what to expect. The first sight of the Asia Centre was impressive. It was hard to adapt to a completely different lifestyle, but the beautiful surroundings helped.

My previous teaching experience had been as a flying instructor, which was usually done one on one. The first few hours with a student pilot are spent bringing him, both in ability and confidence, to the point that he is ready for his first solo flight. I thought, at first, there would be no similarities with language teaching. I was wrong.

One student, in my first class, sat in silence and no coaxing could elicit an answer. His written work indicated he had a working knowledge of English. Later in the course, I sat down and tried to encourage him, asking why he did not ask for clarification or repetition if he did not understand. He stared at the floor, and then without looking up he replied in a whisper, "I can't. I'm Japanese." That made it obvious that teaching English also demanded that some students needed to be given the confidence to use their newly found knowledge.

My next lesson came outside the school. The hills of the Hakone area are beautiful, and I spent every Sunday exploring those hills. It was at the end of one of my long walks on a late summer afternoon, hot and very humid, that an "older English gentleman" wearing shirt, pants and climbing boots, soaked in sweat, covered in dust and grime and carrying a small rucksack, was walking through the main shopping area of Odawara. The street was crowded with people dressed smartly and elegantly, as was the Japanese custom. He felt very conspicuous and out of place. Then he noticed an "older Japanese gentleman," dressed in full leathers, sitting side saddle on a parked 1500 cc motorbike, enjoying a cigarette. Their eyes met. They grinned. The Englishman gave the ancient Roman "thumbs up" sign. The Japanese gentleman bowed his head slightly. Their skins were different colours. They spoke different languages. They enjoyed different foods. They worshiped different Gods. But they were brothers; they were rebels! Three weeks later I bought my first motorcycle.

One bonus to my taking up the teaching profession will surprise most people. I grew up in a small village near Liverpool. Like the rest of the inhabitants of the village, my elder brother and sisters were conservative. I was the black sheep of the family. My time in the RAF had been acceptable. I was, after all, serving the Queen. However, being an airline pilot was not really a respectable occupation: not like being an accountant or working in a bank. They were secretly ashamed of me. They would ask my son, when he visited them: "When is your father going to settle down?" I think they were sorry for him. At LIOJ, I was a teacher. That was different: a very proper profession. They could hold up their heads again and say to anyone who asked: "James? Oh he's an English teacher in Japan." Once again, their errant younger brother had acquired a measure of respectability.