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The way I see it, LIOJ is like New York in that song celebrating “the city that never sleeps.” If you can make it there, you’ll make it anywhere.

Teaching at LIOJ is physically, psychologically, and professionally demanding not only because of the quantity of the workload, but of the diverse quality of roles and responsibilities one takes on. A typical “heavy” day could start in the morning with a business writing class, then lunch, coffee, and small talk with business students, an interview with an incoming community program student, a kindergarten and/or elementary class, and, finally, an evening adult class. And we’re not counting the hours it took to prepare beforehand for this day.

Or, it could be a typical High School Intensive day, starting with conversation strategies, followed by a 3-class rotation of basic American Sign Language, culminating in the twists and turns of the Macarena. In between, one tries to engage and be engaging in English to Japanese teenagers who are energized (or overwhelmed) by the “English-only” environment and the experience of being somewhere outside of school with their friends and doing strange, new stuff.

If there is anything I have learned from teaching at LIOJ (aside from how to nurture a deep well of humor and compassion), it is that it takes a team of highly skilled, highly motivated, and highly committed teachers to improve the English ability of a village. My colleagues, my teaching partners, my mentors—some of whom have become and remain my friends—sustained me through it all. So did my students, the English learners who probably never knew they taught me innumerable life lessons.

When I look back at that wide-eyed, nervous non-native speaker who suddenly found herself smack in the middle of a passionate discussion between colleagues on the differences between British English and American English (and silently wondering what the fuss was all about), I’m amazed at my temerity to have thought I could make it in a foreign culture, teaching a second language, working with a colorful group of professionals from Europe, Asia, and America. Well, I did make it, and I have become stronger, wiser, and eager to learn and give more because of it. And I miss that team of wired and wacky individuals who never gave up when the going got tough because they were true professionals. I think I could be wrong though. Maybe they never gave up because they weren’t professionals. They were amateurs, the best kind. The ones who did things for the love of it.