

THE NAIL THAT STICKS OUT

One American's 18 Months in Japan

by

Dennis Lowden

1230 S. Clark Ave.

Independence, MO 64057-1140

For the Students of
Shoin Women's University
Kobe, Japan

Introduction

During the Spring Semester, 1995, I was employed as a part-time philosophy professor at three separate institutions in the Kansas City area: Baker University, Rockhurst College, and College of St. Francis. None of these jobs had any promise of longevity to it, and one day in April, I talked with John Petrik, another part-timer in philosophy at Rockhurst, about the possibility of teaching overseas. My wife, Mata, and I, began having conversations on the prospects of living in another country, and having the opportunity to travel, and she was enthusiastic about it. One of my students said John had mentioned educational opportunities in Europe and Asia to her during a regular counseling session, and he appeared to be an information focal point on that subject for both sides of the podium. Among his recommendations to me was that I write a letter to his younger brother, James, who was teaching at a school in Kobe, Japan. His first-hand experiences might be the best guide to the problems and pitfalls, as well as unanticipated pleasures of teaching abroad. James was most happy to share his knowledge, and felt I stood a good chance of being hired somewhere in Japan if I was willing to come over and make my case personally to various schools and colleges. That was April, and also out of the question, financially.

By July, I was teaching summer school at Baker U., and unexpectedly received a query from James: would I be interested in replacing him at Shoin Women's University? It was an intriguing long-shot, but I sent the school as complete a dossier as I could throw together in a short time, and soon was contacted by an official of Shoin, Mr. Yasuro Takahashi, Director of International Programs. Shoin has an exchange relationship with several schools in the United

States, in which the American school sends a visiting professor in English for two years, and Shoin sends them groups of students for intensive courses during Shoin's vacation time, as well as individual students of high ability for year-long studies abroad. Ohio University, James's home institution, was unable to propose a suitable replacement, and Shoin had to dip into the available pool of qualified applicants. Thanks to the Brothers Petrik, my name had been recently added to the pool, and after the formalities had been concluded with the various committees and assemblies at Shoin, I became the choice, in August, 1995, for an eighteen-month contract as Visiting Professor of English Language and American Studies. I was expected to arrive by September 20, and had to leave by March 31, 1997.

It all seemed so sudden, and improbable at times, that when it became a *fait accompli*, there began a major rebellion on the home front. We had been approved as a couple, and Mata was expected to accompany me. Shoin was giving us each \$2000 to defray the costs of the trip to Kobe, but Mata decided that she was not ready to leave Kansas City and her family, for whom she had always been the first and last line of support, to go to a land where nothing was familiar and everyone would be hostile. Thus, I arrived in Japan, on September 19, alone. A significant part of what follows in this book is the story of the roller coaster ride our marriage took while I was over here, the internal and external confusion it bred in both of us, and what seems, at this point, to be its eventual resolution.

Acknowledgments

The frequency of letters to various correspondents is a fair gauge of the person's meaning to me during this year and a half, so their inclusion in this journal should be acknowledgment enough, but NO! The greedy bastards want to read it here, too. All right, all right, **thank you**, okay? (in the order in which the names of you crybabies come to mind) Inga Taylor, Gloria Vando Hickok, Fred Hunsdorfer, Bill Lowden, Phil Lowden, Jake Lowden, Jeff Lowden, Melanie Cole, Rick Botkin, Julian Catalano, Pete Duffy, Joe Fossati, Sandra Mori, Kate Grover, Jeff Hollister, Becky Wilson, Don Hatcher, Jason Ontjes, George Wiley, Dr. J. Edward Kendrick, Sally Gronniger, John Petrik, Julie Ryan, Paul Long, Dana Letts, and Margot Nitzsche. Sorry, Margot. Somebody has to be last.

Of course, the same general conclusion can be reached concerning the people in Japan who made a difference in my life during my time there; how many times did I mention them? Most of them are too modest or well brought up to act like Americans would, so I don't feel I'll offend any of them by omission sufficient to bring about retaliation at a military level. But a few are special. Takahashi-san, Ida-san, and Murakami-san, all at Shoin, continuously made me feel welcome and appreciated. The love and esteem for my students is what this book is all about, so I won't put any of their names here, and each of my colleagues in Shoin's English Department, in his or her own unique way, made my stay memorable, and in some cases, actually enjoyable. Thanks, but especially Chris, Katrina, and Peter. Robert Conine was the best roommate I never slept with, which is meant to be more of a compliment than it sounds, I suppose. And the Hori

family members have become true, deep friends for life.

Finally, and most important of all, my wife Mata, with whom I learned a great deal during this time. Chiefest was how much I love her and how easily I malfunction without her immediate presence in my life. In the thunderstorms that are my life, she is the surge protector which keeps my RAM from fusing with my floppy. I was going to use an image about my hard drive, but this is a book for the whole family, or at least the first few pages are, and I wanted to keep this section as sentimental as I could.

If there are any inaccuracies contained in this account, they are either unintentional, meant for humorous effect, or a result of my skewed way of viewing the world

Dennis Lowden

Kansas City, Missouri

July 1997

Friday, September 22, 1995; Kobe

“The nail that sticks out gets hammered down.” This summer, when I told a class of Japanese students of mine at Baker University in Kansas that I might be offered a visiting professorship in Japan, one of them quoted me that aphorism. He was a young artist, already showing signs of having been nailed too often, and seeming to breathe more easily and comfortably in The Land of the Free. But that’s my country, too. Though I have always felt like the nail that sticks out as well, and even what is claimed to be the territory of Ayn Rand has ways of hammering down the unrepentant. The velvet hammer has as much force as the sledge.

Sitting now in my sparse room, too small to be an apartment, too large to be a dormitory, I am beginning my third full day in Japan. Nine months after the fact, the evidence of the great Hanshin Earthquake is everywhere. It might easily be the case that my opportunity to take this position is directly related to the fact that the colleague I am replacing experienced the quake, as did his wife and small children. I am here alone, though my wife, Mata, needed nothing of a geological nature to keep her in the states.

We met only a month or two after I moved to Kansas City from Maryland in 1978. Had she been wearing her infamous green dress, we might have been married, or worse, on the spot. As it happened, I was hired to teach meteorology at a government training center from which

Mata had recently graduated, and she was making a return visit to the concrete campus in August. She brought her two elementary school children, Melanie and Michael, with her, and while she visited old profs, the kids found that my office wall had a full-size mock-up of a Boeing 747 control panel. It was not my doing. My office-mate, Bill Winkert, besides being one of her former teachers, was also an aviation buff. He was out of town on assignment, so I was stuck trying to explain to Melanie and Michael that I got nosebleeds going into the attic, so that piloting 300 passengers at 38,000 feet was out of the question. They were great kids: inquisitive, polite without being nauseating, intelligent in a down-to-earth way, great-looking. The fact that they were black did not accentuate these qualities in my perceptions; the fact that they were the children of a government employee did. Then I met their mother, Mata, with a fashionable Afro 'do several degrees to the modest side of Angela Davis, stem-to-stern loveliness, and spritely affability. That latter quality might have been related to the fact that, as a stranger, I kept her children occupied while she went cubicle by cubicle, socializing. And what was I? A 30-something white man with more beard and hair than any of my colleagues, and excesses of energy and off-center ideas.

Unfortunately, at that time she worked in Des Moines, but in less than a year, she moved back to Kansas City, and took an office job with the National Weather Service, about three miles from where I taught. We never went on a genuine date. She invited me and my son, Jake, to a company picnic. I took us all to a Royals baseball game, and every year I remembered her birthday with a lunch out. She seemed to make nothing of the fact that I sent her Valentine's Day cards annually, though they were of the wise-ass, hide-your-feelings-behind-a-joke variety.

Her younger sister, Tracy, had given her a Lacoste knitted green dress, and she wore it often to work. The first time I saw her in it was during a visit to the federal building where she worked to consult with some scientists from the National Severe Storms Forecast Center, Les Lemon and Chuck Doswell. To this day, they probably remain astounded at my incessant interest during that time in their research, and theories they had spun about thunderstorm formation and intensification. Fat chance. I was hoping to catch a glimpse of Mata in her green dress again. I was even tempted to lobby with her supervisor against further promotions, using the hypothesis that the more money she had, the more clothes she could buy, and the fewer times per months she would be reduced to wearing the green dress. It hugged her butt in a way I could only do in my dreams.

Her attraction was not only, or even primarily, physical. The green dress possessed more of a talismanic significance in our early relationship; it would return at regular intervals to reinforce sensual undercurrents which were only present in my mind and desires. We spent a lot of time, and your tax dollars, sitting at her desk, talking. I knew of her current romantic attachment (Mac, in Des Moines, a former student of mine), she listened as I recounted the sad tales of women traipsing in and quickly out of my life in those days. I couldn't call her at night, since her father, with whom she and her children still lived, was not very racially flexible concerning her social life, and also was not especially prompt at paying the telephone bill. In the early 1980's, I started a newsletter in Kansas City, *Hair of the Dog*. It concerned one of my passions, wine, and Mata had recently become Born Again, and had set aside consumption of alcohol. I guess to her it seemed harmless enough, since I was just **writing** about the stuff. At

least, until that one day when she came to my house for a cookout. As she walked by the dining room table, there were about 25 bottles of pinot noir sitting there, all opened and partially depleted. She may have expected, after that, to spy women's undergarments dangling from the chandelier, or 55-gallon drums of controlled substances stacked in the basement. But Mata has an infinitely forgiving nature, and seems constitutionally inclined to look for the positive in everyone, which, in my case, often took a concerted search.

By December of 1983, *Hair of the Dog* had taken me to the poorhouse, and had to be put to sleep. Its loss meant more than the near-foreclosure on my house, and credit cards snatched back from their issuers. It meant the death of a dream that I could no longer dare dream. The first few months of 1984 were pure depression. I shaved my beard, dated one truly repulsive and whacked-out woman, and was inconsolable. I was also traveling a lot, teaching the new Doppler Radar technology to weather stations in Montgomery, Alabama, and Chicago. The day before flying out for a week in The Windy City, Mata saw me by an elevator in the federal building, and later said I looked like I had lost my best friend. Well, of course I had; dreams are the friends the lonely create in their solitude, and mine had been taken away. She wanted to help me by talking about the status of my soul.

Well, it had no status, as far as I knew, at least not to its resident. I am not religious, and certainly not anti-religious. I was shackled with growing up the son a Methodist minister who seemed godlike to me. He preached great, coherent, intellectually stimulating, socially relevant sermons; he cared passionately about others, particularly those society had left behind: racial minorities, migrant workers, new immigrants, women. He demanded the best of a church, and

eventually he hanged himself in the attic of one in Ft. Lauderdale. No religious assembly, or person, ever measured up to him in my estimation, or my one-sided memories, and I finally gave up looking.

Upon my return to Kansas City in mid-March, Mata asked me if I would mind going to a banquet and gospel singing exhibition (not her term for it) by a guest artist imported for the occasion. I was not her first choice. The man she asked before me didn't want to go to anything religious, but would be happy to meet her afterward to party. I was ready for anything.

Following the event, and after six years of platonic, perhaps innocuous, friendship, she sat across from me at my dining room table, now mostly free of wine bottles. Though neither of us knew it, we were about one minute from our first kiss when she asked me the fateful question. It was phrased so gracefully, so winningly, but also so directly; anything different might have spooked me into my typical cowardly mode with the women I admired. What she asked me was this: "When you think of me, how do you see me?" I'm lucky this was 1984. In 1995, an answer like I gave would land me in a humiliating heap on the Sally Jessie Raphael Show, being shrieked at by trailer park trash on the back row. I answered directly from my heart, and its long-harbored dreams, though to Mata it sounded like ideas from another galaxy. I said, simply, "I think of you as my wife." See what I mean? She sat there, paralyzed dumb, trying to process data which was causing a circuit overload, and then, suddenly wondering why she was kissing me and I was kissing her.

We were engaged in a month, and married in five. Now we've just passed our 11th anniversary, though we've never been apart for more than ten days at a time. Already I miss her

terribly, perhaps in anticipation of how really bad it's going to get without her. I'm actually having a blast over here, but I know that her absence will wear me down like a K-Mart jogging shoe. Snuggling up to her bare butt every night was a ritual, now meaningful in its omission beyond anything a religion could ever offer. Her decision is to stay in America, work to build a fledgling business part-time, while continuing to work for Uncle, and the Department of Labor, full-time. She will visit when we can afford the plane fare, and we'll both try to be adults and tough it out.

My opinion about the whole thing is this: if men were supposed to be adults and tough things out, they'd never get married. The point of marrying is **never** having to tough things out, at a personal level, again. I'm a wuss; I'm not ashamed of it. And I'm also married. That's called cause and effect, and David Hume be damned.

Sunday, September 24, 1995, Kobe

Until coming to Japan, I never expected to find a country as consumer-driven as the U.S. Perhaps my surprise should be attributed the fact that this is my first trip beyond American borders. There are vending machines everywhere. I haven't visited a Shinto shrine yet, but I would not be astonished to find indulgence-vending machines therein; appalled, yes; astonished, no. Beer containers of all sizes will fall from a gleaming white machine for the right quantity of yen. Other products are at the ready if a brew is not required, and entire street corners are taken over by gangs of these machines, like neighborhood toughs, trying to cadge the odd yen from you at every step along the street. I have remained firm. Besides, I have found a shop in the 'hood where the beer is cheaper (though still between 150 and 200 yen -- at an exchange rate of about

100 yen to the dollar, I'll let you do the math -- for very common domestic brands: the Bud and Miller of Japan) and chilled fifths of Dom Perignon 1985 go for 6980 yen: a very decent price even in the U.S.

Where I live, in Nada-ku, a few miles east of downtown Kobe, there is a feel reminiscent of the larger American cities before Levittown. Culturally, the organization of the suburbs as an attractive alternative to city life, seems to be as momentous as the clearing of the frontier for American self-identification. It's unlikely to happen here, since there's no more land available onto which residential and pestilential enclaves can be situated. If I had one wish, beyond that of having my wife with me for this year-and-a-half, it would be to have John Brinkerhoff Jackson over here to walk the streets of Kobe with me. I've never met the man; perhaps we'd despise one another. Each of us has his moments of curmudgeonry. But I can't think of a more accurate and penetrating observer of human uses of living space. I've used a video about him, narrated by the wonderful actor Peter Coyote, in my environmental ethics classes at Baker University and the University of Kansas, and though it has little directly to do with the subject of the course, a point which the more doltish of students are apt to mention at the film's conclusion, one cannot view living space again idly after having been exposed to his way of seeing and analysis.

If Jackson and I were walking within a five-block radius of where I live, facing National Highway 2, we'd find everything necessary for life, and a lot which is pleasant but optional. Most of it is sold from stalls much smaller than a Winnebago, either on or off one of the narrow streets of Nada-ku. There are no alleys, here. If a vehicle of any description can fit through, it's a street, and liable to house a few stalls or shops. In addition to what one might call the ambient

shops which make up each block, there are two organized, two-block long covered arcades of small shops separated by two blocks, and extending up the hill on either side of Rokkomichi Station, the Japan Railways stop in this area. There is another station at the western border of Nada-ku, as well, and two other railway systems also run parallel to JR, one north of JR, and one to its south. And the city has excellent bus service. These markets are fun, particularly if you are caucasian, since you then become part of the entertainment for the shopkeepers, as they are for you. A kind of cultural symmetry there that I like. In the unlikely instance that something you needed wasn't offered nearby, public transportation is seldom more than two blocks, and ten minutes away. You have to be crazy to own a car in this burg, especially with the cheapest gas running 125 yen a liter. ## Wednesday, September 27, 1995, Kobe

I am beginning to experience some level of cultural withdrawal symptoms. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why a spouse or mate accompanying you is so important. He or she provides a crucial link with one's past and values -- commodities which all but disappear, at least for a time, when they are not a part of one's daily, epidermal experience. This is not to say that I've become a frothing madman, a Mr. Hyde abroad substituting for the Dr. Jekyll I am at home. My moral fiber, suspect as it has always been, is no more suspect in Japan. The frequency and intensity of my daily depravities have not increased. That's not quite what I meant by values, anyway. The content of our moral intuitions, I believe, cannot be evacuated so summarily. The parts of my life I valued merely by living them in the U.S. are no longer available here, or, if they are, are thrust into a context which alters them dramatically. Food is an example of great importance to me.

Since I did all the cooking and grocery shopping at home, and did so with attention, care, and concern, these were values which comprised my everyday life -- the epidermal experience which occurred from the skin in. Much is different here. In particular, I can't read the labels of the packaged foods, so I am left with pure observation as the only way of obtaining knowledge. The same thing happens as I walk down a street looking at store fronts and shop windows. The only way to discover what the place sells is to stick my head in the door, prepare myself for the astonishment of the occupants, and gaze around quickly to figure the place out. Sometimes I feel as if I must be an apparition to many of these people; a strange visage which appears and vanishes so rapidly that they may not be certain I was ever there at all.

How prescient I was to have assembled my own cajun spice mixture before leaving the states. The two quart-size plastic containers bring my palate a measure of familiarity, but just slightly out of step. Cajun noodles and tofu, topped with shredded cabbage is not likely to break into Paul Prudhomme's next cookbook, but it works for me. It has to. I've attempted to make a quasi-jambalaya, as well, but several ingredients aren't available, and I don't trust a sausage whose list of ingredients is in a foreign tongue. Come to think of it, I don't trust many when I know what's in them.

I'm proud to say that I haven't succumbed to patronizing one of the American eateries in town, such as KFC, McDonald's, and other fast food dumps. Honestly, I never went to them when they were just around the corner at home, so they weren't a part of my experienced reality, just a part of the cultural scenery. They don't hold any positive values for me, so their presence in Japan is not particularly comforting. They are the opposite; they seem to represent a form of

seductive cultural and commercial imperialism that we are fabulous at exporting. Why Americans keep supporting huge military bases overseas and the incredible drain of resources they represent is beyond my ken. Maybe Barbie knows. The “way of life” her effigy represents, and for which American GIs show the flag all over the globe is more efficiently and securely established commercially than militarily. And that is what Barbie knows. Every one of her who is bought and cuddled by an Asian girl contributes to a condition of cultural ambivalence. I’m not entirely sure that’s all bad, for I fear that the argument which holds up the point of view I have been espousing is the same general argument against such things as racial intermarriage, an alternative I clearly support. So if being against a Big Mac in Kobe means being against marrying someone of a different race, then I’ll have to welcome the slimeburger to Japan, though, like Bill Clinton, I won’t inhale. Speaking of inhaling, it seems to me that the smog in Kobe is as bad as L.A.’s, without the latter’s charm. That’s meant to be ... oh, never mind.

Thursday, September 28, 1995, Kobe

A report on flora and fauna. I am amazed at the paucity of insects in Kobe. I have seen one forlorn and confused fly since coming here more than a week ago, and this in spite of the fact that no one seems to have screens on anything. Perhaps my flat being 4 floors up contributes to this strange absence in my life, but I don’t recall being bothered by them at street level, either. The smog has probably killed them all. I tried to see if the fly I encountered had any of Jeff Goldblum’s body parts, but then, I am pleased to declare that I would not recognize any of Jeff Goldblum’s body parts, whether attached to Mr. Goldblum or another member of the animal

kingdom. Perhaps my inspection of that insect would have been more thorough had Gong Li starred in the movie just alluded to.

It's hard to think of biological universals and constants which are analogous to ones in physics, such as the Inverse Square Law (universal gravitation), but I am working on one at the present time. It concerns the ubiquity of pigeons and sparrows. Admittedly, observation has been shown to be a frustratingly impossible route to universal truths, since it only takes one falsifying occurrence to destroy one's pretensions of universality, but I can't recall a place on this earth not beset with them. Of course, it could be explained by some universal paranoia hypothesis: that all of nature is out to make me look like a fool, and a corollary of this is that pigeons and sparrows arrive at a location a day before I do. In fact, the pigeons on the corrugated roof across the alley do look a lot like the ones which nested in the eaves of Denise and Faye's house next door in K.C. Those fat, greedy little bastards would swoop down and nosh on all the sunflower seeds I left out for the doves and other ground feeders. Perhaps there's a biological explanation that's more satisfactory than the Universal Pananoia Hypothesis, but I have yet to see it.

Sunday, October 1, 1995, Kobe

A shock to the system, that's all that I can call it. At the time it seemed to be a dream sequence, but I was smart enough not to emulate Descartes and ponder the ontological mysteries of the self. Instead, I just tried to savor every incoming hedon. It started at school on Thursday, where I met several of my new colleagues for the first time. One of them was an ingratiating Aussie, Katrina Watts. She decided to put together a dinner out, marking the beginning of the

semester and asked if I was free on Friday night. Of course I was, and she said she knew a French restaurant in Osaka, her place of residence. Four of us ended up attending, including another new face, Molly Gould. Molly and I share a number of common interests, it turns out, one of them being sailing. Since Katrina asked her at a time separate from the time she asked me, Molly heard that the restaurant was sailing about the harbor in Osaka Bay. My rule of thumb about restaurants with gimmicks is that the more you are forced to pay attention to something other than the food, the more you'd better. Revolving rooftop eateries are of this class, as are establishments in which either the staff, or patrons, or both, are required/expected to don humiliating garb for the occasion. When we arrived at quayside, two surprises awaited. First was the size and attractiveness of the vessel; it had four floors of dining rooms, and could serve in excess of 300 diners at one seating. And one seating was all that they attempted per night. The second was the price, which Katrina said, at 10,000 yen, was well above what she had been expecting to pay. We collectively gulped, paid in advance, and marched on board.

The first thing I noticed is that Katrina was treated like arriving royalty, and familiar royalty, at that. The captain knew her, the first mate, and all the wait staff had a warm and genuine greeting for her. She speaks fluent Japanese, so the greetings were exchanged all around. Molly and I did a lot of bowing and nodding, as our fourth member, Peter Mallett, was also fluent in the local language, and was also known to the staff. While this ship, the "Sylphide," is a restaurant in most formal aspects, we were being treated to a *prix fixe* dinner chosen by Chef Moritsuka, and served by the *maitre d'* personally. We started off with a raw salmon appetizer enveloped in a subtle *creme fraiche* sauce, and accompanied by Lanson Black

Label Champagne. I won't detail the various crab, squab, and beef excesses to which we were willingly subjected, nor the 1990 single vineyard Aloxe-Corton (sadly, nothing more original than something from the mediocre *negociant*, Louis Latour) which was our companion for much of the time. After 10 days of attempting to gradually accustom my digestion to a simplified diet and reduced circumstances, this was so far over the top that I'm still not sure it actually happened. After the "Sylphide" docked, the rest of the passengers disembarked. We, however, were ushered below decks to a private dining room, where a grouping of desserts awaited, accompanied by excellent Cognac, and the presence of the chef. He had studied and worked in France, and spoke decent French, as well as his native Japanese. My indecent French was inadequate to express the pleasure the evening had given me. Katrina confessed that there have been weeks when she had eaten there three times. If I had been treated as she was when dining out, I'd never cook again. The price, in retrospect, was a bargain.

Wednesday, October 4, 1995 - Letter to Professor Rick Botkin

Dear Rick,

George Wiley wrote recently about the death of your brother, and I can only say how truly sorry I am that you are going through a time like this. I remember how greatly your father's death affected you when we were both in Western Civ, in that great house on Louisiana. I'm sorry I can't be there for you in some capacity, but I guess these times are the ones when we are most completely alone, in some important respect. Even at this insurmountable distance, if there's something I can do, please let me know what it is. It will not be in the spirit of disrespect, but in the spirit of me not knowing how to be anything else really well except a wise-ass, that I will

continue this letter.

First of all, if you need to know something substantial about Japan, but don't want to wade through pretentious tomes by former ambassadors, or people who have barfed in important people's laps, try *Dave Barry Does Japan*. He has absolutely **nailed** the country, and done so in both a factual and hilarious manner. Now, this letter was started on Monday, the 2nd, when I first got George's letter, and I had punched out something like 20-30 **masterpiece** lines, when I hit the Word Perfect "vanish without a trace" key, and there it went. I must have hit the same key in the plane flight over here, since I was typing away on a journal I have been keeping intermittently when it jumped into the ozone without asking permission. Perhaps the two of them have gotten together in cyberspace over a cyberbeer, laughing their binary asses off (two cheeks, just like us). I was used to the WordPerfect (Version 5.1) in the room across from the Baker University office where I dozed, seemingly a no-fault version, which even a doofus like me could hack away at without doing serious damage to his eventual goal. I now have Version 6.1 for Windows, which appears to be the bungee-jumping version, only using kite string. That all came about because, thinking myself to be a wealthy man, I purchased a notebook computer on my American Express card, and saddled it with all the latest software, not asking first whether I could actually use the shit, or, as it turns out, whether the shit is using me. Some of it is pretty nifty, like a chess game that whips my ass so thoroughly every time I boot it up, that I'm beginning to regain those long-lost strains of masochism I remembered harboring as a young man unable to get laid. In fact, the only difference now is age.

University life here is both the same and different. There are only 12 or so faculty

members with whom you are even able to converse, whether you want to or not, so there's no need for meaningless pleasantries and small talk in the halls between colleagues. They keep us in two enclaves in the administration building, and we share very roomy offices with another of our kind. I have Chris Starling, a Kiwi/Brit hybrid who reads Sartre in the original French, but is really a down-to-earth kind of bloke, and extremely helpful. Twice a week we are required to be present in a room called "English Island." It's a student lounge where only English is supposed to be spoken, and it is purely voluntary on the part of students. Apparently there are English Island groupies -- students who go up there to imbibe English no matter who is up there as the resident professor. I did my hour and a half today, and will repeat again on Friday. There are no required office hours, so this is sort of a replacement, but -- get this -- we are paid a bonus for showing up to something for which attendance is required. We get 6000 yen for each time we're there, paid at the end of the semester in one lump sum: maybe the equivalent of something over \$1500: a nice little start for a vacation fund. Many of the people also have private pupils in English in their apartments, at an hourly rate of 6000 yen, and they say that if you advertise that you're a professor, you have to beat them away with a stick. There are also other schools around which offer part-time work, so there is really more money here than I first realized. We also get a travel allowance for everyday stuff, like commuting to school. It's more than an allowance: they reimburse us the fares. That's a nice thing, since it costs me 400 yen a day by bus. And the buses and trains are everything you heard about them: on time, clean, efficient, and incomprehensible. I have deliberately left blank the question of teaching in an all-women's university, since the very thought of it tends to melt the cartilage in my knees.

Dennis

Friday, October 6, 1995- Letter to Becky Wilson

Dear Becky,

Let me start off by stating for the record that I do **not** have a snootfull. It is just after dinner on this Friday evening, and, while I have had a glass each of a fine, but inexpensive, white and red Burgundy, two glasses of wine do not a snootfull make. But your letter came yesterday, and I meant to imbibe a snootfull in despair. What miscreant or miscreants have conspired in your life to give you such an amoeba-sized self-image? I certainly believe you are not only capable of succeeding in the KU graduate program, but that you will be accepted if you apply. Furthermore, I still think you have an excellent shot at a Western Civ assistantship. The fact you haven't read most of those texts should not be a problem.

Let me tell you a true-life adventure, my dear. In 1986, I decided to quit my job with Uncle (your uncle and mine) and begin the adventure called philosophy graduate school. Luckily, I was not saddled with a spouse who wanted me to have a baby. I'm not certain that foreswearing graduate school would have solved that problem, at least in my case. I had a much lower GPA than you, and wouldn't have recognized W.V.O. Quine if he came up and bit me on the ass. At least the first time he tried it. I was accepted into the graduate program with reservations and on probation, since my undergraduate record had very little history of philosophy courses on it. It wasn't my fault; the schools I attended didn't have a strong commitment to the subject. They didn't offer me an assistantship, but I also applied to the Western Civ folks, and got a really great letter from one of my previous professors, the kind of

letter I am prepared to write for you, as a matter of fact. On the basis of little more, I was given an interview, which they typically hold during Spring Break in Lawrence, and about 40-50 are interviewed for maybe 12-15 positions. You can check with Jane Peace in the Western Civ office, and see about how many vacancies they will have this year to interview for. If there are less than 10, tell her you will personally suck the cellulite out of her thighs with a paper straw if she puts you on the list. The interview process is something you can do well in if you put your mind to abandon the deer-caught-in-the-headlights look you sometimes get when under a bit of stress, and be your wonderful, saucy, interesting self. You are interesting; you have a life of the mind, which is more than you can say for most of the walking corpses out there. Don't reduce yourself to your mundane (it seems to me) external existence, and don't let that speak for the whole of you. There's more **you** there than you seem to credit, and there are times when I've seen it. It's neat, and I wish you would show it more, and more often.

So the interview process is a gang bang; you are sent into a room with about 8 other people, and they -- all of them -- are your interviewers. All but about 2 of them are other teaching assistants, just like you hope you will be, and there's no reason to worry about them. Answer their questions as well and innovatively as you can; boring does not sell in W.C. I went in there not knowing what to expect, and rolled with the punches as best I could. I made one flaky answer which seemed to endear me to them, and I ended up #2 on their list of 60 they interviewed (#1, I will admit, was not only intelligent, but had piercing hazel eyes and legs to die for, but enough about him). So I was in. I was later on 2 interview committees, and found that there are "traditional" Western Civ questions that always get asked, and it might not hurt you to

know generally what they are.

First of all, even though you don't know the individual works on the reading list, or may not know them all, get passably familiar with the authors, their time, their influence; just an abbreviated encyclopedia entry. What they are liable to ask you is what specific works you would like to see on the list, and why. They might ask you to ask who you would add, in the 19th century, which was one of the questions they asked me. Even though I was a philosopher, I tried to make a case for Walt Whitman. They liked that, and you would do well to show some interests outside your specialty; they aren't looking for narrow historians or philosophers or sociologists. The reading list is broad, and narrow minds can't do it justice. One question they asked me -- a wonderful and infuriating question -- was to name the 3 most important events in human history. What in the hell do you do with a question like that? Well, there is no right answer, just as there wasn't to the previous one. What is important is the way you defend your answer. That's why philosophers end up prominently on the list of successful W.C. interviewees for the year; they are taught, as part of their craft, to argue for a position. So I would say that those two things are very important: show that you are not a narrow academician, and argue effectively for your answers. My answer for the second question was: 1.) The death of Socrates, which I take to be the fall of real democracy in Greece, an experiment not to be tried again with any sincerity until our own Constitution, in 1789; 2.) The Scientific Revolution, which was an answer they didn't accept because it could be seen as a span of 200+ years (nitpicking assholes!). So I said the publication of Newton's *Opticks* (not Wayne's, Isaac's), making it clear that I didn't think that was a particularly important event, but I merely wished to use it as a place-holder for

the Scientific Revolution. They let me have that. #3 was the one that I had to work to justify. I said the invention of photography, c. 1837, and they were all over my ass like a pair of wet shorts. It turns out that I was a photography major at one time in an art school in L.A., and not long after photography became prevalent, art began to become more abstract. My argument was that the invention of photography “freed up” art to explore other means of expression, since the job of representation of the external world was now being handled by photography. As I think of it now, it wasn’t much of an argument, but it doesn’t take much. They’re not referees for academic journals, who try to sift through every syllable to find a flaw in your reasoning. Some of those bozos think reason is something that comes in a Sun-Maid box. You can do wonderfully, I am certain, and don’t give up before you’ve given yourself the best possible shot at graduate school. I believe that Western Civ is not only an easier assistantship to get, it is a better one, too. By being forced to read, understand, and teach these texts you’ve barely seen, some of them philosophical, you are giving yourself a great education, and being paid for it. Remember *On Liberty* by J.S. Mill? Well, I first read the book for 2nd semester W.C. in 1987. It’s a great book, but that’s where I first came in contact with it.

You asked whether I have encountered any negatives in my job. Perhaps you don’t understand: I’m not employed in a photolab. My residence is the size suitable for Munchkin amputees. It is situated on the equivalent of I-70, with side streets the width of my nostrils. I love the food, drool over (from a discreet distance) my students, and either walk or take public transportation everywhere. We could take a lesson from them.

Dennis L.

Tuesday, October 10, 1995

Deliverance! No, I'm not going to squeal like a pig for you, but snorts of contentment may be heard from where I live. Did someone named Yuki, or Maki, or Akiko find her way between my sheets as a little welcome home surprise today? Not this time. Last Wednesday evening, I went to sleep early, as I have every night other than the one just chronicled. When the phone rang, I was sleeping, and I couldn't imagine who would be calling me, since only Mata and the university had my number. It never occurred to me that picking up the receiver and finding out would solve the dilemma handily. After quite a few rings, I did answer, and it was a man I had never met, Robert Conine. I knew him by name, since he teaches part-time at Shoin, and his wife, Sharon, teaches full-time. I also knew that she had taken a leave for the entire current semester to care for her father in Arizona who had been recently diagnosed with cancer. Robert had heard through the English Department grapevine, an especially hardy species, that I was living where I was, the Shoin *kaikan*, and wondered if I was interested in living elsewhere. I certainly was, and we talked for quite a while. Since I had no commitments the next afternoon, we decided to meet at my office and run over to his house to look it over and see if it was suitable. At that point, the box a refrigerator is shipped in would have been suitable. He and Sharon rented this house, and their 14-year old daughter had lived with them as well. It was 2 stories, and he would keep the top floor while I had a good chunk of the bottom. Down there the small L-shaped LDK (living-dining-kitchen area) was something we would share. It was excellent, and he even had a Casio electronic piano. It was, he explained, something their daughter had begun to take lessons on, but she seemed to lose any enthusiasm quickly, and he

was about to put an ad in the paper to sell it. When he told me the price -- 30,000 yen -- I quickly peeled off three 10,000's and put them in his hand. I now own a piano. He was pleased, but only partly, and not just because he had heard me play, either. Part of his plan in selling it was to free up some extra room in the LDK. No such luck, or not until April, when I move into my own apartment. Robert is such a helpful, personable guy, that I feel this will be a good move in many ways. However, he did take me to a Mr. Donut shop, but small indiscretions like that should not be held against him.

This week I also heard for the first time from my former student, Inga Taylor. She was in an Ethical Theory class I taught at Rockhurst College in fall of 1994, and impressed me with her outspoken intelligence. She is a black single mother of two great children, Dylan and Aubrey, and is now in her last undergraduate year. For Thanksgiving of 1994, I discovered she and her family weren't planning anything special, and invited them over to eat with us, clearing it first with Mata. Since I do all the cooking in our house, I figured the call was predominantly mine, anyway. Inga **believes** she carries substantially more rear end than she ought to, but does little to reduce it. I tote around a burden of cholesterol in my arteries traceable to my lifelong snacking habit on huge wedges of high fat cheeses. Together, we tried to exercise together on spare afternoons at a local park's walking/jogging path, but sloth, doubled, didn't help the cross-motivational problems. In spring of 1995, she was cast in a play at Rockhurst, which I attended, and when I finished a play I had been writing during the same time, she was one of the first people I let read it. Inga's a buddy, nothing more, but also nothing less. Mata doesn't always view the little time I spend with Inga generously, despite my sincere claims that we are nothing

but friends. She remembers that she and I started that way, and believes that events can overtake even the best and most innocent of intentions.

Inga and I dealt with sex early and decisively in our friendship. We fucked. Just kidding, of course. She said that she would find the thought that I wanted to have a physical relationship with her something between repugnant and actionable. That was that, and it was fine with me. I had no such desires, which didn't mean that I found her unattractive. The opposite is true, but I believe that the latter need not lead to the former. If the path from attraction leads inexorably to a motel room rented by "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith," I'm in big shit. My students at Shoin appeal to me at nearly every level but the linguistic. I have no intention of ever denying it, and similarly, no intention of ever taking an untoward liberty with any one of them. And I know I'll succeed. I've practiced on Inga.

Tuesday, October 10, 1995 - Letter to Mata Lowden

My Dearest Mata,

It's Tuesday, which is my usual day off, but it's also a national holiday -- Youth Sports Day -- so everybody is off, except for the sporty youth of this nation. And on this day, all youths, as I might have said in my own Joisey Yout, are sporty. Schools stage contests and meets, and us working stiffs just sleep in. I haven't had my first cup of coffee yet, so I want you to know how high up the list of priorities you are. Actually, you're right below e-mail in general, which is right below taking a leak. I assume my priorities can be gauged by the order in which I do them upon arising each morning. Leak is 1st, followed by plug in and boot up while the coffee water is heating. Then I log onto CompuServe to check the mail.

I'll tell you, teaching in Japan is not like working for the government, or teaching at an American college. My time is spoken for nearly all day, except for my day off, and we have to let the administration office know where we are at all times. There is a little notification system on our desks, attached to our phones, with 4 lights on it. One means "in the office", one means "in class" a third means "on campus, but not one of those places", e.g., in the crapper, at lunch, at English Island, and the last means "off campus." I don't recall whether it was you or Julian I was writing or talking to about this, but a full-time professor is committed to being with students for literally one-half the hours the school is in session. School is up and running 30 hours a week, not counting lunch, which everyone takes together. I have to be with students, either teaching or at English Island, for 15 of those 30. At KU, a full-time professor has no more than 6 hours required, and some can get by with less if they have large research grants to work on. So what I'm saying is, letter-writing at work is not even a remote possibility. I just went away briefly to pour a cup of coffee, and the toilets came on the screen, complete with an assortment of rude noises. They're gone now as I type, but I find I am able to supply the rude noises myself.

I haven't moved in with Robert Conine yet, mainly because the guy with the van, Bernard, got stuck doing something else on Sunday. Today is supposed to be the day, since it is a holiday, and no one works, except maybe American junk-pickers. I packed everything on Sunday, so I have been living out of a suitcase since then. I hate that. I'm the sort of person, as you well know after 11+ years, who likes to build a nest and snuggle down in it. Perhaps there's some bird in my family tree. Speaking of that noxious weed (my family tree, of course, though I wouldn't start feeling superior, if I were you), Molly Gould, the other new professor, whose specialty at the

University of Delaware is the Lenape tribe, lent me the text she used in teaching a course on the Lenapes, and I've begun to read it. Very interesting. Now I know why I like to walk around naked a lot, and have you do the same: it's in my heritage! The Lenapes wore as little as possible in the summer, both sexes being topless, and sometimes more. They also seemed to like a little game of hide the wampum at any place and any time. I'll let you know more as I get further into the book.

Well, I'm standing by the door, suitcases in hand, waiting for the call from the governor that releases me. I'll try to remember to send back the pictures with this letter. I am already working on a very short list of what things I'd like you to bring with you this December. It won't be much, and I won't tell you now, but instead put them all in one letter (or fax) so that you can find them in one central location. I can't wait to see you and hold you again. I don't suppose either of us expected separation to be as bad as it is. It sure is for me, since I'm separated from nearly everything that gave my life meaning before. At least, a move out of Alcatraz will be a step in the right direction, but the biggest step will be the one toward you as you get off the plane.

Love always, D.

Saturday, October 14, 1995, Kobe

It's Friday the 13th in the U.S., which explains everything. This morning, at 2:04, the house started shaking. It was another earthquake, though much milder than the Hanshin Quake of January. We got up, and Robert came downstairs and turned on the TV. Within seconds, Japanese characters, which is a confusing combination of three written systems, called *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*, appeared on the screen informing us of the quake and its magnitude.

This was apparently something instituted after the Big One. Information seemed slow to seep out from official sectors at that time, and the public consternation led to a change in policy. Come to think of it 'consternation' is not an attitude which seems to apply to the Japanese. Perhaps disappointment with those officials who are supposed to protect the public interest is a better description. The quake was measured at 4.8 on their scale which, like so many institutionally promulgated things over here, is slightly smaller than the ones I am used to in the U.S. So the quake was probably 5-something on the Richter Scale. No damage done around here, but I'll have to see the news this evening to find out whether other places got it worse.

The other unfortunate going-on, or, more accurately, **non**-going-on which has reached critical mass (an unfortunate though accurate description) on this Friday the 13th is a case of constipation. Perhaps it's the change of diet, perhaps it's the change of everything, perhaps it's the unperforated toilet paper that's so tough you have to tear it with your incisors before folding, but my innards have seized up solid. When Robert gets up, I'll ask him if he has any laxative, but it seems doubtful. More than likely, I'll have to trudge sluggishly to a neighborhood store and try to explain, with disgusting hand signals, what I need. The last time I did that, about two weeks ago, I wanted some hand cream, since my mitts were drying and cracking. Okay, it's not malaria, but it's something I wanted to do. There are several arcades around the *kaikan*, covered streets or alleys which house many small shops of various persuasion. One day I went into one which seemed to specialize in cosmetics and pharmaceuticals, and scanned the bottles and jars for a hint of their contents. I have the same problem at the food markets; I can't figure out what salt is. Of course, I know what it is, I just don't know what container conceals it on the inscrutable shelves

of the local Co-op. As a result, all my seasoning thus far has been with my home-prepared Cajun spices, or *shoyu*, soy sauce. Back to the hand cream foray. None of the three salespeople in the shop spoke any English, but I pointed to one of my hands with the other, and then began to rub them together like a man possessed, in a lurid pantomime of either Lady Macbeth, or -- as I hoped they would understand -- a desperate man trying to rub hand lotion into his skin.

Recognition and smiles lighted their faces, and they quickly pointed me to several plastic bottles of indeterminate contents and ~ 300 yen pricetag. I gave them my best *arrigato* and left happy.

As soon as I got back to The Hovel, I pushed the plunger on the bottle, and a beautiful white cream slid coolly onto my thirsty palm. It didn't smell like hand lotion, but differences abound, and this was probably one. As I began to rub it in, my concern mounted. It was not being absorbed, but was starting to foam. And now the aroma began to clarify itself: hand **soap**. I went to the sink for confirmation. Under running water, the lather formed beautifully, parching my hands even more.

Sunday, October 15, 1995, Kobe

What does it mean, when you call home expecting to have a lovely talk with your wife, and not only is there no answer, but another man's voice is on the answering machine message?

Well, it's a day full of sunshine here, and not the sort of place for paranoid ramblings. The houses here are so close together that I can hear a dog in the next block chew its food. The neighbor's dog is powerful bored, like Henry in the *Dream Songs*, and he expresses it vocally. Their house is just across the street from ours, and much more expensive-appearing, but dogs have no level of affluence which affects their behavior except companionship, food, and new

smells to smell. In that fairly opulent house, the beagle is a pauper.

Yesterday I experimented while in the bathroom. I spent so much of yesterday in that modest *chambre des grunts* that I decided to accomplish something with my time. This experiment had to do with the closeness of houses in Kobe, mentioned above. I stood in front of the toilet, accomplishing my business with my left hand (ever the ambidextrous one!), and, with the other, slid open the window and likewise the screen, and without having to stretch or risk yellow stains upon the floor, was easily able to touch the exterior wall of the house next door. I wonder if the imprint of my fingers made indentations on the interior of that wall.

Tuesday, October 17, 1995, Kobe

I continue to be amazed at the number of parallels I find between the Japan I am experiencing and the 1950's America in which I grew up. One I have noted earlier: the ability to live self-sufficiently within one's neighborhood. That was a stabilizing aspect of '50's life, but most of that era I found intolerable. You will find in me no nostalgic desire to return to the days of Beaver Cleaver. My memories are of the suffocating pressure to conform, and my contrary desire to resist those pressures. Sometimes my desire took self-destructive turns, like driving too fast, and petty thievery from local merchants; often it came out in writing, music, and the need to escape what seemed like the irrationality of my parents's religion. While it often seemed I was isolated, a feeling many of us felt in those lonely Eisenhower years, the Beat movement was out there as an avenue of expression in the artistic realm, as were several greaser options for the inarticulate. When I look at current Japan, it seems as if those same pressures are weighing down upon young Japanese, and the same sorts of attempts to avoid, or resist them, are likewise being

attempted. I wonder, will there be an analogue of the '60's in Japan to follow this time?

There are a couple of other things that strike me as similar. Twice now, on food advertisements, I have seen an attempt to entice the buyer by claiming it was produced, or developed by the finest technology. In America in the '90's, the appeal would be to "naturalness" or some claim to non-interference with natural processes. One of these instances was on one of the drink vending machines which dispensed some Gatorade-like athletic drink. Its proud slogan was that it was the greatest drink modern science could come up with. The appeals to "modern science" and the wonders of technology were ones that resonated throughout the 1950's. They almost became the mantras of Middle America. While technology is thoroughly integrated into every process of our American lives today, it is seldom seen as a desirable factor, and thus is not emphasized in advertising and packaging. The second place I saw it was on a loaf of bread, which proudly proclaimed that it was "factory made." No blue-haired old ladies kneading the dough all night so you could have it fresh on your table this morning; no indeed, this food was cranked out by something dependable: a factory! No one over here wants some senile old coots like Ben and Jerry messing with their ice cream, either. In fact, they're just waiting for the time when cows can be eliminated from that process, too.

One final stop on the bittersweet trip into the past: the transportation revolution. As a freshman in high school, I commuted to Asbury Park High by train: the Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Line. Many of my students arrive in the district from far-off homes via the Japan Railroad, or the Hankyu Line. A few kids in school had cars, but they were their own clique and I never knew them. Most of us walked, took the bus, or rode the train. The America I knew then

wasn't quite ready for the automobile as a personal necessity. The streets were narrow, there wasn't much parking where most people did their shopping, since most people didn't drive in from the 'burbs, one to a car. It's an uneasy transition for a society to make from a mass transportation orientation to an individual vehicle orientation, and I also think it's an unnatural one, even a counterintuitive one. It certainly seems true from the standpoint of Japan, which has no more land available for its people, or its cars. The transition from individual to mass conveyance seems the rational one, generally, but we went in the irrational direction and carved out our spaces to accommodate the single-driver vehicle. Japan seems like that place just before America went 2, 3, and 4-car crazy, and it is one American precept it seems unlikely to follow.

Saturday, October 21, 1995 - E-mail letter to Gloria Vando Hickok

Gloria and the Billowing One,

Yes, thank you for offering to save my ass. It is currently located at:

8-3-17, Ueno-dori, Nada-ku

Kobe 657, Japan

The beans most likely to bring a smile to any number of my apertures are: navy beans, black beans, and small red beans. If you want to hazard an air drop from a U-2, I'll stand outside with a net, or with any of the Mouseketeers.

It's Saturday in Kobe, and Robert and I are going to Osaka to see the old castle, and other tourist requirements. Last night, 2 of my students took me to Kobe's Chinatown, and we had a nice meal at 4 separate establishments. A few of the students seem to think it's their duty to show new professors the various sights in their country, none of which includes their own nether

regions, I hasten to add. My 2 companions last night were each 19, which translates into about 13 dog years, or 13 American years, when measuring social sophistication and experience. They are just sweet, innocent young ladies, the kind you never meet in the U.S. anymore, except in Amish communities and utero. They have also promised to take me to Kyoto for the changing of the leaf (there are so few trees in urban Japan, you know), and to some sort of cheese and wool festival on the other side of Mt. Rokko.

Thanks for the letters, and are you saying that my frank and open discussion of constipation makes my letters unsuitable for the *Star*? Well edit that shit out, as the saying goes. I have no pride.

Dennis and his Charmin companion

Saturday, October 21, 1995 - E-mail Letter to Jeff Hollister

Dear Jeff,

Cat Kickers Anonymous is now in session!

So what's with grad school? A slap in the face with some ugly attitudes? Too elementary to require comment? An exciting opportunity to deepen and enrich your already burgeoning base of knowledge? Only one of those answers accurately reflected MY grad school experience.

The Great Hanshin Earthquake, as the quake of last January is called, not only killed thousands in Kobe, it also leveled many acres of real estate. Already it probably sounds pretty bad, and it is, but Shakespeare nailed it, as he usually did, when he said that it's an ill wind that blows no one good. The quake rendered literally **thousands** of cats homeless, and the pathetic little whining bastards come up to you on the street as if you are a walking can of tuna. What

results should hardly be classified as cat kicking; there's really no sport in it. I'm not wimping out, I'll have you know, or getting soft in my old age, but even I tire of the 60th or 70th feline as it ricochets off a half-crumbled wall once leaving my foot. I'm beginning to avoid cat-infested neighborhoods, and have even taken to carrying a boom box with barking dog recordings on it, to scare them away. Nothing works, unfortunately; perhaps you have a suggestion. What are noble halls of learning like Duke good for, if not to help address the pressing problem that the real world has to face?

I went to Osaka today and visited Osaka castle. One whole day in a city of 4 million and I only saw one cat, and it was scared shitless: my kind of town!

Best Wishes,

Dennis L.

Sunday, October 22, 1995, Kobe

Food. Japan and I are at one concerning its importance, not just as fuel for the engine, as many Americans seem to view it, but as an aesthetic and cultural experience. Yet there are two things which are still difficult to grasp in the attitude over here. The first occurred to me on the last Saturday I spent in The Hovel, prior to moving in with Robert. He, Molly Gould, and I went for a long (and for me, tiring) walk in downtown Kobe, and we stopped to have lunch in a Japanese-style health food store in a mile-long shopping arcade named Motomachi. The shop was in a basement, and there was a small restaurant enclosed therein. I just drank a glass of peach juice, while Robert ordered *soba*, or long spaghetti-like noodles made of buckwheat flour, and, in this instance, served cold in a bowl of broth. When his meal arrived, it was bedecked and

garnished with various sprigs and shavings in shades of green, which set off the beige noodles and darker broth in which they nestled. It is a **very** simple, almost elemental dish, and yet it was presented as if it were being served aboard the *Sylphide*. The respect they show for food is both touching and impressive. I pondered the attention they give to food that evening as I looked at the gray walls, gray ceiling, gray floor, gray furnishings, and gray atmosphere of The Hovel. If a bowl of noodles deserves the kind of treatment it received in the presentation for Robert, why not living space for another human? Why can the aesthetic attention not extend to where I live? I'm not sure of the answer, but I think it has to do with the aesthetic impulse itself, which, over here, seems to be non-anthropocentric. Robert's *soba* were not decorated for Robert, but for the *soba* itself. That a person was going to consume them was a distasteful fact of the whole process, and not the reason for the process itself. The process of honoring the food in the way it was served is an abstraction greatly valued by the culture. It is an aesthetic abstraction and value, and one I am beginning to appreciate, though not, perhaps, understand. That's the philosopher's lament, I suppose: condemned to love what you cannot understand and understand what you cannot love. The aesthetic tradition, however, does not appear to extend to living quarters, or at least, living quarters for foreigners.

The second difficulty concerns mopping up. I am an enthusiastic eater, and so was able to leap right into the slurping activities favored by the Japanese. What I cannot understand is the absence of napkins accompanying a cuisine which not only encourages but seems to demand a lot of freelance eating improvisation. When I finish a Japanese meal, particularly if it includes a bowl of noodles, I have absorbed some of the broth in my beard, left a few Jackson Pollack-

esque splatters on the table in front of me, and practiced a bit of abstract pointillism on my shirt and lap. Now I am not unskilled with chopsticks. Even one of my students commented that I was pretty good with them, for a foreigner, and I took that to be a genuine compliment. When I was in grade school, my family was invited, occasionally, to dine at the home of an older Chinese couple, the Waungs. The first time I attended they put on a tremendous spread, but required that all who eat at their table use chopsticks. It was a struggle the first few times, and a lot of delectable food went undevoured by this young and famished stomach. Eventually, I got the hang of it, though I find that every Asian culture has its own variation of the theme. The Vietnamese I met in the middle 1970's used sticks longer than the Chinese ones I had learned with, and they held them very differently, it seemed. The Japanese favor shorter sticks, and that takes a little adjustment. I still wave them about like a conductor in the *finale* of the Shostakovitch 5th, which is not done over here. The same student who praised my chopstick virtuosity (Yuki) criticized my flamboyance: less Leonard Bernstein and more Fritz Reiner needed. That still doesn't explain what the Japanese do with all the food unaccounted for from bowl (or plate) to mouth. Where does it go?

The department had a dinner on Thursday night for us newcomers (Molly and I, plus Phil Nicoloff, who was a last-minute replacement and had been on board before as a visiting professor from U of New Hampshire) at a nearby "Sumo" restaurant. We were seated, unshod, around steaming cauldrons of broth heated by a gas burner, and near each pot was a large bowl of comparable size, piled high with all sorts of edibles. The idea was to put whatever you wanted into the broth, cook it as long as you wanted, and then retrieve it to a small plate and consume it,

aided by chopsticks. Four of us shared a cauldron, and when the evening was through, my spot at the table was barely discernible through the detritus of the meal which I had strewn about me, and upon me. No one else seemed to have a similar-appearing place, and immediately the previously introduced UPH (Universal Paranoia Hypothesis) kicked in: they gave me the Japanese version of the dribble glass as a pot, or one chop stick was shorter than the other, or the food they gave me was still alive and wriggled a lot when it was being retrieved. Surely, I'm not a slob, am I?

Now, many restaurants present one with an *oshibori*, or moistened towelette, before the meal begins, and that's a very nice touch, but that's not when I need it most.

Tuesday, October 24, 1995, Kobe

If it's Tuesday night, what does that mean? You guessed it: Monday Night Football. On Japanese TV, each Tuesday night at 7:00 during the football season, we get a selected NFL game, complete with Japanese commentators. It's the best NFL broadcast I have ever seen, since it is totally platitude-free, excised of the self-important pomposities that mark much of professional sports in the U.S., plus another invaluable addition, or, more accurately, subtraction. It contains no commercials of any kind, no wasted time in between whistles watching people play with their steroid-withered crotches, putting their teeth back in their faces, or exchanging business cards and comments about the sexual prowess of the mothers of their opposite numbers. All football, all the time, and it gives a person opportunity to evaluate NFL football devoid of all the extraneous hoopla. I've come to the conclusion that it is **entirely** hoopla, and the athletic event, missing all the bullshit and quasi-significant punditry, is boring beyond description. It is only

through the efforts of the play-by-play people that we are able to give a rat's ass about any of the people on the field, or the outcome of the game. The primary reason, it seems to me, is that the game has been stripped of the fundamental, primal physical immediacy that great sports activities possess. Look at a 100 meter dash, or a 10,000 meter run, and you need no language or "color man" to tell you about the contest and its goals. The same could be said of the javelin, or soccer, or boxing. It consists of people striving, with will and body, to do what others have not been able to do, or to do something better than another person opposite you.

Wednesday, October 25, 1995, Kobe

There seems to be a species of crow in Kobe that sounds like a bad imitation of a crow by someone who tried, and failed, to get on The Gong Show, or, even worse, The Late Mr. Pete Show . Every time I hear its call, I jump with the kind of eerie fear/pleasure one gets at scary movies. That **can't** be a bird. I scan the sky for it, and have yet been rewarded by a sighting. Then, of course the UPH kicks in, if it hasn't already. These creatures, half human, half rapacious flesh-tearing birds with beaks by Black and Decker, are hiding just out of sight; maybe in a convenient treetop, perhaps an eave large enough to conceal their fearsomeness but not their bone-chilling cry. But wait a minute, my excessively dormant rational side replies, this is Japan, not the back lot at Universal. And remember, it counters, Godzilla wasn't even created in Japan. "Created in Japan." The phrase brings another possibility to mind. Because the Kobe smog has long since killed off all indigenous feathered bipeds, Sony was commissioned, back in the 1960's, to create a bird to replace the extinct ones. It put the team that invented Beta to work on the project, and the result is a bird that sounds like it is doomed to the mark-down cart at Toys 'r Us.

And the reason I can't see it is that it looked more ludicrous than it sounded, and all models were purposely destroyed, along with the members of the Beta team responsible for it, and the Betamax fiasco. Sony saved the soundtrack, and was able to sell it to the City of Kobe to play out of loudspeakers stuck in trees and eaves, hoping to convince the citizens that all is well, the birds have returned. Well, this is one Yankee who's not taken in by such subterfuge. All those years in front of Chuck Barris shows has finally paid off.

Thursday, October 26, 1995, Kobe

Well, today was a Red-Letter Day, or perhaps I should say, a Brown-Letter Day. I finally saw my first pile of dog shit in this town. That claim is not completely true; it was the first **fresh** pile. I have encountered the odd fossilized remains in Kobe's many vacant lots, lots which, before the earthquake, were completely occupied. And, perhaps a more recent fragment may have remained, uncharacteristically, in the gutter of an untended side street, but the steaming heap in the brisk morning air was a treat yet to be experienced. Until this morning. Even more ignominious was the fact that I found this canine tribute to the gods of perpetual concrete on the steps of my own beloved Shoin Women's University. I am one of the earliest arrivals at work, and it was there to greet me, deposited proudly halfway up the steps to the main building only a few minutes before my 7:30 entrance. What makes this an event worth noting is the rarity of a public display of any bodily function, other than sneezing, which seems to be a mandatory activity on buses loaded at equal to or greater than three-quarters capacity. Leash laws in Japan must carry the death penalty for both parties, since I have yet to see a dog running free over here. But there are a fair number of dogs in this country, all of which are kept in tow by their owners,

and sent outside for a routine crap only at the end of a short string. Walking up the hill to Shoin each morning, I see the 6-legged teams out on the pavement, one member sniffing out whatever faint aromas are there to be found, and the other partner carrying a plastic bag in the leashless paw, awaiting the anticipated squat and grunt. Now here's the point; I've never seen one of these 2-leggers with a scoop, shovel or implement in hand to transfer the deposit from sidewalk to bag. I fear the truth may be revealed by a microscopic investigation of the fingernails of these owners. I'll bet some of them are restaurant owners, too, and not Vietnamese or Philippine restaurants, either, where the presence of dogs on the premises, if not the menu, is far from rare. Attentiveness will be my goal tomorrow morning, since I am certain to view this scene every day. If I can find no plausible medium of transfer, I may rethink the attractiveness of eating out in Japan.

And, in a separate report, I want to say that, in spite of the foregoing, I now have proof that this is indeed a civilized country, and that there's hope for the younger generation in Japan. This fact should have been recorded on Monday, but I was too giddy with excitement to steady the mouse on the WordPerfect icon. A student of mine, whose name must be recorded for the cultural history which will surely evolve out of this report -- Kyoko Ito -- came to my office to discuss other things, and as we unreeled our mutual likes and dislikes, the name -- the golden name -- of Bill Evans was uttered by her. She not only had heard of him, she also had many CD's and offered to have a music exchange program, beginning on our next meeting, which was today. I brought "You Must Believe in Spring;" she gave me a composite album of tracks from several albums. It may be love, since it is certainly not spring.

Saturday, October 28, 1995, Kobe

It has come to my attention that I have not written much on these pages about my teaching. Since that activity is the ostensible reason for my presence in this country, perhaps a mention of what I am doing would dispel the latent impression that it must be unimportant. Well, it probably **is** unimportant, at least to the long-term lives of the students, which is probably something every philosophy professor can say with confidence. I am not teaching philosophy at Shoin, though I initially harbored a secret hope that I could smuggle some into my classes. The courses for which I signed a contract are American Studies, and various kinds of English language classes. The load is twelve classroom hours a week, plus three mandatory hours of informal meetings with students. For the students, the meetings are optional. This is about triple the American university commitment expected of professors, and double, or more than double, what one would perform at a college in the states.

The man I am replacing, James Petrik, of Ohio University, is also a philosopher, and he let me know through both calls and a letter that the students did not have as much facility with English as I would probably hope, and that I would do well to reduce the intellectual expectations I might be tempted to place upon them. In other words, James tried to warn me as best he could, but even those words did not prepare me for the incredibly low abilities I have met here. I don't mean to imply that the Shoin students are incapable of learning and using English, quite the opposite is true. But the level of comprehension and use prevalent in my classes is nearly monosyllabic. So, I was hired to be a highly-paid remedial English teacher at a Japanese university. That realization sank in around the end of the first week; in fact, my last class on

Friday afternoon was a big help in that direction, since it seems to comprise the collective “dumb row” of last year’s English classes. My options seem to have been selected for me in advance of my arrival. One of them was **not** the teaching of anything of intellectual interest to me, or intellectual stimulation to my students. Those two options disposed of, it was clear that I had nothing left but to do the best as a teacher of very elementary English, or sulk, disillusioned, until my contract runs out. Of course, I’ve chosen the latter, since I have a lot more practice at it than the other.

Monday, October 30, 1995 - Fax to Mata Lowden

Hi Sweetheart,

While I had considered sending this for you last night, I didn’t want to spoil you, so I’m holding off until now. I thought I’d give you a rundown on what to expect in customs when you land in Japan, in hopes that knowledge is strength. When you land, you will ride escalators and walk halls until you reach a large room with 8 or so customs agents in little booths. You line up (Japanese are great for forming lines) in front of one of these booths marked for foreigners with foreign passports. There are more of us than there are of them (and we’re BIGGER!), so we get 6 of the 8. But their lines are shorter, and soon the domestic customs agents change into ones for foreign passports, and if you can spot that, you can dash over to their line and get through more quickly. Of course, you’ll be carrying your carry-on luggage, so ‘dash’ may be an unfortunate choice of verbs. This customs check is only to see that your papers are in order, to quote any number of WWII movies. After you get through that formality, you again trudge halls and

escalators, and at some point you herd yourselves aboard a monorail for your next destination. When you arrive at a baggage claim area, much like all other baggage claim areas you have ever seen, you will find an enormous number of baggage carts, free for the borrowing, for your use. Use one. The ramp where the luggage parades around prior to being claimed is very big, and you should be able to find a front-row spot, with your cart behind you. Enjoy this moment; it is likely to be the last moment you have to be wary about guarding your possessions in this country, and that's mainly because there are a bunch of foreigners around, especially Americans. Once you load your baggage on the cart, proceed to one of the next customs checks, where they will ask you more pointed questions about your stay. They may also ask you to disrobe for the guys, or at least, open one of your bags. They asked me to do neither (drat!), mainly because I explained that I was coming over for an 18-month stay. All you have to say is that you're joining your husband, who is over here on an 18-month visiting professorship. You will find that neither set of agents speaks very good English, though the second one I got appeared to be a little more fluent than the first. Many of them are also young women, and while I was in line I saw no one being required to open luggage, or sing their high school *alma mater*. At that point, you will be waved through, I trust, and you will have the option of exchanging your money for the kind of trash I've already sent you. I would suggest you have a little cash on you for emergencies, and also for your flight back, but no need to trade your dollars in at the airport. I'll provide all the yen, though the exchange rate there is better than most places. You will be allowed to keep the luggage cart, so please do so. You can push it out into the receiving area, where I will be waiting, having just been asked to disrobe for the guys. The cart will be useful either for a

preliminary hump, or to protect the contents of the bags once you see me and lose all sense of propriety and gravity. Once the officials hose us off a few times, we'll grab a bus to the boat (this airport is on an artificial island in Osaka Bay, and the most direct way to Kobe is by jet boat), and then boat to Kobe. You will find that the necessary signs at the airport are in English, and when in doubt, follow the other idiot in front of you. I found that 12 hours or more in an airplane tends to bring out the sheeplike tendencies of travelers, and you follow the one in front of you only because you hope he or she knows better than you where to go. I can't give you any advice for Korea, other than avoid the kim chee airline snacks and don't mistake Seoul airport for Osaka, no matter how much you want the journey to be over.

Love Always,

D.

Wednesday, November 1, 1995, Kobe

For the second time in a week I've seen a silver Ferrari on campus. This is a small urban campus where no students and few faculty drive their own cars to school, and where there is enough parking for, maybe, 10 cars on a regular basis. The first time I saw it, I heard it. I was seated outside, in the sun of a perfect autumn day, when to my right I heard the unmistakable syncopated, throaty digga-digga-digga-diggas of a Ferrari prowling at quasi-idle speed. I turned in that direction, and it slowly loomed before me like some sort of sensuous mechanical apparition: the Flying Dutchman in silver. It seemed to slide or float out the gate and onto the streets of Kobe. I couldn't imagine driving a beat-up '63 Corvair on the streets of Kobe, so I can't fathom the depths of affluent lunacy abroad in this city which could permit such an act. When I

saw the car again this morning, parked behind the building where I was teaching, my thoughts began to change. If it's a regular fixture on campus, then I'm beginning to revise the thought that I was overpaid. If a Shoin professor can afford it, I'm going to see what department he teaches in and find out if there's a vacancy.

Saturday, November 4, 1995, Kobe

My emotional life started unraveling in the most disturbing manner this evening. Today was a lovely six-hour stroll through downtown Kobe with Chieko, and I came home in high spirits. I had told her that I would bring a picture to school of me with long hair, since the topic of one of our conversations hit upon that subject in the course of our wandering. The one I was thinking of was my only remaining one with Sonya, c. 1973. I brought it out to look at it again for what must have been the three-thousandth time, and in looking at those two incredibly blissful people, the two happiest people who ever drew breath, I inexplicably began crying some very sad tears, an act I have not found myself doing very much in the last decade and a half of life. There was a time, not too long ago, when I began to doubt that I had any capacity for emotional response at all, but that is not my current worry by any means. Maybe it is a reflection of what has happened between Sonya and myself in the intervening years. At first, we would visit, we lived together once, a few years after that picture was taken, and had what might be called incessant contact. But, little by little, that diminished to letters, then cards on birthdays and major holidays, and then the cards and letters stopped coming. How did we go from that picture to silence? And more to the current point, was the delight of a day in Kitano-cho with Chieko doomed to dwindle down to a deadly silence following the last feeble card? Perhaps it's

a measure of how I am becoming hooked, emotionally, on the people I know here in Kobe. I'm making a bigger investment than I thought I would, and already, like Joe Granville, foreseeing the market crash. Would Mata's presence in Japan have made a difference? Probably.

Certainly. But she's chasing what she thinks is important in the U.S., and I'm doing the same in Kobe.

Thursday, November 9, 1995 - Fax to Mata

Mata (not to be confused with Mommy) Dearest,

Thanks for the double-fax this morning. I heard the phone ring, and suspected (or hoped) it was a fax from you, but I guess Robert picked up the phone upstairs and made you dial again. Now you know what it's like! Amazingly enough, I am suffering from communication overload. Since your tape, I have received the 2 cards from you and Jake's letter, plus the Windows 95 arrived yesterday. At Shoin, I got letters from two ex-students I had written to from KC, and then written off when they didn't answer while I was there. One is Mari Miyoshi, who came to Thanksgiving dinner at our place in Lawrence in 1988, the first year we were there. She was a Western Civ student of mine, and came with her husband, Taizo. I most remember that her face got very red from drinking Champagne, and that she was very cute (of course) and also a superb student. I had looked up her address in Japan in an old KU directory and sent her a form letter about my upcoming move, not expecting, and barely hoping, that it would finally catch up with her. It did, and she caught me up on all the news, and I hope we can see her again sometime in the future.

As far as shoes inside, we wear slippers (I switch between Birkenstocks and the other

ones you sent me, and will probably use the lined ones you bring me rather regularly) or just socks, depending on the weather. It has been colder recently and blustery, and the heater is marginal, at best, so I find myself not just wearing socks very often. Find something comfortable and warm and you'll be fine. Our room does NOT have a lock, and only has sliding doors, but you are the only real valuable I worry about, so that's not a concern. I certainly trust Robert without question. The place is not at all soundproof, though we will be on the first floor and Robert's bedroom is on the second. Our room is directly adjacent to the LDK, which means that any excursion we make there at midday may be noted by anyone at home.

Well, the page is nearly over, but not my desire to be closer to you. If the people at your office can kiss your entire black ass, that's not nearly a patch on what I'm going to do to it. But exactly **how much** black ass are we talking about here? I certainly love the amount I left in KC, but I'm certain I don't **deserve** any more than that, so please don't bring any more; I know I won't be worthy.

Love always,

Jack Sprat

Saturday, November 11, 1995 - E-mail letter to Kate Grover

Kate:

Wonderful to hear from you. I was afraid that you had fallen through the cracks, and by the time I returned, would be far from touch. "If I return" might be a reasonable addition to that last sentence. I am enjoying this place much more than I thought I would, or ought to, since Mata isn't with me. My Japanese (language) is nearly non-existent, but it is amazing how many local

citizens speak a little bit of English. I've lost a few pounds on the good cuisine over here, and am finding that Kobe's weather is quite a nice change from that in Kansas. It has begun to get colder here, but most weather changes seem to be gradual, and not at all dramatic, which is a mirror of Japanese culture. Gradual change is the only kind accepted here, which can be maddening at times, but I'm convinced (and have been since my days in meteorology) that climate has an unsuspectedly disproportionate influence over cultural values, and I would point to this as an example. But on to more important issues.

Japanese beer. It's barely a notch above mass-produced American swill, and I don't buy any of it anymore. Unlike in the States, most domestically-produced products are more expensive than ones which have been imported. I'm not just talking about ones imported from sweatshop countries like Malaysia and China, but European and American products, too. So I can buy American beer 40% cheaper than Japanese beer which has been brewed 15 miles away in Osaka. I don't, of course, because I can also buy Dutch and German beer for the same price as American beer (about 115 yen per can, with the yen currently trading at 102/dollar). The cheapest rotgut Japanese beer is 160 yen a can (even in cases), and the mainstream brands like Kirin and Asahi are about 180.

Downtown Kobe is a labyrinth of shops, stores, stalls, and hawkers of various things, and there are always people buying. The big department stores that I remember as a boy in Philadelphia are still alive and well in Japan. One store sells literally everything, and there are 7 or 8 such different stores in every million-plus city. Each item you buy has to be wrapped individually, and then groups of items have to be wrapped together until you begin to hear the

forests begin felled all over the world to provide the Japanese with wrapping paper, and chop sticks! For some reason, no restaurant (and the Japanese eat out a lot) will serve food with reusable chop sticks, so tons of wood get one use and joins the landfills (or the ocean fills and incinerators, which are more likely). I've bought my own chop sticks and carrying case, but I have to remember to bring them with me.

As much as the philosophical background of Japan is interesting, I regret to say that I am not doing any philosophy over here. I was officially led to believe that I would be teaching American Studies, with the odd course in advanced English for the truly gifted, but that was not the case at all. I am teaching **very** remedial English to students who have only a little experience with the language. There is one course in American Studies a semester I teach, and this semester, not knowing anything about their prowess beforehand, I decided to have them read Aldo Leopold. Class has now met for 6 weeks and we haven't gotten through the **January** entry yet! The Land Ethic is never going to get there, and I am nothing more than a vocabulary teacher, explaining (for example) what the word "thaw" means. I kid you not.

So why did I start off this letter hinting that I might want to stay here forever? The school is very good to me, pays a pile of money, and the students are really very sweet and disarmingly kind-hearted. It is an all-women's school, and it's amazing how well a class will run with an absence of testosterone and sexual tension. In addition, the students treat me as a social and cultural project to be improved by them, and several of them have assigned themselves as my "groupies," to take me to various places in their land that an ignorant foreigner like myself needs to see, and probably wouldn't, on his own. So I've been taken to castles, gardens, festivals, and

eating places. At various times they have acted as my interpreter (buying a camera) and intermediary, and while our social contact falls WELL SHORT of the kind I would experience with a spouse or significant other present (I was trying to phrase that statement with the utmost tact), they have been delightful and affectionate in a genuinely innocent sort of way. Perhaps it's just a male ego thing, but I am enjoying it, and they get a chance to practice their English, something they desperately need.

Nice to hear from you, and please write again.

Dennis

Sunday, November 12, 1995 - Fax to Mata

My Dearest,

It's only about 2 hours since we talked, but I just felt like writing to you, anyway. Robert brought the bed materials downstairs and I set up "our" bed -- as opposed to "my" lonely bed -- in the bedroom, as well as changing things around a little to maximize space in there. You'll have a dresser of sorts for your own use, as I have one with drawers myself. Yours has shelves, and holds a modest amount of clothing, or whatever you wish to put in it. Speaking of the bed, it is smaller than ours at home, and is really not a bed, but a futon. Robert sleeps on one upstairs, and it's the traditional Asian way to sleep, which makes it something to get used to for foreigners. It's nothing more than a pile of bedding on the floor, the thickness of which is determined by your economic status or strength of spine. I have neither, so I've put down quite a few pads, and have even reserved one extra if needed. Tonight will be my first night to sleep there, so I'll see if I need to readjust to something new all over again. One thing is sure: we will be sleeping very

close to each other every night. It seems to be slightly wider than a twin bed and only about a foot off the ground when uncompressed. I assume we won't have a problem trying to stay away from each other at night, unless we have some idiotic fight about octopus etouffee or one of the groupies.

You had asked whether our bedroom would be soundproofed, and for the life of me, I can't imagine why that should be a concern. We sound like M. and Mme. Marcel Marceau in bed; two dying ants make more noise having sex than we do. Are you hinting that the situation will change in December? Are you packing a bullhorn? This sounds exciting; have you taken a dominatrix course at the Communiversity? Sneaked into one of those marital aids places on Main at night disguised as a frustrated white woman? If any of your sexual plans for us requires the pouring on and/or licking off of copious amounts of Champagne, I have stockpiled 6 bottles for whatever use you may want to make of them. [Time Passes] I've just returned from the Shoin Festival's second day, which has the misfortune to be scheduled on the same weekend as the Kobe University (KU hereabouts) Festival, and suffers in the comparison. Kobe U. is a much larger school, and is coed, and many of the Shoin students go to that festival, rather than their own, because there are **guys** at the KU affair. Ironically, a lot of the guys my students have abandoned their own campus to ogle have come to the Shoin Festival to ogle the girls they presume will be there. Our festival might bring 500 people a day through the gates; the head count at KU is about 15,000. Admission to each is free, but the school clubs all have booths, mainly food, which they use for fund-raising. I did have a lovely tea ceremony performed for me at Shoin this afternoon for 450 yen, and 2 of the students participating were ones I knew. But

Shoin women are permitted to join KU clubs, and I found 3 students in my classes hawking a variety of edibles, from octopus (*takoyaki*) to rice cakes and French fries right out of a freezer bag (krinkle-kut for your convenience), which was the first western fast food I've had here since the unfortunate donut episode with Robert. I really like their boneless chicken on a stick (*yakitori*) which I indulged in today, as well, but I tried to save room for the moonlight cruise of the *Sylphide* tonight. It's a fairly expensive and posh conclusion to the Shoin Festival, and most of my students find it too rich for their blood (4000 yen admission), though one has a boyfriend who is well-off and has talked him into springing for the tickets. I wonder what **she'll** have to spring for (or upon) later tonight as compensation. She did mention that she wants to have her picture taken with me, so I suppose I'll wear my suit and power tie.

While I've got your attention (presuming a lot, I know), I want to let you know something I've probably already mentioned, perhaps more than once. You will not go unnoticed in Japan. I will notice you, and so will everyone else. Now this doesn't give you any special burden, at least from my point of view; if you feel the desire to grab my pud on the bus, or in one of my classes, I won't criticize you for doing it. However, older Japanese may refuse to sit next to you on the bus, or move if you sit next to them on the train, and that's another way of being noticed. It happens to me regularly, and I hardly notice it any more. I suggest you try to do the same when it occurs to you over here. In a strange way, we will be living in one of the few societies in the world where you and I are racial/social equals: we're both worthless slime. Most people, particularly the young, really don't seem to feel that way, and don't treat me that way, and I'm sure you will be dealt with likewise. You will be an object of much curiosity, as I am, but it's a

different kind a racism than American racism, and one that doesn't single out your race as despicable; it generalizes all races other than the *Nihon* as being despicable.

I'm also eager to take you on a bus ride through Kobe, mainly so that any untoward comments you might ever have made concerning **my** driving forever stick in your throat. I've already told you about the narrow streets; I should also have mentioned the fact that whatever parking regulations that exist are surely unenforced. Double-parking is the only kind of parking you ever see, and traffic is dreadfully impeded everywhere. Buses are on an impossible schedule, and as a result, every trip seems fraught with near misses on each block. Taxi drivers are the sons of the surviving (and probably not surviving, as well) kamikaze pilots, trying to take as many others with them as they can. I don't even want to get started on motor scooters.

Monday, November 13, 1995 - Fax to Mata

Hi, Baby: what's shakin'?

Of course, I'd much prefer to see it shakin', rather than have you describe it, particularly since you clarified the weight you currently sport. I hope you're not going to say that you were told your poundage by a muscular fitness trainer as he began to undress you on the scales, having both guessed your weight and the last time you had sex, and promising to cure both problems with the same sort of therapy. Speaking of shaking, I've begun to notice, far too frequently for my own sanity, that Japanese women either have nearly no butt at all, or what butt they have they refuse to move in anything other than a utilitarian manner. No loss, usually, since there's not much available for any sort of show, but one or two of the students last night had decent shape and volume being put to absolutely no end, in a manner of speaking.

I mailed off an envelope to you containing the first pictures from Japan, as well as a few *ichiman* (10,000 yen notes) to help you with the stuff you need to buy prior to shoving off. I'd like you to give one of them to Jake, so he can either do something nice with Heather, or buy her something special. Find some way, as I will when I next write to him, to stress that the money is not to go to the latest Tramp Appeasement Program (or JATAP: Jake's TAP). He was so girlfriend-dependent before going in, I wonder if he can see that pattern as another pattern of dependence that he has to break? Probably not. I'm not dependent on you Sweetheart; it's worse than that! We have a pure, beautiful, sweet relationship that I'd like to make nasty, dirty, disgusting, and foul-smelling as quickly as you set foot on this soil. Yeah, and maybe soil you, too. It's getting bad over here. Hurry, hurry, hurry!

All my love forever, J. Dennis Lowden.

Monday, November 13, 1995, Kobe

Quite a weekend! This was the Shoin Festival, a modest little celebration of the school, with students in booths trying to sell various edibles for a good cause. The cause, in most cases, is a party afterward, complete with karaoke and, apparently, a total absence of debauchery. And they call **that** a party? The school's officials have the poor judgment to schedule it on the same weekend as one sponsored by neighboring Kobe University, and the comparison is not flattering. In fact, many Shoin students belong to clubs at Kobe, and attend its festival in booths put up by the clubs, shunning the one of their own university. The majority of Shoin students attend neither, and just take advantage of the days off. As an element of the patronizing attitude toward young women in society, Shoin grants a day off from school on both the Friday before and the

Monday following Shoin Festival, in spite of the meager attendance by students. The excuse given is that they need a day to prepare (Friday) and one in which to recuperate from their labors on behalf of good old Shoin U. (Monday). Most who labor at all labor for Good Old Kobe U, and the male students therein who seem to run the clubs as their own private place to round up young women. And any recuperation needed will be to nurse the mammoth hangovers pursuant upon the excesses of alcohol typical of undergraduate parties worldwide. But these frail young women can't be expected to put in a few hours each day of the weekend and then show up for classes the next Monday.

I attended both festivals, on both days, and saw far more of my own students at Kobe U, but had the two most memorable experiences at Shoin. Kobe's festival seems centered on what the students want in a festival, and Shoin's seems more planned by the gray old men who run the school, and reflects more of what they think young ladies should be interested in doing on a weekend for the school. As a result, being a gray old man myself, but having no chance at ever having a hand in running the school, I enjoyed much of the Shoin Festival, especially the Bach concert on Saturday afternoon presented by the Bach Collegium Japan. This is a professional, original-instruments group which specializes in the choral music of J.S. Bach, and was recording this concert at Shoin for an album of early cantatas. Their leader, Maasaki Suzuki, is something of a Japanese cult hero in classical music, and his performances show why. But the audience was 75% old people like me.

This was quite a music weekend for me. Peter Mallett, Shoin colleague as well as arts editor for a local English-language magazine, *Kansai Time Out*, was given 2 tickets to an Osaka

orchestra, the Century Orchestra Osaka, which he had just written about favorably in *KTO*. He couldn't attend, but knew of my interest in music, and offered them to me. I accepted, and then set about trying to find someone free on that Friday evening. All the usual groupies (as in "Round up the usual suspects.") were occupied preparing for the Kobe festival, so I found someone I barely knew, named Akiko Odake, who seemed happy to accompany me. I've spoken English with her a few times, but she isn't a student of mine. She also lives in Himeji, which is in the opposite direction from Osaka, but since we had the day off anyway, it was no great sacrifice to go there to meet her and ride the train up to Osaka together. Actually, it turned out to be no sacrifice at all, and a great treat, since she spoke English nearly purged of any accent, though with a fairly limited vocabulary. The orchestra was excellent, as Peter said they would be, and I noted a January concert that interests me. The concert hall was also first-rate, and just the right sound capacity for a medium-size orchestra (about 65 members).

The third interesting event of the weekend is also the most puzzling. Peter also had a ticket to the grand finale to the Shoin Festival, a dinner cruise on the good ship *Sylphide*, something experience of only one embarkation told me I must not miss, and he offered it to me. I'm beginning to owe this guy **Big Time**; I only hope repayment doesn't come in a friendly shower and a game of Hide-the-Sausage. The boat sailed from Kobe, and I found a few, but very few, of my students on board. The cost of a ticket was 4000 yen, and most had something else to do with that kind of money, it seemed. Among the 350-400 in attendance were only about 8 professors, and I was the only English-speaking one. It looked like a night in which my solace

would be food and drink rather than repartee worthy of the Algonquin Roundtable or a stirring game of Bloomsbury Squares (“I’ll take Medieval Islamic Political Philosophy to block, Peter.”). The buffet was exceptional, with everything from sushi to smoked meats and piles of ripe fruits. I ate everything at least once, and then discovered a dessert bar on another deck frequented only by a few of the cognoscenti. Language began to seem less and less important, though seeing hundreds of lovely young women dressed alluringly did make me remember another of my neglected appetites. Upon boarding the ship, all in attendance were given a ballot and a number to wear. The ballot contained three categories of voting, and I wasn’t sure what any of them was. The first seemed to be “Best Dressed,” and the second, “Miss Shoin,” but the third was a complete enigma, so I only voted for the first two. Prizes were to be given in a big ceremony that concluded the festival, just before the ship turned around and headed for the Kobe pier. It barely interested me, but since all the desserts had been removed from the tables, the voting result was the only game in town, and so I attended. And lucky I did, too, since just before the results were announced, one of the Shoin students who had organized the evening and was coordinating it came running up to me breathlessly. She was unknown to me except by the badge identifying her as an organizer, and she grabbed my arm and began to walk me toward the front of the room. In her fairly passable English she explained that she had been looking all over for me. I should have told her that she evidently missed the nearly-abandoned dessert bar I had to myself for a half hour until some seagoing gunzels shut it down a few minutes ago. It turns out that I had won the election in Category Number Three, which had **something** to do with eating. “Something” wasn’t quite precise enough for my analytic mind. Exactly what kind of eating award had

everyone decided I deserved? Was it some sort of waddle-up-to-the-trough-and-ingest-until-you-hurl recognition? I tried to query one of my students concerning the specifics, but the best she could come up with is some version of the Food is Better than Sex trophy: that when I eat I look like I am happier than I have ever been before. Was she just blowing smoke up my ass in stereotypical Japanese politeness, or was that what the award represented? Whenever there's any question about the motives of others toward me, I have one reliable resource: the UPH. I was the only foreigner (*gaijin*) at the party, and obviously didn't speak their language; maybe this was a way of humiliating me in a way that they got a huge charge out of, while being able to remain polite to me, since I didn't understand the ridicule to which I was being subjected. Nice try, ladies, but **nothing** gets by the UPH. The present was a cheap pen set, or so I was told: I didn't open it. I was sporting a \$400 Pelikan 800 that night. Surely they saw it and knew that it would intensify the insult to receive a pathetic, thrown-together-in-a-sweatshop-of-Malaysia ballpoint in a shabby box and tacky wrapping paper. Funny thing though, after the ceremony, most students gathered on the open air poop deck to watch the lights of Kobe slowly approach, and many of the students came up to me and asked to have their picture taken with me, as if I were a celebrity. They can tell their children one day, "Yes, and that big foreigner ate more than twelve sumos with tapeworms. I saw it with my own eyes." The stuff of legends, that's me.

Saturday, November 14, 1995 - E-mail letter to Gloria Vando Hickok

Gloria,

Mata says you're back from the travels, so welcome to the online world as well. Doesn't Bill know how to do all the necessary things to get plugged in while you are absent? My wifelet

and I have begun a blizzard of faxing, often 4 pages at a time, filled with longing of the most heartbreaking kind. It is wonderful to communicate so quickly, as E-mail permits as well, but I fear our phone bill is soon to require us to form our own company to make continued contact cost-effective. She'll be here in 26 days, but who's counting?

Hope your tour was both useful and fun, and that you got to see some interesting people. Mine are, and I do. Next weekend 4 of my groupies are forcing me, at nipple-point, to accompany them to the ancient capital of Kyoto, wherein can be found shrines, temples, The Path of Philosophers, and seventeen different ways to serve octopus. It gives new meaning to the phrase "This food sucks." I have already promised one student, Noriko, that I would try the octopus speciality of her hometown (Osaka), called "Takoyaki." It's a chunk of boiled tentacle spirited inside a dumpling for the unwary. The dumpling is steamed, giving the westerner enough time to skulk quietly away to a nearby KFC place. If he is tall, or is manacled to a suspicious young lady, as I would be (making me, considering my state of spirit recently, a manacled-depressive), then the only merciful option is extra horseradish and a very cold beer.

This place is food-obsessed. How do I know? What other place would give an award at a dressy party for "Best Eater?" I'm serious. This past weekend was the annual Shoin Festival, and the final event of it was an evening's cruise around Osaka Bay aboard the "Sylphide," with which I acquainted you in an earlier dispatch. Three awards were to be voted on. The first seemed to be Best Dressed, and the second was probably Miss Shoin, but the third was a complete mystery, so I left it blank and voted for the two students I most wanted to be caught in a lifeboat with in case a stray iceberg sent the Sylphide to its watery grave. I can hear the captain's impassioned plea

now: "Squid and octopus first!" The results of the balloting were the final event of the evening, and no one I voted for won. Though I attempted to console them in a lifeboat later, I did find out what the third category was. I found out because I WON IT! It was "Best Eater." The only Caucasian there and is cited for a Waddle-up-to-the-Trough-and-Shovel-it-in-until-you-Explode Prize. It makes you wonder whether it was one of those mercy-fuck awards like Miss Congeniality, or Most Likely to be Still Living at Home at Age 50, caring for her dead parents and a few plants in not much better shape. Was it a subtle kind of cultural payback for McDonald's and Tokyo Disneyland? No, my students insisted, barely able to suppress the omnipresent Shoin Woman Giggle, this was not meant to reward OKI, or Observed Kilos Ingested, nor did it represent a Nagasaki Was Gratuitous counterattack, intended to hit Americans where they are most vulnerable, **everywhere**. It was a tribute, they said, because I looked truly ecstatic when I was eating, and that's a Japanese ideal. To love food as a sensuous and aesthetic experience is to appreciate it at its highest level. Of course the several chunks of sushi stuck to my suit coat did help solidify the opinion of those assembled. So I now have another cheap pen set to rewrap and give as a Xmas gift. How are Bill's writing implements holding out?

Love and knishes, Dennis

Tuesday, November 14, 1995 - Fax to William G. Lowden

Hey Bill; what's shakin'?

Never mind; I really don't want to know. I do have a question, though: do you ever check

your E-mail? If you had, you would have found a limited time offer for a CD of my choice, plus a spaghetti pot and four-in-one reamer, manicurist, ear hair remover (it's getting to be that time in life), and stud locator (that's carpentry talk, of course). The clock is ticking. It's also ticking until Mata visits for about 5 weeks, beginning December 8th. Of course, it could happen a lot sooner if the government shuts down. The Japanese government will **not** shut down for any purpose, other than to collect its payoffs from big business, which makes it indistinguishable from nearly any other government in the world.

I am spending big bucks for this fax to try to extract some information from you quickly. I got a letter from Mother yesterday which included a letter from Ida Hunsdorfer to me. It seems as if they knew a Japanese exchange student a few years ago. After returning to Japan, she continued to write to them, at least until the Great Hanshin Earthquake of last January. Her family lived in an area close to Kobe, and it did suffer quite a bit of damage, but Ida sounds like she's sure they're all dead, and wants me to send the obits (figuratively speaking). I think that's a little pessimistic, but I guess it's not an unreasonable conclusion, given the severity of the quake. I'd be glad to do some checking for them, but it would be easier if I could communicate directly to them, preferably by E-mail. Since you said that Freddy is online, could you send me his address? If you don't feel comfortable doing that, just give him mine, and let him decide if that's the best way to communicate with me. It certainly is my way of choice anymore. I'll give you 2 addresses, but suggest only using the CompuServe one for the time being. I have an Internet address at the university, but I'm having a tiff with Windows 95 concerning access to it via my own computer. It worked wonderfully with Windows 3.1, but 95 is a big bully that is starting to

piss me off. Unfortunately, like most big bullies, you can't do anything to make them change.

Hope all is well with you and yours. Japan is very nice, the students are extremely kind, sweet, lovely, and nearly incapable of communicating in English. Just like teaching in America.

See ya,

Den

Sunday, November 19, 1995 - Fax to Mata

My Darling of Teen Days,

As a Kyoto report, I could say that it was a lovely day, in a relaxed sort of way. Kyoto is a city that could easily overwhelm a tourist who tried to do as much as possible in a day, since there would always be something **major** left unseen or undone. We took it as if we would be back many more times in the future, which quite possibly is right, and tried to make the day as enjoyable as possible, not try to cram as many sights into a given period of time as possible. So we saw one temple, one shrine, one castle, and talked incessantly about how hungry we were! I continue to be amazed at how it is possible to eat a lot of Japanese food and still lose weight, or stay slim. Both my companions yesterday were 19 years of age, very slender, non-acned females, and they don't act as if getting fat is something they will ever worry about, or ever have. You know how weight-obsessed American female teenagers are, and how little that worry translates into svelteness. Maybe there is some genetic clue to the puzzle as well, but I am becoming a believer in your basic diet as having a large part of the determining element of your weight. The girls I was with yesterday don't exercise any more than most kids, though they may walk more frequently than Americans. What they don't do is eat a steady diet of high-fat, processed food.

Yesterday was a real lesson in their eating habits, and I paid attention. We met at the train station at 9:00 A.M. and got to Kyoto around 10:30. By 10:40, Chiharu was looking for a place to eat. Both she and Yuki had eaten breakfast, but that was 3 hours ago! I hadn't had any breakfast, and they both looked at me as if they were surprised that I was still able to navigate under such conditions. We had to spend a little time with certain formalities, like buying our return ticket (crowds at the ticket machines are worth avoiding if time is precious) and obtaining a one-day tourist bus pass. It gives us a free ride on any of Kyoto's buses or subways for one day, at a cost of 1200 yen, which is not bad if you're going to try to make a marathon of it, seeing 15 shrines, temples and museums without pausing to rest. It turns out we didn't get our money's worth with it, but no need to be too much of a pinch penny. Easy for me to say; I'm getting a paycheck every month. We took a bus to the stop for the *Ginkaku-ji* temple, which also coincided with one thing I wanted to do, tread the *Tetsugaku-no-michi*, or Path of Philosophy. We got maybe 100 feet along the P o' P when it became necessary to have an early lunch. The P o' P has quite a few little shops alongside it, and we went inside one which could only seat 10 who were **very** good friends. The kitchen was adjacent to the dining area, and we could watch the cook/proprietor work. Neither of them had ever been to this shop, but they decided that was where we would eat lunch, and I discovered their truly Japanese decision-making process.

In America, it is unlikely we would eat in a hole-in-the-wall restaurant unless we had been told about it, or had eaten there before. When in doubt, Americans will eat in some chain

place, like Shoney's or KFC, where you know what you're getting, no matter how mediocre. I think Americans have learned to accept eating as something akin to fueling up the car, where quality isn't important, but consistency and getting it over with quickly is. Maybe like American sex, as well: regular, predictable, not meant to interfere with other, more important activities. Maybe my change in sexual attitude is allied with my proximity to this culture, which finds some personal activities, like eating, worth taking time to do well, and often, and with a great deal of enjoyment. Sex certainly fits into that description, as well. Back to the restaurant. Japanese have an attitude about shops like that which is: "Since it's run by a Japanese, it must be good. Period." There's never a question of being ripped off by a sleazy merchant, or getting bad or contaminated food in too small a portion. That sort of thing is just not something a Japanese would do, so there's never a discussion of whether this place will poison you, or sell stuff that'll fall apart as soon as you leave the shop. So we went into a little two-room lunch counter the size of a modest American living and dining room (one room for cooking) and had a real fine *okonomiyaki* for 500 yen. It's sort of a hybrid between a crepe and an omelet, filled with all sorts of goodies; mine had smoked bonito. We then had the strength to walk farther to the temple, but on our way back, we had to stop for a little cake for fortitude. And as long as we were in that alley, went farther back to a little hidden shop where they looked at fans and I bought some incense for our days and nights in bed. One of the scents is sandalwood, a favorite of yours, I recall. We continued on the Path of Philosophy, detoured for about 10 minutes at a Shinto shrine which was on the route, and then couldn't last another step without refreshment. We stopped at a little tearoom with seats outside under some trees, and had some sweets with green tea and ginger

sake. The girls found a “love fortune” bowl, where you pay 100 yen and pick your fortune out of a bowl and it purports to tell how your love life would be. I abstained, reasoning that I couldn’t read Japanese anyway, and for fear that it might say something like “You are standing next to the greatest love of your life,” causing the girls, or at least the one standing closest to me, to scamper down the P o’ P in horror, abandoning me to whatever fates care for those condemned to receive inappropriate love fortunes. All went well, however, as both Yuki and Chiharu -- who have steady boyfriends -- got the fortunes they wanted. Now, both emotionally as well as physically fortified, we caught a couple of buses which took us to a castle on the west side of town. Shoes came off, and we had a very sensuous stocking-footed walk on the original wooden floors of a palace. It was almost like foot rub. Almost. The castle closed at 4:00, and it was just as well, since we were all about to collapse with hunger. Chiharu had read about a noodle shop which makes their own *soba* (the buckwheat flour noodles I believe I may have introduced a month or so ago), which is not unique, since most shops do that, and this place serves it with smoked herring, with a side of rice covered with smoked salmon flakes. I was ready to eat the incense I had bought at that point, which would have had the additional advantage of producing more pleasant farts, but was able to trust Chiharu’s steady instincts. Unfortunately, they failed us when we were the most vulnerable, and we wandered about a strange part of town until she finally got her bearings and led us to the shop in question. On the way there, however, we passed by a couple of maikos, which are young apprentice geishas, a sight which neither of my companions had seen in their 19 years of life in that country. I didn’t find the geisha look particularly attractive, but Yuki and Chiharu loved it, and stared at them like they were looking at a pair of

celebrities. The noodles were excellent, and I bought a package of them to take home (and will cook up tonight in chicken stock with green onions and pieces of chicken and Enoki mushrooms -- by the way, certain fungi, like Enokis are less expensive than in the U.S., and Shiitake mushroom, which are a king's ransom in America are nearly given away over here; you could buy 5 pounds of Shiitakes for the price of one stalk of celery in Kobe). The women really slurped those noodles down, complete with sound effects, and -- now you will find this beyond what you might consider plausible -- they were finished before me! It's not just their greater ability with chop sticks, either; I'm not more than a baby step behind them, anyway. They just wolf that shit down, sucking the *soba* relentlessly into their mouths so as to cause me to get an erection the size of the Eiffel Tower. Japanese don't pick at their food; that's not the secret of their slimness. They get after it! Of course we had water, tea, and pickled vegetables along with the meal, and, naturally, there was no tipping, and as soon as we left the shop, we had to find a place that sold sweets. Luckily, there was one around the corner, and I just watched this time while they bought something for the train trip, as well as presents for family and friends from their trip. One of the interesting lessons of my expedition to Kyoto is that most Japanese do not buy packaged goods, particularly edibles, but prefer to find things which are fresh and hand-made. They trust the person behind the counter implicitly, and I find that attitude wonderful. It's such a relaxing feeling to shop in a country where suspicion is not required by the consumer.

Love always, and often, and from every angle you want, D.

Tuesday, November 21, 1995 - Fax to Mata

Dearest of the Dear,

It's now my Tuesday morning, and you are completing one of your last work days for Uncle. Your last fax was far too tame; I am used to my regular fix of blood-churning, groin-disturbing, fever-inducing, lust-provoking **SMUT**. Where was it? You've made me an addict, then you cut off my supply: how rude. One thing, in a non-allied vein, that probably occurred to you, but has only recently to me, is that this visit to Japan will be the first **real** break you've had from being the first line of support, financially and materially, since you were 12. **You are overdue!!** I hope you are able to rest that part of you that is always supposed to come up with the solution, or the cash, or the meal, or the something that you've had to all your life. It may not be easy, so these 5 weeks may not be enough to achieve that goal. And then, you'll go back into much the same role for a while. So I hope you can return here very quickly to give yourself a chance to find a little peace and self (and we get a chance to find a little "couplehood"). It seems as if you define yourself often in relation to others, and that's not a bad idea, in its way. But there is certainly a "self" there which hasn't had a chance to be rediscovered in a long time, just as there is a pair with us that hasn't been together for a long time -- certainly longer than the nearly 3 months of physical separation. Maybe we've never had that opportunity. I'm looking forward to it, and maybe Japan is the perfect place for it. It's culture in which neither of us has any role other than outsider, so no external expectations are being placed upon us.

Well, it's a day for laundry without a cloud in the sky, which means I'd better get washing in time for the first jock-soaking downpour. I also have a bit of shopping to do; Thanksgiving means a couple of people over, and another bottle of Champagne to be distributed among the poor and needy. None sucked from bodily crevices, however. See you. D.

Wednesday, November 22, 1995 - Fax to Mata

To the One for Whom I am Thankful,

Tomorrow will be the first Thanksgiving day since we've been married that I can remember not cooking a big turkey. Robert is having the traditional Chinese stir-fry and rice, even though turkeys are available (albeit at Japanese prices) at many places in town. He's also invited two other Americans over: David, his former housemate, and Molly, the other new professor at Shoin this year. I'll contribute a bottle of Champagne and my guacamole (for dipping with chips and veggies for an appetizer), but otherwise will be unneeded. I'm not sure I like that feeling. Bernard and Rosanna may drop by later, which may necessitate another bottle of bubbly stashed in the cooler.

I had a strangely disturbing dream last night. It awakened me so thoroughly and startlingly that I couldn't get back to sleep for two hours thereafter. It still (at nearly 4:00 P.M.) makes me a little queasy to think about it. I certainly feel sheepish recounting it, but I'll tell you about my dream, if only to reveal to you the depth of my subconscious fears of losing you. I was a war photographer in a big international war being held, that year, in Miami. One of the war correspondents I saw hanging around the battlefield was Dave Barry! I said it was Miami. Well, you came to the war zone, ostensibly to visit me, but when you got a load of Dave Barry, and he got a load of you, Big Time Flirting ensued, and right under my nose! He was putting some serious moves on you, and you were being very coy and leading him around by his throbbing pecker (that's a metaphor; you hadn't actually latched onto his honker at that point). Eventually, you and he semi-disappeared into some bushes. It was easy to see what you two were doing, and

you knew I was watching, since both of you would look my way periodically to make sure I was catching all the action. You and he started real kissing once you got behind some foliage, and you responded so eagerly that it was hard to see who was attacking whom. You both more or less wrestled each other to the ground and the dream ended. Is there something you haven't been telling me?

Only 16 days now.

All my love is yours forever,

D.

Saturday, November 25, 1995 - E-mail letter to Kate Grover

Dear Kate,

Do you remember that 2-part video I showed in Environmental Ethics class, "After the Warming" with James Burke? One of the few things he and I have in common, apparently, is that he's also full of shit. In that little scenario he devised, the atmosphere would be saved by the Japanese, and other Pacific Rim Asian countries, who would require us to economize and do without in the way they do, rather than our disgusting Western resource-guzzling way. Well, I live there now, and that's not the way they live at all. Sure, gas costs nearly \$5 a gallon, the way it should in the U.S., and public transportation is truly a marvel, but there are big loopholes in his story. These people have not heard of insulation, weather-stripping, or double-pane windows. I'm currently sharing a house with another American teacher, and it is on

two stories with 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, and a carport out front. All the rooms except the master bedroom are very small, but it's livable. As we approach December, the daytime highs are lucky to hit 55, and it's 40 at night, sometimes less. Of course, it will get colder yet in January. The house has NO (as in zero) insulation and lots of windows, all of which have a steady breeze coming in around them, even when they are secured. The windows in my bedroom are made of paper. That's right: woodpulp you can write on, if I need be more specific. They are seemingly an aesthetic statement by the owner, but the R-value of them must be something at four decimal places. They can be slid aside to reveal the outer windows, made of a Saran-wrap thickness of glass. This full-size (for Japan) domicile has one small electric heater attached to the ceiling at one corner of the house. It can heat the one room in which it is situated, but only if the doors to and from that room are closed. Luckily, it's the LDK room, as they are called over here. That, as you could probably figure, stands for Living-Dining-Kitchen, which is one contiguous room, L-shaped. No bedroom is heated, nor is a bathroom, which means that taking a dump leaves a significant part of the skin of your ass stuck to the completely frozen toilet seat. Well, how about a nice soak in the tub to warm up (that's not a proposition, by the way, though slightly over 2 months without Mata is causing me to have thoughts many religious people would go in for counseling with)? The tubs here are not only designed for people more diminutive than myself, they were meant to be sat in, not reclined in. Thus, they could be generously described as accommodating legless children comfortably; in fact, legless children would drown in them, since they are pretty deep. My paper bedroom has been provided with a portable radiator, which will keep it pretty warm in that 8X10 location, as long as it gets a 2-hour head start. The result is

that the heaters must nearly run 24 hours a day to heat 2 rooms, and a lot of the heat goes out the various orifices.

Another way in which the rest of the world would do well NOT to emulate the Japanese is in the area of the consumer lifestyle. Americans are positively **restrained** as consumers when compared with the folks over here. Shopping is the national sport, closely besting sumo in the affections of the country. People don't just buy, they also throw away stuff to make room for the new. In fact, a whole industry has grown up here called Gomi-Picking ("*Gomi*" is the word for trash, but also commonly names the day, twice a month, when you are to put out your large items to be picked up for disposal by the authorities), which involves cruising the literally mountains of stuff being thrown out by the Japanese. Much of it is only slightly damaged or incapacitated, but, for some reason, most Japanese seem to feel it is beneath them to have something repaired. Thus, it joins the *Gomi* heap, and then my friend Bernard swings into action. He is an American who teaches English part-time and *Gomi* picks full-time. He owns a little van (one of the few Americans I have found brave or foolish enough to challenge the Kobe street traffic) and now knows when each section of the city has its *Gomi* day. He will get there just ahead of the trucks and sort through the leavings. I just got finished washing my clothes in a washer which he found and gave to the guy I live with. It's quite modern and has only one flaw: it has to be initially filled by bucket. Then it runs perfectly. That may seem barbaric (as the Japanese who threw it away probably did) but a new machine here would be about 80,000 yen (or \$800) for one much smaller than you could buy for half that in the U.S. His best picks, however, are objects of art or

traditional crafts. He usually sells them at flea markets which abound in many of the poorer sections of the cities, where you are sure to find many Americans and other westerners who feel no reluctance at buying something used, or dinged up a bit. But, in spite of all his efforts, and those of other Gomi-pickers, a lot of what the Japanese buy gets tossed. I don't know yet whether this country has landfills or just dumps it in the ocean, but there's a lot of stuff everyday which has to go somewhere.

Another consumer element the Japanese insist on is excess packaging and wrapping. Every store insists on double-wrapping, taping, and bagging everything you buy from them, and each individual piece gets the full treatment. I carry my canvas Land Institute shopping bag with me to the market, and I'm just about the only one with anything on me reusable, other than money. Speaking of filthy lucre, this is very much a cash society. No consumer, and I mean zero again, has a checking account, and nearly no credit cards are used. Everybody pays cash and saves the rest, which is a pretty good idea that has yet to catch on in the U.S. One result is that the big banks don't make a lot of money on credit card and loan interest, so they sock it to you in fees. I went with the Citibank branch in downtown Kobe for less than a month, mainly because they had a few English-speaking tellers. For an ordinary savings account with ATM card there was a minimum balance of 300,000 yen, or you pay a penalty. That's 3 G's. When I tried to send money back to Mata by money order (not telex or anything fairly high-tech) the fee was \$45. After 2 weeks I took my money and ran. The post offices here also function as the all-purpose financial centers of each neighborhood, and you can get a savings account there with no minimum and cheaper fees. And there are branches all over Japan for your listening and dancing

pleasure.

There are other things about the society which makes it a less-than-ideal model for the rest of the world, and most of these things, as well as the good things as yet unmentioned, have deep cultural roots of ethnic superiority. They will be hard to sever. America has nearly no real culture (I am discovering this by observing what a REAL culture looks and smells like), so much of what's both good and bad about it can be either fixed or discarded. The exceptions, it seems to me -- the ingrained American cultural legacies -- are, regrettably, racism and a kind of voracious, fuck-'em-if-they-can't-make-it brand of Capitalism. If we could shed ourselves of them, he says from his lonely soapbox in the dark of the night, the country could become as truly great as its potential always has pointed to. If they remain, I can't see much except a continued erosion from within, feeding the paranoia-mongers like Newt and the Newtonians.

Just the sort of Big Talk you might expect to hear at one of those pubs you haven't visited yet in Topeka. Think of the favor I've done you: you've been able to listen to all the bullshit you always hear in a bar frequented by people not quite as smart as they think they are, without having a hangover and tobacco smell in your hair the next morning.

Cheers, Dennis

Sunday, November 26, 1995 - Fax to Mata

I will give these people one thing (and it's not hanging between my legs), they sure do grow one fine apple. I'm eating one now, and it's really the best-tasting apple I have had since my childhood in New Jersey, eating Stayman Winesaps all autumn long. These Japanese apples are as big as a baby's head, or a softball, and are very flavorful without being cloying and overly

sweet. They also are selling the Mandarin Oranges (*mikan*) I probably mentioned a few weeks ago. The ones available now are a lot riper, and they are another gustatory joy I hope you will find worth the trip. I had one this morning to force down a cold pill. I brought some Dimetapp 12-hour Extendtabs, and that name is partly right and partly wrong. They are lucky to be 8-hour pills, and 6 is really their effective life before my sinuses become the neighborhood phlegm factory. Their extendtab claims are correct, since they appear to be designed to extend your misery for as long as you take them. So, the cold remaineth (being that it is Sunday morning, a little biblical lingo probably wouldn't be out of place), and thriveth, apparently finding that I treat it real well, giving it homemade soups on which to grow stronger, let alone the blitz of fresh fruit. I'll find some way to be over this by the time you arrive, I promise. My guess is that I have no immunity to the particular cold germs prevalent over here, and what is a common, 3-day discomfort for most Japanese has become a 2-week+ siege for me.

It's about 9:00 P.M. Saturday night, your time, so I probably won't call, my voice being as raspy as it is, but will send this raspy fax instead. I've been slowly cooking some spaghetti sauce today, in part to make the house smell nice, and in part to have something for dinner tonight. I wish I had a scale nearby so I could see how much I weigh. When I lived at The Hovel, there was a scale on the top floor next to the washing machines, and I'd weigh myself every week when I did my laundry. That was about 6-7 weeks ago, and I feel I'm down a few kilos since then. I don't think I'll look like someone from Bangladesh when you first see me, but I noticed in a picture someone gave me how thin my hair is getting on top. Time for a rug? I DON'T THINK SO. Just a reality check; I'll be 55 tomorrow, and my life needs to be with you, not some

giggling little sweeties (2 of them have already asked if I would play Santa Claus in some function they are participating in; now how many women have a Santa Claus fantasy hidden under their pillow? Choose a number smaller than one; even Ms. Claus dreams about Jean-Claude VanDamme, not that overstuffed, elf-exploiting bag of whiskers, smelling of too much stale milk, store-bought cookies, and the wrong end of eight reindeer for hours on end.) who think fellatio is an Italian designer. You're the one for me, Sweetheart. D.

Friday, December 1, 1995 - Fax to Mata

One week makes one weak

This may not be news you wanted to hear, but it snowed here this morning. When I went out the door to go to the bus stop, I noticed the streets were wet, and I did remember hearing what I thought was rain sometime in the middle of the night. I thought little more about it until I glanced up at the mountains a few minutes later as I walked up the hill to Shoin. I do that often to check the progress of the autumn colors, and on this morning, a new one made an appearance: white. The topmost trees in the range were dusted with white, up a few hundred feet above the school. That was the only place where snow fell around here, I think, but it was a nice introduction to December.

As far as Robert's dealing with the cold house, I think I've discovered how he does it. He likes it. Last night there was a department meeting and I didn't get back to the house until 6:00. It was dark, of course, and the temperature outside was falling quickly. Robert was in the kitchen, cooking up something in his shirt sleeves, and the heat was turned off. It was about 58 inside, and he showed no inclination to warm things up. I kept on my outer coat during dinner,

but he may not have noticed (his eyes aren't that good). As soon as I came in, I turned the heater in my room on, so after dinner and the news, I excused myself and went in the room for the rest of the night. He stayed downstairs for another hour or so, and I never heard the heat go on. We can turn it on whenever we want, of course, but I was just curious to see whether he would of his own desire.

Saturday, December 2, 1995 - Fax to Mata

The other Half:

I never thought the phrase "my better half" was ever a very nice, or sincere way to refer to one's spouse, but I'm beginning to sign onto the general concept. I don't think you're my better half, any more than I'm your better half. We're both infinitely better whole than halved, so perhaps it could said that you're the half that makes me better, but that isn't quite right, either. You're the half that makes me **anything** worth mentioning; it's not that I'm reduced by your absence, I'm just **NOT**, without you. I'm rereading *1984*, by George Orwell, and in that fictional future world, they have a term, *unperson*, which is applied to anyone who used to be alive, but has been liquidated by the state, and then all references to him excised from all public records. He ceases to exist in any tangible way, though a few people may remember him for a while. There is a very serious way in which I feel like I'm an unperson without you in my life as a living presence. I've missed you before, when we've been apart for a week or sometimes even a few days; sometimes I've even missed you when we were together, and would call you at work just to talk with you. But missing you is too mild a term for what I have been feeling in our separation this time, and perhaps that's true for you, as well. If so, it would mean, I think, that it's not

merely my being in an alien culture in which I cannot communicate or understand the communications of others, or of the society itself, which drives me quickly to desire the most familiar port of comfort and communication in my life: you. It's more like a fundamental realization of my own identity, and how much of it contains **you**. This is not my official identity, such as the post office and governments recognize for their purposes, but may have nothing to do with the way you see yourself. I think you have assumed that my official identity as your husband was a bit at odds with my internal identity -- the means by which I describe myself **to** myself -- as some independent entity capable of functioning very well, perhaps optimally, alone. Perhaps I even harbored some of those beliefs myself at one time; I'm sure I acted as if I did often enough for you to figure that you were "some useless appendage" that I stuck myself with and was unable to, or uninterested in, unsticking. Of course, the quotes in the line above will be familiar, since they came from the fax you just sent an hour ago. I'm not quoting them to throw your own words back in your face, my loved one, but I use them because they struck me hard when I read them this afternoon. I'm sure this **is** the way I have made you feel in the past, and I cannot tell you how sorry I am about it, and how wrong I may have been if I even thought 1% of that to be true. But it has taken this much time apart for me to understand not as much your place in my life, but my own inability to function as a person, in my own eyes, without you incessantly in my life. Perhaps others may see me as taking care of business and doing my job, or coping with whatever comes along just fine, but it's all a facade behind which an incomplete pile of bones and rubbish lies, waiting for you to come back to put me together again. I really don't think I'm overstating the case here; this is precisely the way I feel.

I would guess that to 95% of the world, I appear to be a happy-go-lucky sort of guy, full of fun and a quick quip. And I enjoy that part of me, and would probably be bored with myself if that were missing. But I feel pressures and stress very acutely in my life, and I know you recognize that. Some things that affect me probably shouldn't, like Michael's living with us, but they do, and I haven't had a way of dealing with them, to my detriment. It probably hasn't done anything positive for my long-term health to be absent that ability. The stress of graduate school, and my failure to complete it has been a weight, particularly the latter, once it became evident, in fall 1994, that I would not be able to continue. I wrote to Julian around that time that "the stench of failure permeates everything I try to do" (that may not be an exact quote, but I don't think the rules of scholarship need apply in our letters) and I included our marriage in that. I felt that I just didn't have the tools, whatever they were, to really make a genuine, long-term success of anything I tried, and I didn't see any way out of this kind of frustrating existence. It was really quite a low point in my life, and it was at almost precisely that time that Michael dropped back in for the duration. Those weren't the only times I have been distant and self-isolating with you, but I would guess they were the most recent examples of that sorry phenomenon. I recount this not to depress you, because one point I am making is that these are two elements of stress which no longer affect me, and it has been a positive thing for me. I am appreciated by my students, and even some teachers remark about how the students seem to gravitate to me. You noted, a fax or two ago, that my willingness to talk frankly about our sex life, and also to change it in whatever way we needed to make it the best possible, seemed to indicate that I was feeling a little looser or more comfortable over here, and the absence of those two points of stress, Michael and the

feeling of failure, are probably the keys. So I **was** getting at something with this letter, though it may not have seemed so at one point.

The absence of those points of stress, however, may have made it possible for me to realize more fully how important you are in my life. In one sense, I was freer than I have been in decades: stress reduced, surrounded by attentive, attractive Asian women, without you, as well, which is one element of freedom, I suppose, and I had a well-paying job for a year and a half. If there were a recipe for bringing a loner happiness, or at least this one, that would have to be it. And in the first few weeks, I really enjoyed roaming around, discovering things in the city. But slowly, something started working its way to the surface to smudge this nice little picture, and maybe that crying jag I hit may have marked its breakthrough to my conscious. Its truth is all the more apparent to me now, because all the other possible sources of sadness and discontent have been removed from my life, and replaced with some pretty fabulous ones: girls and money! But I've begun to walk around like a zombie, and, in recent times, haven't much left the house except to go to work. And, as you and I have begun to communicate on a much more intimate level than before, the realization has just slapped me in the face like I was in an old 1940's movie. I'm not functioning because you are that me that's missing. As I said earlier, I don't think of you as a part of me, as much as almost a surrogate me; a me *in absentia* temporarily. I really am a different person without you, and I don't especially like that person. I didn't mean to get so "philosophical" with you, but I haven't expressed or explained to you in these terms what being without you meant, and what being with you is going to mean. We genuinely like each other's

company, we have fun together, we're both decent people who want to be loved by the other, and want to love the other, but maybe are not exactly sure of either one yet; we're not sure that the other can love us the way we need to be, and we're also not sure we can love the other in the way they need to be. In my case, it's even worse; I don't really know how I need to be loved, since I've never really been loved to the extent that I recognized it as such. But I promise you I'm eager to give you the rest of my life to let you try, and I believe it will happen. I hope I can do the same for you, since I recognize now that whatever I do for you, I'm really doing for me, and I am a selfish bastard!

I'm yours; and I wouldn't want it any other way.

D.

Sunday, December 3, 1995 - E-mail letter to Julian Catalano

Julio,

Somehow, I recall you writing to me recently, but I have failed to secure said letter in the innards of this machine. The last thing in my files from you was dated 11/23, when you mentioned that Rose and you were history, and that I got no points for boinking my own wife, but, I would assume, several for boinking someone else's. I fear I haven't increased my point total while over here, and in the last 3 weeks I've merely been finding that Caucasians have little or no immunity to cold germs of the Realasian variety. Every bodily function and orifice has been visited, tormented, and left impaired by whatever I have, though it seems to have become bored with my attentions, and has gone elsewhere.

For having the reputation of being a fastidious race, the Japanese do have some strange

sanitary habits. Mata is big on sanitation, an area where she would, I am sure, like to see some whole-hearted reform on my part. Wait until she sees where she has to shit over here. Japanese crappers are ceramic holes in the floor, though some places have "Western" toilets, which means complete with graffiti. The school is one of those places, though they have traditional hole-in-the-floor facilities on even-numbered floors and Western ones on odd numbers. I probably won't tell her about the latter until she experiences the former. Another interesting habit, and perhaps more closely allied to my recent indisposition, is the eagerness with which they sneeze openly, juicily, and directly into, onto, and upon someone else. Oddly enough, blowing your nose in public is thought of as the height of rudeness, but not showering a stranger with mucus and spittle. Since public transportation is efficient, it is also crowded, and I feel an industry that could make it big over here is some sort of open-orifice condom which could be donned in public places during cold season. It would protect every exposed body opening, but still allow freedom of movement. Perhaps more expensive models could have a one-way sneeze tunnel, where you could sneeze on your neighbors but they could not sneeze on you. Now that the flaws in your handicapping system have been exposed, perhaps you need a new endeavor with remunerative potential.

Be well, and be regular,

Dee

Sunday, December 3, 1995- Letter to stepdaughter Melanie Cole

Dear Mel,

It was a nice surprise to get your letter attached to one of your Mom's the other day. She may have told you that it didn't all get received since the fax machine at this house ran out of paper without a warning. So she transmitted it again, and all is well. I was particularly happy to hear that Mikey is doing better with his behavior problems at school. When I sat in his class in September, right before leaving, I felt that the Ngom couple would provide a different approach than the teachers I met from 1st grade. In particular, they seemed to be much stricter in the discipline side of class -- sort of a "tough love" approach -- and that seemed to be a little lax last year. I'm also glad to hear that my postcards are arriving regularly, though I would guess that the Ngoms probably flinch at my amateurish attempt at French. If they use my cards as horrible examples of how to misuse the language, that's all right with me; anything in the service of education! I also have to say that I'm glad his teachers are a black husband and wife team. There are so many good implicit lessons that come from that setup for him, in addition to the schoolwork he absorbs, that his self-image as a black person in a society which clearly does not value him equally with a white person, gets positively reinforced every day he is there with them.

As you might guess, letters from either your Mom or myself will be pretty scarce for the next month or so. I figured this might be the last time this computer gets any time put in on it, so I'm trying to do some last-minute corresponding on it. E-mail is the greatest invention. I now am writing to about 15 people on it, and those who don't use it, other than special ones like you and your mother, get little contact from me at all. Even Jake sent me a short message the other day from the computer at his work. We'll make that guy a nerd yet! Inga, who you may remember from 1994 Thanksgiving visit, writes pretty regularly, depending on her social life and classroom

load. She's enrolled in a physical therapy program at Rockhurst which is rather demanding. I've even raised my brother Bill from the dead, and established contact with an old (and I **do** mean old) Sunday School teacher I had (and victimized horribly) when I was in grade school. He and his wife still have the scars from those days.

I was a 10-year old wiseass with not an ounce of respect in his bones, knowing that it was my father's church and I could do whatever I wanted. I'm surprised they still speak to me. They reminded me, in their first message, of the time when I was shooting spit-balls at kids during the Bible reading, and they tried to corner me and take me out of Sunday School that morning and place me in my father's custody. They were about the only teachers I had who would actually narc to my father about my behavior, and it was a new experience for me. Most previous teachers figured handling me was one of the prices they had to pay, or, perhaps, a trial the Lord sent them to endure, and dealt with me, or, in most cases, let me get away with anything, without saying a word. I wasn't used to real discipline until I hit Freddy and Ida's class. Well, they had me cornered (they thought) while the rest of the class looked on in amazement. However, I was next to a window, so I merely opened it and leaped out. The room was on the second floor of a church annex, and they thought I had killed myself! Actually, I did sprain my ankle, but I limped away out of sight before they could come down the stairs to look after me. Apparently, it made a big impression on them, but the impression was mutual. I came to love and admire them after a time, and would correspond with them eventually from college many years later, and visited them upon occasion. Well, you've learned a little more about me than I planned to tell you, and it's even something your mom doesn't know, yet. She'll find out. Moms always do, I have

discovered.

And, if you want to bet some money, I'll be willing to bet that she **does** return to K.C. when she is scheduled to on the 9th or 10th of January, contrary to your latest prediction. We're both nervous and excited about your new pregnancy, and I know she wants to be a source of everything (she is, after all, **SUPERMOM!**) for you in your last months. That's important, and as much as I'll miss her, I want you both to have an opportunity to be together for it. Perhaps the only thing that might tempt her to stay will be the sight of all the lovely Asian women in my classes, smiling and acting sweetly toward me. She has nothing to worry about, of course, but sometimes a picture overrules a thousand words, to rephrase a cliché. They are the sweetest, dearest students I've ever known, and they dress like they're on a job interview (or a beauty contest), but they can't stand up to The Mata Effect. Besides, you could fit most of their butts in a thimble, which might sound good, but, as a man, I like to have some idea where a woman's legs end, other than her shoulders. So she'll be back, as Arnold would affirm, and we'll be reduced to sending pornographic faxes for a few months until the phone company shuts us down for lewd behavior.

Well, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and whatever holidays occur while I'm happily occupied with your Mom. Say hi to Chuck for me, and, of course, give a big hug and kiss to Mikey. I suppose I'm as happy as I can be without my wife with me, which I am now finding is the main source of my happiness on this earth. But it's always wonderful to know you're around, and a lovely part of my life. My thoughts are with you far more often than I let you know, and I love you for, as the song goes, all the things you are.

Love always,

Dennis

Tuesday, December 5, 1995 - Fax to Mata

My Dear Mata,

I'm in the middle of a sleepless night, facing an issue that I knew I would have to face sooner or later, but hoping it would not surface before your visit, and the joy and excitement I have anticipated with it. But in your last fax, you mentioned our spiritual life and its importance to you, and a monster I knew was lurking in wait came out from the shadows. I know I could probably sidestep discussing the subject until another time, but you stated the issue clearly, and made clear also its importance to you, something I knew already. The spirit of these recent letters makes it necessary that I respond as honestly and clearly as you have, and the results of **that** are what I dread most. While I really don't think sex, or an anemic sex life would ever be likely to break up our marriage, nor anything we would do with each other, or our vows, as long as we did those things with sincere loving intentions, I do fear that religion is a potential destroyer of your love for me. Underneath everything else, it is the greatest fear I harbor for us, and it is only right that I disclose it now. I don't want you traveling to Kobe under any illusions, though I do think what I will say is likely to either make you cancel your trip (it is insured, after all) or place our visit under a very gray and joyless cloud; very different from the hopes we both have expressed in our letters.

In yesterday's fax, I mentioned that I was a philosopher, perhaps from my early years, and I think that's true. An important part of what I think is important in life, particularly my life, is

questioning and challenging human concepts, and thinking them through carefully and objectively. A part of becoming a philosopher, I found, is reading what other people like me have thought, and how they went about the process of thinking on human concepts. The history of philosophy is not just an academic pursuit, but is an intellectual recounting of the ways in which many people have tried to grapple with difficult issues of human life, and, ultimately, of their failings. Failure is one of the inevitabilities of the philosophical life, and so I'm used to thinking in those rather uncomfortable terms. All philosophers have ended up not being able to grasp the full understanding of human life, but many have contributed bits and pieces to a still (and ultimately) incomplete canvas.

The early Greeks, such as Plato and Aristotle, are favorites of mine, because many of their ideas ring very true to me; something inside me and inside how I have experienced the world resonates with their ideas in many areas. We also disagree, but because I think they are wrong on several things as well does not make them wrong on all things. One of the things we (the Greeks and I) have agreed on is the nature of spirituality. No letter from me at 1:30 in the morning, typed in bed while leaning uncomfortably against the wall, is likely to be able to do justice to this concept, but I'll try to give you a little outline of it, so that you can better understand me.

The Greeks had very strong beliefs in a soul and a spiritual life, but it would be wrong to describe them as religious beliefs in the Christian context. I found it interesting to explain this to Rockhurst students when I taught Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, since most of them had been raised with a very narrow idea of the soul and spirit, and weren't aware that another one existed,

except in some vague “New Age” mumbo-jumbo. To the Greeks -- and me -- spirit and spiritual life is a very broad category of inner human experience. Creativity is a part of one’s spiritual life, as is the enjoyment of the creations of others, such as music or art. Emotional life is completely a part of one’s spiritual side, and its health and balance can have a great effect on the ability of the rest of one’s soul to be fully active and fully contributing to a full human life. That was the goal, eventually, for the Greeks; one could be said to have lived a truly human life when all facets of human life were given time and space to **flourish** (which is a word I think is a great one to express the reaching out to fulfill yourself in some area of human endeavor). If any part of the soul is out of balance, the rest of it suffers and can’t flourish to the extent it is capable. So spiritual life, and the soul, which is merely the word given to that distinctly human inner element that distinguishes us from all other life that’s known, is an all-encompassing and interdependent uniqueness we possess. It’s the source of our greatest triumphs as individuals, but also of our ultimate failures, too. Intellectual life is one of the most important part of the Greek concept of soul, and it is the part with which I most identify, just as an artist would emphasize one part, or another person would feel closest to yet another. Thinking, and intellectual development are a part of one’s spiritual life, and most philosophers, as you might guess, believe that a philosophical way of thinking is the best way to advance this part of your soul. While I agree, I recognize that there are other ways of developing the mind which may be very enriching, but also non-philosophical. Math and science are two such ways of looking at and trying to understand the world, and human existence within the world which are not really philosophical, but still are mentally stimulating and enriching. I could also mention things like history and sociology, as

well, and others that the lateness of the hour have squeezed from my consciousness.

Relationships and friendships are another element of one's spiritual life, and their maintenance and the fulfillment a person gets from them adds to their soul, or subtracts from it, if that area of life is in disrepair. I surely identify it as the place where I am most in need of work, as a human who desires to flourish.

And finally, religion, and religious practice had a place in one's spiritual life and the development of one's soul, but it is not the preeminent place that most of Christianity requires. For the Greeks, it was an element of the whole, and not the whole itself. It could be greatly emphasized, as I emphasize intellectual strength, or it could be minimized, as, perhaps, some artists minimize the role of science in their lives. If it is eliminated, however, a person's entire spiritual life suffers, since all of the elements contribute to the others. For the Greeks, the way in which they expressed their religion is pretty alien to today's ideas, since they were polytheistic, and I'm not in much accord with their ways there. But the underlying **reason** for religion as a part of the soul is something I find very important, and with which I agree. The Greeks practiced religion as a way of acknowledging that, as humans, they were not all-sufficient themselves, nor did they have all the answers to the most important questions. The idea that failure is an inescapable part of the philosopher's life comes back here, since religion is a way of mitigating that feeling of failure in the face of the unknown. Much of the Greek concept of the soul revolves around human capabilities and human uniqueness, and the power of our species to do and know more than any other in the history of the earth. That's all certainly true, and worth celebrating, but we need to recognize our limitations, and the ultimate mystery at the heart of all

that is. The Greek word *hubris* is one that retains something of its original meaning in English usage, and that is, arrogance beyond your abilities. A human would be guilty of that when he or she refused to admit to an ultimate inability to know all that could be known, and many characters in Greek tragedies suffered at the hands of fate for exactly that flaw of character.

To explain as much as possible is a desire all humans had, said Aristotle, though he said it in Greek. When you hit the limits, either of your own ability, or those of the species if you're really sharp, or have a good library at your disposal, you can't stop. Humans want a complete picture, not a fragmented one, but human knowledge and tools available to the human spirit never are capable of completing the picture we so desperately want to see. Aristotle knew we would be unsatisfied with the fragmented view of life that our own abilities, either personal or collective/historical bring us, so we have to throw ourselves into the unknown, and admit that there are powers and forces that have answers and even questions that we will never have. We can put a name to the power and force, and call it God, if we want, though some Jewish students I had at KU said that their religion forbade them even putting a word down for such a power, since the very act of putting it to human language was one which whittled it down to human terms, which they thought of as blasphemy. Creation stories and tales of prophets and moral leaders of the past are a part of religious practice, and they give an element of the on-going account of human attempts to grapple with and confront the unknown and unknowable. They are good stories, and worthy of keeping alive, not just for literary or aesthetic reasons, but because we all need to feel connected to a past similar to our own. The Jews often invoke the times of persecution in biblical accounts to show that this generation is connected in very important ways

to earlier ones. Christianity is an outgrowth of Judaism, though many Christians try to repudiate their Jewish roots, and the stories of the struggles of the early church and even the lessons and life of Jesus are ways of producing a kind of continuity between generations and eras with common beliefs and difficulties.

Unfortunately, there aren't any churches today which have this concept of spirit and soul, and that's my dilemma. Early on in our friendship, Inga asked me about my spiritual life, and I was honest with her as I haven't, I suppose, with you. I knew if she wanted nothing more to do with me, it would be a temporary loss with little permanent effect; but if my views alienated you, much of my life, as I knew it, would be dead. While she was my student, she clearly didn't share my spiritual ideas, but sounded much more compatible with yours. At least she still speaks with me, as you do with McQuirter, but there's a sense that she and I will never be on the same wavelength on some issues, which is probably true with you and me. Perhaps the reason why churches don't exist for what I am trying to express is that the idea of "worship" is a peculiarly Christian one, and a bit off what the Greeks felt was called for in religion. So, when I go to a church, there's a lot that I like, depending on the church, and a lot that isn't my cup of tea. Ironically, the things I find good and comforting are the very things that I suspect you find boring or unnecessary. There are ritualistic elements I like a lot, perhaps for complex psychological reasons that go back to my father and my childhood, and also for some of the things I have been talking about in this letter. These may be the "trappings" you mentioned in your letter. For me, religious practice needs to be compatible with the rest of my soul, not clash with it. So a church needs to appeal to my intellectual, aesthetic/musical sides, as well as any overtly religious

attraction.

You also say that you don't want me to change, but it seems as if that's what happened with McQuirter (remember, you brought his name up in your letter first, and mentioned that I "took his place," which leads me, inevitably to wonder who will take my place if I don't change satisfactorily. Of course, it's none of my business who will take my place, as long as he hasn't already). In my mind there's nothing wrong with you putting God first in your life, and me second. It's probably been that way a long time anyway, and I haven't objected, **ever**, to that arrangement. I did often perceive that I was not #2, however, but much farther down the list, with Primerica and others nudging me down with the leftovers. As long as I'm **truly** #2, I wouldn't aspire any higher; that, also, would be *hubris*. No, you don't have to worry about that.

Now, I ask: what do I have to worry about? This is what I would guess I have to worry about **mightily**; that you would perceive that you and God are a "package deal" for me: if I don't take both, I don't get either. Is that the deal Mac had to take? The deal that he turned down? If what you require, or you interpret your God to require of you, is that I accept your general religious orientation and practices in order for us to have any chance of a happy and completely fulfilling marriage, including sex and growing old together, then I'm afraid it's not going to happen. I would guess, to your eyes, I am not a religious person, based upon the content of this letter and your observations of me, and also based upon your own ideas of what constitutes a minimally acceptable religious belief. Whatever you do think of me in this area, it is not something I have discarded or never given much thought to. There is not a lot in life that I haven't given much thought to. My beliefs about the soul and spirit have been worked on and

thought through by me, and, of course, with a lot of help from some dead guys 2500 years ago. In that way, we are probably more alike than you would like to admit; we both take our starting point in the written word several millennia ago near the Mediterranean Sea. We get some sense of ourself from it, it helps guide and mold our behavior and outlook on life. But, because we bring ourself to it, a unique self, I also believe we have an effect on it, even if very slightly. I'd like to think that, through my students, I've been able to add another footnote to the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, made them live for someone who never expected that to happen. Perhaps you hope that will happen with others through your influence and example in religious practice, and it would be great if it did. A part of our immortality, I believe, is our effect upon the souls of others. That's how my father lives with me, and others who loved him and were touched positively by him and his work. That's also why I resist my mother's attempts to reduce him to one word in posterity: adulterer. He was more than that to thousands of people, and he lives through their lives and their changes as a result of his presence.

Well, it's after 3:00, and I hope I can sleep now, but I doubt it. The uncertainty of our relationship has never been more fearful than it is now. While nothing has changed in my feelings for you, as I have expressed them in these last weeks, I'm very worried about how what I have said here will change the way you see our being together. You have very high spiritual standards, I am sure, and I am also pretty sure I don't measure up to them. I don't know how closely your beliefs adhere to those of Michael, but in the last year on South Benton, I detected a powerful vein of intolerance bordering on Inquisition-like pig-headedness in his religious

attitudes, as he expressed them to me early on. I think he detected my lack of sympathy with them, and kept them hidden thereafter. If you share his “it’s my way or the highway” point of view, at least for a mate’s spiritual orientation, then we’re in trouble. I’m sorry to put a damper on all the sexy fun we’ve been having up to this point in these letters, but I guess it was all based on false pretenses, or ignorance of pretenses, and I’m sorry for that. I guess I have avoided the subject because I knew how potentially divisive it is, and I wanted so much to keep our love alive. I don’t want to divide us, I want us to face life together in as many ways as is humanly possible, but this is apparently one where we will be out of step. I don’t find that particularly difficult, since I have felt out of step with most people for all of my life. But I fear that you cannot accept nonconformity at this deep a level as acceptable in a mate, and that will eventually mean the demise of our relationship, and the marriage around which it has been built. I feel that result would be a tragedy for me of unimaginable extent, but I would understand it, from your point of view. Of course, I’m making several assumptions about your point of view, and they may be in error. It would not be the first time. If this is too much of a gulf to bridge, and you know it instantly, there is no need to waste the money for the airline tickets and spend 5 weeks progressively breaking our hearts. Let me know, of course, so I don’t sit in the terminal all night. Maybe this is the lateness of the hour talking, but as much as I want to be with you and build and strengthen our relationship in the ways we have been talking about in letters, I don’t want it to be a temporary pleasantness on the way to eventual destruction. I am in it until our last gasp, no matter what, as long as you want a real marriage with me, and can accept my spiritual shortcomings. Of course, I don’t view them as such, but I would understand another’s seeing it

that way. But if you can't, and know it, do us both a favor. I've been as honest as I have ever been with anyone on this subject, other than my father, with whom I had an ongoing and vigorous discussion on this very subject in his final years, mainly via the mail to and from Wake Island. We both understood each other, and, I think, respected, loved, and admired the other, but did not share the same beliefs. Of course, we didn't try to live together and forge a common life, and that situation, I believe, makes all the difference. I love, respect, and admire you, and want us to make, and continue, a life together. In that sense, nothing has changed. But there are two of us in this, and I wonder what effect these 4 pages have on your belief in our future. D.

Sunday, December 17, 1995 - E-mail letter to Julian Catalano

Julio!

Sorry you're about to be evicted, but my advice on such things would be out of date by several decades. Find a woman with property, I would say; Ivana, as I understand it, has the little summer house in The Hamptons, and Imelda still has a bundle stashed, I am sure, though you'd have to overlook some pretty leathery embraces. Nothing you haven't done before. Maybe it's just women whose names begin with 'I' you need to be on the lookout for. Mata and I got off to a great start: she arrived on Friday, her bags on Sunday, which is her reward for flying Korean Air. All luggage is required to spend 48 hours in Seoul being rummaged by the relatives of some disgraced premier or another, e.g., Wae Too Short. No loss, since it merely deprived Mata of all her clothing for a couple of days, something I was planning to do anyway.

Last week, I took her to school every day and she taught my classes. All I did was introduce her, and ask her to have a little one-on-one conversation with each one about any topic

they wanted. Bingo! One hour plus shot in the ass each and every time. Mata was astonished at the amount of leg being exhibited by the students, even in the coldest weather, and they all seemed to like her, which is not exactly the same thing. There is still a complete week of classes left until Christmas break, so we probably won't do much, if any, traveling until vacation. My research grant has just graciously supplied me with a 17-28mm fisheye zoom lens for the new Pentax SLR which it obtained for me last month, and is soon to find that a 100-300mm telephoto zoom is completely indispensable for those research activities I have planned outside the windows of the dormitory next spring.

This will probably have to suffice for a Christmas card from us, since we aren't thinking too far in the future these days. Be well and happy, and thanks for all the contact.

Waspo

Tuesday, December 26, 1995 - Kobe

Julian alluded once that there was an inverse relationship between excesses of connubial bliss and artistic output. Few people of my acquaintance can speak more authoritatively concerning excess of all sorts than he, which is why that allusion remains with me. And while I would be the last to claim any artistic status for these pages, since Mata's arrival on the 8th of this month, I have not been found challenging the capacity of the hard drive of this instrument with any regularity. It would pain me deeply to admit that Julian was privy to any lasting truth which had eluded me. Anyway, we are comfortable together, Mata and I, like an old DeSoto and a case of STP; we need each other for maximum operating efficiency. The STP has no real reason for existing except for old wrecks like a '53 DeSoto, and the latter would be parked and

rusting were it not for the STP. However, the **Big** (sexual) **Talk** of the faxes has not been put into practice with anything like the piston-like regularity (ever notice that male Americans who write would be absolutely mute without automotive metaphors?) promised, or threatened, by the letters. Still, it's far pleasanter with her here than with her absent. There is a feeling of the days comprising **real life** rather than some marking time in a strange place, hoping for real life to begin again some time soon. The place remains strange, but living here no longer is with Mata's presence. I hope that's what love is, because that's the feeling I have about it.

One thing about the Japanese: they really know how to put the X in Xmas. Kobe has what is reputed to be a smashing light show downtown during the holidays, and everyone told us that it was not to be missed. Saturday, the 23rd, was the Emperor's Birthday, and in honor of His Regalness, the subjects constructed a world-record traffic jam in Kobe, all vehicles headed for the light(s). Luckily, we had tickets to a Christmas concert at Shoin, conducted by Maasaki Suzuki, and were able to avoid most of the effects of the downtown celebration, except for a massive interruption in the bus service. Since the lights were to be extinguished after the 25th, we decided to travel there on Christmas Eve, inhaling some seasonal spirit from the city in the process. We boarded a #2 bus which was already overcrowded, and, had we been rational rather than seasonal, would have disembarked at the next stop and walked home. But we're Americans, dammit! We are subject to the most implausible of cultural attachments, and lights in the shape of fat bearded men in red suits, reindeer, and well-dressed Middle Eastern nobles on camels seem

to draw us at this time of year beyond the protests of reason. By the time we got to the Shin-Kobe stop, a full mile and a half from the scene of the display for which we were exposing ourselves to a pharmacopeia of Asian germs, the bus driver made an announcement which was, of course, uninterpretable by either of us. The UPH cautioned me that it probably mentioned Mata's and my presence to the other patrons, and suggested that they help us keep the holidays in a special way by having the shit beat out of us and being left under the seats to perish, but since we were able, eventually, to leave the bus uninjured, that may not have been the gist of it. But nearly everyone did get off at that point, and we joined them to walk the remaining distance, arriving before the bus did. While I had never seen the lights before, I knew they were about a block and a half south and east of the Daimaru department store adjacent to the entrance to the Motomachi shopping arcade, though eventually we were swept up in a flood of people heading in that direction, and from which deviation was not a possibility. The lights themselves took up about 3 blocks of the city, arching over the streets suggesting nothing so much as a tribute to excess electricity. They all appeared to be in the same design of concentric semi-circles, and far from lumen-challenged; it was probably enough to peg the light meters of most cameras, and everybody in attendance seemed to love it. Well, everybody minus one. There is this Scrooge-like impulse within me which seems to surface in late December, and I just had to say "Bah, humbug" to this stultifying light show: redundant megavolts. Mata was not roused by it, either, and we both made our way out of there and headed for the Sannomiya railway station, from which we pledged not to repeat the bus debacle. But before we reached Sannomiya, Mata went into a store for some serious browsing and I stood outside looking for some evidence of the fact

that it was December 24th. While doing so, I was approached by a young man sporting a Canon F-1 camera -- definitely of professional quality as well as price -- flashed what he claimed were press credentials, but could have been a Buy-10-get-1-free-card from Toshiko's House of Tentacles, and asked me what I thought of the light display. Now, I can behave in public, and I felt this was an occasion which called for that. Of course, we hadn't eaten yet, and hunger can do things to the will that electrodes to the testicles could only dream of. But, respecting his country and deducing that his English, though passable, was not capable of unpacking aesthetic complexities, I said it was "impressive." This was not a lie, so I felt no need to blurt out a truth in expiation of my verbal sins. This was not enough for the guy, however, and he continued to grill me on the illuminated Pride of Kobe, and I continued to wonder whether he had seen too many Sam Donaldson tapes in J-school, and answered him in what I took to be elementary school synonyms for "impressive." They were about two in number, and still the same sorts of questions rained down on me; could I be a little more specific in my evaluation? Unfortunately, I could. One English word all my students knew intimately, even the least articulate, was the word "boring." I used it to describe my reaction to the lights, and you might have thought I claimed carnal knowledge of the Crown Princess and was sharing a labial criticism with a loyal subject. Was I aware, he asked me, that the display was designed and built by a famous Italian? I resisted (barely) the observation that it is foolish to trust Italians to construct anything more complicated than lasagna, remembering that Leonardo is dead and, as far as I know, so is Enzo Ferrari. Mata returned and he insisted on taking our picture together, most certainly already in the hands of the Ministry of Justice for our impending deportation hearings, or so whispers the UPH.

Monday, January 1, 1996 - E-mail letter to Julian Catalano

Julio,

Mata and I had thought of going to Kyoto on New Year's Eve for the ringing of the temple bells, but I had only been there once, and that was with guides during the daytime. We'll probably do that next year, since I feel Kyoto will be a major visiting place for me during my time here. We had a bottle of Dom to drink, anyway, and temple grounds, let alone railway cars, seem inappropriate places for such a noble beverage to be consumed. I am also too cheap to spring for a hotel room at that time, which would have made it easy to combine a late-night visit with a morning one. We opted to get up fairly early, and join the celebrants to their first visit to a Shinto Shrine of the New Year, or *hatsumode*. It's reputedly **much** less subdued than the evening before at the temples, and usually features food. We went to the Yasaka Shrine, or *Jinja*, had a good time, and then went to a splendid temple nearby, the *Chion-in* Temple, where we spent a little "quality time" with the spirits. A set of monks was going through a ritual of some sort, so we kneeled on the mats and listened, smelled, and observed. It was quite a multi-sense experience, though I would much rather do such things alone. Mata is a splendid companion in every way, but I would like the freedom to spend as much or as little time at places as I want. Since she is dependent on me for knowing where our next step will take us, I feel that I really won't do Kyoto properly until I can do it by myself. I also expect I'll not be so cheap next year and get a hotel room well in advance and do the entire Kyoto thing. It really is an extraordinary town, as you said.

Nothing more from here. Everything except convenience stores and public transportation

shuts down for 1/1 through 1/3 in Japan; even the English-language news is off the TV for the duration, though I did observe, last night, a game show on some nationally-televised network which had, as its object, the voluntary removal of most articles of clothing by selected audience members. It ran for about 4 hours, starting at 8:00 P.M., and several sets of fine Nippon Nipples were displayed for all to see. It was boys against the girls, and seemed to be rigged so as to reveal far more female anatomy than male. And they say there's no justice in the world.

American networks could learn from these folks.

Cheers,

D & M

Monday, January 15, 1996 - Letter to Professor Joe Fossati

Coming-of Age Day (A National Holiday, for which I am **paid!**)

Dear Joe,

I'll spare your eyes the cryptographic chore of trying to decipher my handwriting for a change, and let WordPerfect take care of it. That, and the printer at school, should make this, at least superficially, pleasurable reading. Thanks for the card, and the sight of two lovely dogs at Xmas. The holidays had their upside for me, since Mata visited for 5 weeks, long enough to make her leaving a mixed sadness. I've begun to get a great deal of satisfaction from visiting Kyoto, and am finding that it is one of those places where the lavishly complimentary things written about it are true, at least in my experience. Mata and I went there for New Year's Day, which is the **big** holiday in Japan, visiting a Shinto shrine (not frequented by what are known as Shriners in the U.S.) and a Buddhist temple. I'm not being converted, a term which implies that

there was something to convert **from**, but I do find the environment around these places very conducive to civilized behavior, and even philosophical ruminations.

But enough of this palaver about eternal verities; I'm a temporary academic, my mind is fixated on money! I just finished maxing out my research grant for this semester: about 250,000 yen (it sounds like more that way, though it comes to about \$2350 with the exchange rate currently beating me into a small shrub), and you'll be proud to know that not a sou, farthing, or doubloon went for legitimate research activities. However, I do have one of the finest collections of Pentax cameras, lenses, and electronic flash that I have ever seen. Actually, it's only one camera, 4 lenses (3 of which are zoom) and one electronic flash, but I wrote it off like Donald Trump writing off a lunch with Rudy Giuliani. I won't get audited, and neither will The Donald. Actually, I am audited every time I turn in a voucher. We pay out of pocket for whatever we want, and then turn in the receipt to the guy with the red-tipped cane who oversees research activities. He rubber-stamps it as approved, and once a month the school reimburses us, in cash. There are restrictions on purchases, of course, but they tend to run to large tracts of real estate, and bar tabs at a geisha house. Whatever we don't spend each semester, we lose, so there is a lot of scrambling around in the last week, looking for something, **anything**, which will bring the total down to zip. It was easy for me because I used to work (not quite an accurate characterization) for the federal government, so I know what it takes to spend an exact amount of someone else's money. On first try, I brought my Y250,000 down to Y600, which greatly impressed my peers. Getting published in the *Journal of Ennui* would scarcely turn a head, but getting your research money down that low first semester out? That guy shows promise!

Well, as far as my memories of SPGS go, everybody there on both sides of the cash register seemed to be lumbering toward mediocrity, or, more accurately, speeding downhill **from** mediocrity as fast as physical laws will permit. Stay sane, and keep that Pantera clean. I have a Ferrari story to tell you one day.

Dennis

Sunday, January 21, 1996 - Letter to Inga Taylor

Dear Ingatayl,

Well, Mata has come and gone and you can take that any way you like. (And you're saying, maybe if she'd come more often she wouldn't have gone. And I thought you were a friend, too) I thought I'd spring for some big postage numbers, mainly because I feared you'd been given the old heave-ho by the P.T. program for not kissing up enough to your teachers. That sounds about right to me; someone doesn't kiss my ass sufficiently they can pack their fucking bags. Too bad. I have a letter or two for you on the Internet, aging like fine wine in the Rockhurst computer. Maybe you can sneak in at night and get them, disguised as a janitor.

Two exciting events in my life are approaching. First of all, I move into the apartment which I was supposed to occupy originally, but the earthquake changed everyone's mind. Oddly enough, on the first anniversary of the quake, 1/17, I got my first look at the apartment. It looks fine inside, though the building where it's located is still being repaired. I move there in a week, and so I thought I'd give you the address.

In case you win the lottery, my phone number there is: 011-81-078-802-3373. The place is not too bad by Japanese standards, but real small by American ones. There's one genuine

bedroom, and one smaller spare room for storage or prisoners. The kitchen, living room, and dining room are all one continuous space about the size of an average American living room. The kitchen has a 3-burner stove top with no oven. There's an apartment-sized washer and dryer in the bathroom, and they hold about three jockstraps or one of Dolly Parton's bras. The tub is the traditional Japanese soaking tub: deep but not long. The crapper is in its own separate room, which anyone who has ever lived with me will count as a blessing. The whole place is heated and air-conditioned by a unit the size of a briefcase stuck onto the wall. You need a special antenna to get English-language TV, including CNN news briefs, and this place doesn't have it. I remember seeing your place one time, and I would guess this one is a little smaller. I would also guess it rents for about \$1500-1700 a month, utilities extra. I'll get it for a token payment of \$150 a month, since the university owns it (not the whole 10 floors, just the one apartment), along with the other places it has for its visiting professors. Since there are about 6 of us, they have a fair investment in Kobe real estate, other than the campus itself. There's also a fairly good-sized patio, in which I expect to grow the herbs I need for cooking, like basil (you'll have to travel over here for your next hit of pesto), thyme, and cilantro. There will also be space for me to put out a hammock, and also a grill for cooking out. Oddly enough, I haven't seen any charcoal for sale in the grocery stores, though maybe it's just not the season, yet. The apartment is on the first floor, and very convenient in that way. It's about a 3-block walk to the nearest train station, though a long distance from the school, and no train gets me close to that place.

Did I ever force you to read some writing of mine against your will? It was last spring, and I think I gave you a play or two to look at, after which you called the vice squad to have my

house staked out. Well, one of those plays won First Prize in a play writing contest sponsored by the Missouri Home for the Criminally Insane Creative Writing and Macrame Therapy Group. It's quite an honor, especially the prospect of having it actually performed by those cretins this year. The joys of being out of the country! Well, you ask, as you ask with nearly every sentence of mine that you read, "how much of this is bullshit, and how much is merely lunatic raving?" Don't ask the lunatic; what the hell do you think he'll say, anyway? If you want to know, you'll have to answer my letter, hopefully on the Internet, where I don't have to pay extra for scratching my nuts, linguistically speaking.

There's even more! Once the current semester is history, I'm on vacation and do not intend to spend too much more time around here than I have to. When discussing my first vacation with Mata, I told her I really have wanted to visit Thailand and Malaysia, but I think she has heard too many stories about Bangkok brothels, the most lurid of which are said to be true, and doesn't want me to go there without her. So, while she was here, I settled on going to Micronesia, a group of backward islands with no known history of plumbing or shoe stores -- two accouterments of civilization Mata requires on any visit longer than 4 hours. After she went back to K.C., I happened to talk to an American over here who spends every vacation on the island of Bali, in the Indonesian chain. He says you can live like a king there on \$25 a day, though his idea of regal accommodations consist of not having to fight for sleeping space with any insect larger than your fist. But he had pictures and a real nice narration to go with them, and has convinced me that the fabled isle of Bali is my next stopping point, and the next place from which you will get a postcard from me. The place he stays is far from the touristy, \$150 a night

Hyatt/Hilton ghetto, and he gets a room on the beach for \$15 a night. On a small, less-developed island a few hours flight from Bali, called Lombok, he stayed at a hotel on the beach for \$7 a night, including breakfast! The pictures he had showed a tropical paradise with beautiful people populating it. Of course, Mata is jealous now because I won't be bored shitless on my vacation, and may actually have an outside chance of enjoying myself. I'll let you know.

So let me know how life is for you, and what's happening. Of course, the Michael and Lisa Marie breakup was a shock; it took me days to pick myself up off the floor after hearing about that one. All the polls that make it over here say Bob Dole is way ahead of every other Republican, which leads me to a question: who are these Republicans, anyway? Would anyone with an I.Q. higher than their shoe size vote for that Freddy Krueger in a suit? I'm beginning to like the Japanese wackos a lot better than the American ones; at least there seem to be fewer of them, and their sisters are real cute!

Love, Dennis

Monday, January 22, 1996 - E-mail letter to Fred Hunsdorfer

Dear Fred,

Once I started eating the food over here, I swore I'd lay off the American stuff that's all over every city on the map. In my little section of east Kobe there's a McDonald's and a KFC within 2 blocks of each other, but they've lost their appeal. Of course, I never went to those places while I was in the U.S., but I feared I'd get a little homesick and get lured in by Flag, country, and lipids. I was strong until today, so this letter is part confession, part culinary aside.

After stopping by the school this morning (finals weeks have begun, and Professor Nice

Guy isn't giving any to his students, all for the real purpose of being able to cut out to Bali that much quicker) I went to Osaka to check prices on airfare to vacation. Phone is simpler, but I have found that companies which advertise that their people speak all sorts of languages are being somewhere between optimistic and lying heaps of parrot droppings, and I can usually make myself understood face-to-face with both my hands tightly grasping their throat. Osaka has a lot of "bucket shops" which buy up tickets in blocks and sell them at cheap prices, and I decided to venture into the belly of the beast. I was semi-lost all day, but found a couple of the places, and found a great price to Bali on (and I am not making this airline up) Air Micronesia, as long as I'm willing to change planes in Guam, and genders in Brunei. Air Mike, as it is called by us world travelers, was the one I was going to fly to Ponape and Yap, so they get my money anyway.

While wandering around the city, past lunch time, I was getting hungry plus wet from the day-long light rain, and suddenly I saw a familiar sign, but one I hadn't seen over here before. Shakey's Pizza Parlors. Could it be? Yes, and they even had the familiar all-you-can-eat 600-yen lunch buffet available until 3:00. I caved in like a poker player with two pairs, seven-high. The pizza was so amazing that I took out my pad and wrote down some of the combinations offered (and eaten!). First of all, there has to be corn on everything. Fully half the pizza varieties had niblets sprinkled on the top, like some gigantic chunks of unmelted cheese. There is also the prevalent belief that mayonnaise is an underutilized international condiment, and to rectify this lapse, the Japanese put it on everything they can. I just bought some sushi tonight with crabmeat inside, slathered with Hellman's finest. Alas. There is a pizza they make with clams and other fish, and instead of extra cheese, they'll take that sucker out of the oven and

squeeze some cute scalloped design in mayonnaise all over the hot pie before slicing. It leaves a lot to be desired, tastewise, but the Japanese in the restaurant were fighting each other off with samurai swords to get the last piece. Of course, everybody's had Canadian Bacon/pineapple, so I'll barely mention it. The one which had me ordering an extra Heinekens to take the taste out of my mouth was the pepperoni/tuna one. Now I've had some great tuna over here, in sashimi and sushi, but this was straight out of the can, and barely one notch above Friskies. Smoked sausage/jalapeno (and corn, of course) was pretty dull, something which could not be said of the pickled ginger/seaweed offering. It would take cojones of great durability to try to foist THAT off as a pizza on the other side of the Pacific (with, perhaps the exception of California). The crusts were quite thin and good, however, and the pies were not drowned in sticky cheese as they often are in America, usually as an attempt to cover over their complete lack of any recognizable taste. These pizzas had a recognizable taste, let me tell you!

Enough, right?

Denny

Tuesday, January 23, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Dear Inga,

"I have a scheme" (That's the O.J version of MLK's famous speech of 1963). One thing I love to do is plan things and carry them through. The more complex, the better. Usually, I do it all by myself, but occasionally, I need a little help from my friends. This is one of those latter

times, and you're that friend. I trust you to be silent about it (who the hell would you tell, anyway?), and I promise it won't be much work. In my last E-mail, I mentioned an exotic vacation that I'm taking (and NO, I'm not being accompanied by a hot young student for whom I need you to purchase reliable condoms and some powdered rhino horn for the 3rd and 4th times each night!), beginning on February 7. That's still the schedule, and I'm going alone. Mata knows about the trip and her reaction is in the snail mail letter. She believes I'm going to stay for a month or so, but I'm only going to be there for 2 weeks, though I could afford to spend 6 weeks there, and would probably love to. On the 22nd of February, I fly back to Kobe, and a day later I fly out again. Destination: Cowtown! (That's Kansas City, for those of you who think the city has outgrown its old reputation) Saturday, February 24th, is Mata's birthday, and I'd like to surprise her, but hopefully not in locking loins and swapping gravy with a guy named Donnell. If it turns out I catch her with her hands in someone else's fly, I will have shot nearly \$3000 to find out the sad truth. Oddly enough, it will be worth it; the truth always is. However, I've made the reservations and paid for the tickets, but there are some details I can't handle from this distance, but you can. And since you're learning to talk like a white person now, you can probably get better service when you call and ask for the things I'm interested in. I will take you out to dinner (and not just a cheap lunch!) as a way of thanking you, and also let you keep any money left over from what I'll have to send you for one part of the operation.

Now you have the right to refuse to do any of this, and I'll still write to you, provided your excuse is good enough. But here are the 3 things I need taken care of for me before I arrive.

- 1.) Transportation from the airport. My plane arrives after 9 at night on Friday the

23rd, and I will have been in the air and in airports for about 22 hours at that point. I need to get to sleep as soon as possible, which means wasting no time at the airport. Please find out about the airport shuttle bus, if it's still operational (and if so, is it still running at that time of night) and what hotels it goes to. Price would be useful, too, so I'll be sure to have enough cash on me (and not yen) when I land. Since you're liable to be working, or rutting away like crazed weasels with someone willing, I'm not going to ask you to pick me up all the way in whatever county the airport is located. Now, I'd LOVE to have you meet me at the airport, don't get me wrong; and it may be necessary for you to do so if item #3 proves difficult.

2.) A place to sleep. There are plenty of hotels in K.C., and I don't need a fancy one, just a clean and quiet place, since I'll be getting up early the next morning to raise the curtain on the main show. The best choice, as far as convenience, would be something around I-435 and Metcalf, such as the Embassy Suites, or the Marriott. Both of them are likely to be pricey, but if there's shuttle bus service to either of them, it's my first choice. Wherever you call for a room, try to get a cheap rate. Sometime they give special discounts to educators, so ask if they do. If not, I just turned 55 and am a member of AARP; maybe they give old farts a discount. I'm not proud. If nothing out there in JoCo is available, then the Plaza area is choice #2. Try to keep it under \$100 a night; way under if possible. That probably rules out the Ritz-Carlton, but occasionally Marriotts, Hiltons, Sheratons, and other chain type hot-shit hotels have weekend deals. If possible, I'd like you to get a list of several hotels in various locations and their prices for that one night, and E-mail them to me before I leave for the land of exotic wonders. One possible snag in this part of the scheme is that most hotels require a credit card number to hold a

room past 6 P.M. I've got cards, and will probably use one to pay for the room, but I'm not too crazy about putting that kind of information out on the Internet. Hackers can intercept any message they really want to, especially ones like we send, which are sent with no security precautions at all. Once I decide on a hotel, and you make the reservation, try to explain the whole story, without a lot of detail, and see if you can get the room without a card. The reason for the I-435 and Metcalf location is that the next morning, she'll be at her regular Saturday morning Primerica meeting, and that's where I'm going to surprise her -- in front of lots of people. I'm a first-class rat.

3.) When I surprise her at the meeting, I want to have a bouquet of flowers with me -- roses preferably, but not many flower shops are open very early on Saturday mornings, so this may be the trickiest part of the plan. After we've made hotel reservations, call around to florists between where I'm staying and the general area of Corporate Woods in Overland Park, and see if any will be open around 9:00 A.M. If so, we're in business. Order a couple dozen roses to be ready when the shop opens, and I'll collect them at that time. The meeting starts at 9:00, and it's usually not C.P. Time, so I want to show up around 9:20-9:30 to make sure she's there, but not after the meeting gets rolling too well, or she gets involved in some project or another. If flower shops just don't open that early on Saturday morning, I'll send you some money and ask you to buy the flowers on Friday night before the florists close, and keep them in your fridge. I'll find a way to pick them up before 9:00 A.M. Saturday, perhaps the night before if you pick me up at KCI. We could swing by your apartment prior to going to the hotel and I could get them then.

Well, what do you think? Can you lend a hand here? In addition, if you have any suggestions concerning any phase of this little surprise, please let me know. I am bound to overlook things that you can see, or you might have an idea which would simplify, or make less expensive, any part of this. I have found that the easiest way to send money is to put a Japanese bill in a letter and send it air mail. Let me know when the letter I mailed to you recently arrived; it'll be a clue to how long another letter might take if I need to send you an *ichiman*, which is Japanese for a 10,000 yen note. It's the largest denomination of money over here, but you can take them to whatever bank you have an account with and they will convert it into dollars at whatever the current rate of exchange is. Today, an Ichiman will probably fetch \$94. You would keep whatever is leftover for yourself and your pathetic old car.

Let me know as soon as possible. There's really no one else in K.C. I trust, and who isn't in some sort of contact with Mata, and might accidentally (or on purpose) let her know.

Love,

The Merry Prankster

Monday, January 29, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Inga,

While I haven't heard from you concerning that long letter about preparations for visiting Mata for her birthday, there's no hurry anymore. Yesterday in our weekly phone call, she sprung it on me that she wasn't coming back to Japan after Melanie's baby was born in late May, which was supposed to be the reason she was staying there in the first place, and a reason I thought was a good idea, but that she might try to make it for my birthday in late November, since that would

give her the prime Primerica selling season of summer and fall to work the suckers. Well, I'M beginning to feel like a sucker being worked, and I'm tired of this shit. After my stunned silence and mumbling on the phone call when she unloaded that gem -- and something she had to be thinking of while she was here but didn't have the balls to tell me face-to-face -- my thinking about it evolved into two letters and a total of 7 pages which I will print out and mail today by snail mail. In them, I just asked her to get real with me for once and give me a reason to imagine that we actually have a marriage left. I don't think we do, since I take it that one of the irreducible elements of a marriage is the desire on the part of both parties to be together, and to put their union first above all earthly things. This crazed (and to this point, not very successful) lust for money via Primerica is what has become first in her life, and I'm not going to settle for second to that. If I'm not first, I'm outta there.

It may be that I'll just show up and spend the days packing up my stuff and moving it into storage. That shouldn't take the 3 weeks I've got on the tickets, and I've got to come out for two reasons: one is that I want to see and hear for myself from her that it's over, or that she's reconsidered. Finding out the truth for once will be a relief. I'm not sure about the roses, however. While I'd like to give her every chance to become my wife again, and show her that there's still a lot in my heart for her if she wants it, I don't want to be some pathetic asshole begging her to come back while she wipes somebody else's cum off her mouth. That's just a figure of speech, of course. So I'll just arrive on Friday night, as the airline tickets say, and play the hand I'm dealt. I may or may not go to the Primerica meeting, since I do expect to be seriously jet-lagged by that time, what with only a 30-hour ground time turn around in Kobe

between Bali and the doom awaiting me in K.C. The second reason is purely financial (I'm beginning to sound like her, aren't I?): The reason I got such a good price on both this and the Bali tickets is that the company has a VERY punitive return/refund policy. At this late date, I could get my money back on both sets of tickets only if I paid a penalty of \$500!! So I'll take a vacation in which I have no heart whatsoever, and then come back to the dread of finding out whether we sink or swim. She may have time to call me before I leave for Bali, assuming she has the inclination after reading the letters, or has the interest, what with all the Primerica business she does morning, noon, and night. But I'm beginning to sound bitter (beginning?), and I lay awake all last night alternating between bitter, angry, depressed, and betrayed. Maybe I'll find a new one for today. I'll be sure to call you while I'm in K.C. See you around.

Wednesday, January 31, 1996 - Letter to Mata

Dearest Mata,

In the process of delving around in the apartment, I've made a few interesting discoveries which are unlikely to ever get mentioned in a phone call, but might help you get a sense of what living here will be like, and to prepare you for that event a little better. I could send this as a fax, but then a little surprise might be just the thing you need for your mid-winter doldrums, plus I couldn't send any of these pictures that way.

One thing I wanted to do with this letter was to give you my airline itinerary, for whatever purpose you might need it. The middle part is blank, since I won't make those arrangements until I get to Bali, but arriving and departing are confirmed. I leave KIX on 2/7 at 1040 on Continental/Air Micronesia (hereafter CO) Flight #978, arriving Guam at 1510. I change planes

at Guam, leaving on CO Flight #900 for Bali, arriving at 2045. I expect to spend the first few nights at the Ubud Inn, in the town of Ubud, which is inland from both the airport and the touristy places on the southwest shore of the island. Sometime that weekend, or perhaps Monday, I'll go to the town of Lovina, on the north shore, and spend most of the next couple of weeks there, most likely in the Rini Hotel, which is in the Kalibukbuk section of Lovina. David has friends there, including someone who works at that particular hotel, and he recommends both it, and their hospitality. From there I can arrange my next leg of the vacation, or maybe just veg out there for the whole time. I'm not going to put any pressure on myself to keep a prearranged timetable. However, on March 15, at 2145, I have to be on CO Flight #901 returning to Guam from Bali. I get to Guam at 0500 on the morning of the 16th, and change planes to Flight #977, which takes off at 0710, arriving at KIX at 0940.

One other thing I discovered in the apartment was a stash of various things left by the previous occupants, including toilet paper, a little table-top ironing board and iron, and a lot of books. One of them is a philosophy book called *Consciousness Explained*, by the well-known American philosopher, Daniel C. Dennett. I started reading it yesterday, and it's pretty difficult, but fascinating. I've finished 67 pages of the 455 total, and I may take it with me on vacation. It has done two things instantly, however: made me realize how much I missed thinking about these kinds of things during the past semester (I was like a starving Kobe cat going after those pages), and some of the content helped explain something puzzling about my own consciousness. In particular, why did I react to your decision not to come back after Melanie's pregnancy was

over in the way that I did? Of course, it wasn't just that occasion; there was the Dave Barry dream, worries about other things concerning whether you really wanted me when you weren't here as evidence that you did. Dennett gives a very interesting account of this kind of simple consciousness that really rings true, in the cases I've been experiencing. Consciousness is the primal reality that makes up what we think is true about our lives and the world they inhabit. I'm saying this in my own words, and not Dennett's, though he writes with great clarity and wit about such a difficult subject, and there's no guarantee I'm getting it right. It consists of two major features, external data that comes in through the senses and other sources, and our mindset that receives that data. That mindset is our set of expectations, fears, beliefs, paranoia, optimism -- whatever we currently think about a particular subject. The more meaningful the subject is for us, the more complex and varied our predispositions concerning it. My beliefs, hopes, and fears about you and our relationship comprise an enormously complicated set waiting there for some data; while those same things about the Gray Cat, or Julian, are simpler. If the incoming data made it clear that I'd never see the Gray Cat again, I'd probably sleep soundly that night; if it said the same thing about Julian, it would be upsetting, because my feelings about Julian are deeper and more complex than those for the Gray Cat. If the same data came in about you, I can't even be sure I'd **survive** the night, let alone get any sleep. I chose you three as examples for a particular reason: you're all far away from me, which means the data I receive concerning you three is limited to language and maybe still photographs, and it arrives much less frequently than it might were I in the U.S. But absence of input doesn't mean absence of reality, or consciousness, except for trivial subjects ("Out of sight, out of mind."). Barbara hasn't answered

any of my e-mail letters, but she has become a triviality in my picture of the world; she's at the edge, slipping completely out of the frame. She has nearly no meaning in my life, so the reality about her doesn't need any data updates to keep me current. My mindset about her is pretty much dormant and meaningless, and I'm sure it's reciprocal. One of the philosophical reasons I need you with me is that you're the most meaningful person in my life, and so you are the second most important reality-focus (after *moi*) for my mind. Because your meaning in my life is so complex and many-faceted, I need a lot of input from your presence to keep the picture updated; with the Gray Cat or Barbara I need no input, since their meaning for my life is practically nil, and so no current picture updating is needed. They are stagnant images now. You are a dynamic force, and I need continual input to keep the picture current. Out here, I haven't gotten that, but I have to have a reality anyway, whether a complete data set is there or not. As long as you are meaningful to me, I will (or my mind will; it's not as much an intentional action on my part as it might seem) construct a reality about you with whatever data is given me. What I got last Sunday morning (your Saturday night) was that you had decided not to be with me until many months after you had most recently said. The fearful and paranoid part of my already existing mindset had a field day with those words, and nothing else was there to prevent it. Input which comes in through touch, or eyes, or the emotions was absent, and so my mind did the best it could with what it had, and that letter I sent you was the result. While our mindset is something we also build to some extent, it's always a result of past construction attempts. It's like preparing a building for an earthquake, or some other natural disaster. When it actually hits, you can't really do anything; everything useful will have been done beforehand. Maybe as a result of this unnatural disaster,

my mindset concerning you will be altered in important ways; that could mean that I'll be a little less apt to jump at fearsome or threatening ideas which could have a more innocent explanation. But there is no real guarantee until we are together. Once that happens, the kind of incessant input we provide each other will keep our reality fairly accurate. Of course, the question is, why don't you have these kinds of reactions to me. One explanation is that I mean far less to you than you say I do, but I'm not sure that's true. It could be that my complexity of meaning concerning you has a far larger share of fears and paranoia than you have about me, and that sounds more plausible (and less paranoid, if you can believe that!). Maybe you do have these things occur, and keep them to yourself. Whatever it is, I found the Dennett explanation quite compelling, and I thought I'd share it with you.

Love Always,

Dennis

Thursday, February 1, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Hey Vernell!

How's it hanging? That's a guy greeting (though it could be used by old women with single mastectomies) brought on by two things: musing on your Vernell name, which could be mistaken for one a man would have, and the current TV program I have on, which must be "The Transvestite Hour." This is the second time this week it's been on prime time (7:00 P.M.) and on different channels. Cross-dressing seems to be an affectation reasonably well accepted by Japanese society, if its prominence on the tube is any indication. Some of these guys are real **babes**, too, in what must be a superficial way. A typical scenario on the show is to dress up (or

cross-dress up, to be more precise) one of the stars -- and they **do** dress up splendidly -- and send them out in the world to see who makes a move on them. It's television entrapment, pure and simple; a 90's version of the Prurient Candid Camera. Akira/Akiko sashays by a likely suspect, like trolling for bluefish, and almost always gets a nibble, and often more. Depending on what the bait, station, or producer considers the limit of acceptability, the mark will be allowed to come on to the star as forthrightly as he desires, before the ultimate *denouement*. This latter event is typically the high-decibel emergence of an obnoxious M.C. from behind the standard frond or curtain, explaining to the hapless would-be Romeo exactly the gender of the sweet young thing he had been planning to boink, to use Julian's favorite term. The usual reaction is immediate, Mach Three flight, impossible to catch clearly even on slow-motion replay. Some pause and shake their heads in disbelief, staring at a person no longer as desirable as he was most recently whispering that he/she was. If the M.C. catches up with him, the interview seems to contain an excess of stuttering and mumbling, and often attempts to shield their identity. A colleague once ventured, when I described the entire scene the first time I viewed it, that the man was most likely **not** trying to disguise his identity from his wife. Having a mistress is still accepted by many women as one of the expectations of a conventional Japanese marriage. He would most likely be trying to hide his identity from his male buddies at the local pub, who would not let him forget who he tried to put some middle-aged moves on over national TV. The best unveiling I saw was last week, when the excessively amorous mark started a rather vigorous breast rub through the clothing of the star, who was suitably implanted for the occasion (or for life, if it comes to that). The star eventually took one of the man's free hands and placed it in

his/her crotch, where, from the suddenly widened eyes he exhibited, he seemed to recognize a piece of plumbing not unlike his own.

I do a lot a channel surfing, looking for any of 3 things: 1.) English-language programs, 2.) music other than by old, kimono-clad women with too much make-up, or 3.) female nipples. This last item is a fairly frequent visitor, usually in the form of some sort of game with women contestants, the primary object of which is to expose their breasts. This is achieved in any variety of ways, the most recent I recall being some sort of hot tub Olympics in which the combatants, clad ONLY in a white bath towel which they had to hold with one hand to keep it arrayed around the sensitive areas, were required to do underwater retrievals, limbo contests, and races to the end of the pool and back with a penis in their mouths (that last one was a fiction just to determine whether you actually READ these things). This appears to be a "No-Nipples-Night" in more ways than that.

Love,

Dennis

Friday, February 2, 1996 - E-mail letter to Jason Ontjes

Zipster,

Allow me to inflict upon you the Poon-Tang Theory of Human Motivation. In spite of the fact that I didn't originate it, I consider it infallible in all applications, and I'm amazed that major schools of psychological research haven't sprung up to study it. The major premise, briefly stated (admittedly no small task for a philosopher), is that there is an inverse relationship between the frequency of sexual contact an individual has and the frequency of all other meaningful

accomplishments. Consider yourself as a test case. One of the first things you told me in our first exchange of pleasantries across cyberspace last fall, was that you now have a squeeze, by which I took it that you were speaking beyond a mere grapefruit. That was also the last thing you mentioned, though the thought occurred to me that you might have been one of the marksmen used by the State of Utah in its recent execution, and were sworn to silence in all areas of your life. If the graduate program in your discipline has orals, that might prove a troublesome restriction on your future vocational ambitions. No, the P-TTHM is more plausible, especially when I am considered a test case from the other side of the Balance of Lubricity. Mata left nearly 4 weeks ago, and is scheduled to return for good in June. This morning I sent off six (6!) e-mail letters to various correspondents, and now I'm tapping one out to you. I cleaned my desk this morning, and am reading a philosophical treatise entitled "Consciousness Explained," which should reveal unequivocally the depth of my need for depravity.

While help may not be on the way, SOMETHING is. The semester ended last week, and all that remains is the glee of dealing with the academic aspirations of my charges in the manner most calculated to send their hopes and dreams packing. I've volunteered for an Intensive English Week at the end of March, for which I get gobs of extra loot, but until then I'm a free man with airline tickets in his pocket. I leave on February 7 for the storied island of Bali, from which, it is predicted, I shall never return, particularly if I venture to drink the water. Luckily, Thai beer seems to be in abundance over there, and, sadly, reliable physicians are not. Where else I

go and how long I stay depends on the whims of fate, or, more accurately, the leniency of local

magistrates. But I shall return to Kobe on March 15, which is what my return ticket says. I'll be off-line between 2/6 and 3/15, so if you are inclined to produce an argument against the P-TTHM, you'll have to get out of bed to do it. And soon.

Dennis

Tuesday, February 6, 1996 - E-mail letter to Fred Hunsdorfer

Dear Fred and Ida, (what the hell: put the kid in for an inning)

To correct your impression of the thriftiness of my air fare to Bali, it is not 290 yen; that was the train fare to Osaka to pick up the ticket on Air Mike. Otherwise, all Japanese would have fled their own overpriced, overcrowded island for Bali, and it would have sunk into the ocean. The latter cost 57,000 yen, which is still better than most voyagers to that island can ever remember paying. So a student came into my office recently and said, "Professor Lowden, I don't think I deserve this grade you've given me." To which I said, "You're right, Ayako, but it's the lowest grade the university will permit me to award." (chigga-boom!)

I suppose I have to admit a certain affection for college basketball, agreeing with you concerning the one-dimensional nature of the professional variety. I was converted to this view by my years at Kansas, and the Roy Williams, team-first concept, emphasizing defense and putting as many fresh bodies on the floor as possible. As a result, they tend to have difficulty in recruiting the lights-out high school stars of playground and gym, who want to go to a place where the coach will build a game around them for 3 years. Over here it's hard to follow the Jayhawks and their progress, but the last time I looked they were #3 nationally, and had only lost one game. They should definitely be in the Big Show in March, and seeded well. U. of Florida's

basketball

fortunes have improved recently, with the hiring a few years ago of Lon Kruger as coach. He's an old Kansas State alum and former coach, but seems to be a classy guy in spite of being from That Aggie School.

Yesterday was a stellar achievement for me in my cultural transformation: I ate a lunch of octopus. It is called "*takoyaki*" over here, and 2 students met me in Osaka to take me to their favorite *takoyaki* restaurant. There was a line outside, usually a good sign, unless it's men in uniform with hoses, or paramedics. I remember the Sunday dinners at the seafood restaurants in Belmar, New Jersey, and other places when we lived in Spring Lake (usually there was some woman's name for the place, as I recall, "Ethel's" or "Mabel's"; never an "Ida's" as it now occurs) and later when we would spend a few weeks at Ocean Grove. The places would always have a line outside, and the food was always splendid. This place had an English name as well as its indecipherable Japanese one. The former was "Pizza Ball Restaurant," displaying that typical Japanese disregard for rational meaning when employing OUR language. While *takoyaki* is spherical, it tastes nothing like pizza -- even Japanese pizza -- though my visit to the pizza ball heaven did result in clearing up one of the great mysteries of Nippon gastronomy. What were those light beige flakes of something suspiciously resembling human skin that I found on one of the Shakey's 600-yen buffet reported on earlier? A quick review of that previous letter shows that I didn't mention the substance now sending you retching to the Porcelain God; it must have been in the letter to Melanie (my step-daughter in K.C.). It was on the pickled ginger and seaweed pizza, and perhaps my omission was an attempt to save you old folks from any severe

shocks to the system. Well, it turns out they are thin sheets of smoked bonito, and it seems to be a very popular addition to dishes in Osaka; like see-through parsley.

This restaurant was a do-it-yourself affair, and since all Osaka knows how to make *takoyaki*, it is no hardship to have the customers make them and eat them in the one-and-same booth. The balls are about an inch in diameter, and one "order" of *takoyaki* is a dozen. So the 3 of us sat in a booth with 36 little half-moon indentations, in sheets of 12; a bit like a waffle iron without a top. The waitress determines what variety of additions you want to your octopus (yes, corn is available!) and returns later with all the fixin's. We had middle-of-the-road stuff: scallions, seaweed, corn, pineapple, cheese, pickled ginger. A very thin egg batter is poured into the heated half moon shapes, and then chunks of purple "tako", tentacles visible for all to see, are dropped in following. On top of that you put whatever you want to add, in whatever quantity, and then it's up to the patron, who receives a big skewer along with chopsticks, to turn them when they are cooked on one side. When I finally ate my 12, I found the octopus to have the taste and texture of odd-shaped pieces of bathtub drain stoppers. Nothing gross or slimy, but definitely chewy.

And speaking of gross, slimy, and chewy, I just received the consent form to have my prizewinning play performed in the drama festival at the college, and it turns out that another play I submitted received honorable mention, and it will be performed, too. It is called "The Tree," and is, indirectly, a tribute to my mother's grandfather, William C. Lindle. I even wrote a little autobiographical introduction to it which isn't meant to be performed, but could be included in the program if no expense was being spared. I get the feeling that a whole hell of a lot of

expense is being spared in this "festival," so I don't hope for much. Actually, I'm really proud of this play, maybe more so than the one which won, which only reinforces, by inference, what Samuel Johnson said to writers centuries ago: "Read over your compositions, and when you come across a passage which you think is **particularly** fine, strike it out."

Well, I'm off to paradise. I also bought a guidebook to Bali yesterday in an English language bookstore in Osaka, which "warned" the reader of the rampant topless sunbathing at Kuta Beach. Thank God! And to think for a moment I considered going to a DIFFERENT beach.

Denny

February 8, 1996 - Kuta (rhymes with 'puta'), Bali

Yes: Bali! The Rube Goldberg mechanisms of the gods have placed me at the Kuta Village Inn on a steamy morning in the waning days of the rainy season. Snow lay upon the mountains north of Kobe as I took the train to the airport; surely some celebratory confetti from the heavens to send me on my way. And the UPH is nowhere to be found.

For an inveterate planner such as myself, this is a sea change of a departure for me. All I have are two weeks between when I arrive and when I leave, but no hotels booked, no cars rented, no faces greeting me, familiar or un. With only my Lonely Planet guidebook for help, I've scheduled half a month in paradise improvisationally. My first few days were to be spent in Padangbai, an apparently sleepy little fishing village on the SE coast, fronting the Indian Ocean. However, my flight arrived too late -- 8:30 P.M. -- to catch the bus, and a cab ride of 35-40 miles might erode any pretension of economy I had for this vacation. So I bought a taxi fare to the

closest place with hotels, Kuta, and waited for the first tout shilling for his hotel to pounce upon me. It was a guy from Kuta Village Inn, and that was that. The room was spartan on the inside but had all the minima: A/C, hot water shower, lock, actual toilet. The hotel is a ring of oddly-angled two-story buildings surrounding a pool, lanai, and outdoor restaurant/bar. It's a bit protected from the noise of Kuta proper, and lushly vegetated. The place only appears to be booked half-full, and mostly with easy-going Americans; not the uptight, my-money-is-bigger-than-your-money Hyatt crowd. The staff is kind, and all too willing to book tours, rent cars, and perform other services for you, for which the prices of those services are more than slightly elevated. No harm, it seems, and the women at the reception desk and the restaurant are as lovely and gracious as any I have ever seen. Dare I tear up my passport and stay forever? Well, I won't stay at the Kuta Village Inn forever, since I've arranged a bus passage for Padangbai at 10:00 this morning.

February 9, 1996 - Padangbai, Bali

Now I know I'm in paradise! How? Last night for dinner I had a meal of fresh-caught snapper from the bay (eyes and teeth [which is why they're called 'snapper'] included) baked, and served in a simple but ravishing garlic sauce. On the side was a generous mixture of steamed vegetables, also with the sauce *du jour* (perhaps the sauce *d'annee*) and a large plate of **perfect** fries. I have only had perfect fries about two times before. Both were at Arthur Bryant's Barbecue, and both while Mr. Bryant was still alive and keeping an eye on things. These were a touch better, since they were exactly the right state of crispness. It was accompanied by a 22 ounce bottle of Carlsberg (I told you it was paradise!) And I got change back from \$5.

Interestingly, the bus ride from Kuta to Padangbai went by the Grand Hyatt Resort at Samur Beach. It looks for all the world like a Hollywood set for a movie about Bali. It's a romanticized, idealized Bali, with no focus to it other than the pampering of the patrons. I am discovering that Bali has a life that doesn't take us into account. Babies are raised, fish are caught, boats are painted. Tourists have little place in this world, unless we buy the fish, of course.

This morning's breakfast was very nice: banana honey pancake with fresh fruit on the side, and Balinese coffee, which has quite a particulate content. Last night, critters welcomed me by scampering across the thatched roof of my cottage as I tried to sleep. This morning's cold water, open air shower was bracing, and not unpleasant.

My contributions to Padangbai's economy continued today with a \$2.50 haircut. The beauty salon (the porch of a very small house in an alley away from the beach) was not easy to find, but the woman was very nice, and spoke good English. Like everyone in Padangbai, and probably everyone on Bali, she has a relative who, she is certain, will give me a better price as a tourguide, and speak better English while doing so, than anyone I had yet contacted. As it turned out, I had just agreed with Made Mandra, the manager of the place I was staying, the Rai Beach Inn, to let him serve as my guide for a day in the mountains and lakes of east Bali. The price of \$55 is probably overinflated for the willing tourist, but it sounds like a bargain to me. I will have a private guide in his car, and have him all day. We'll visit the two most sacred Balinese temples, an important lake, and some volcanic peaks. Last night I listened from the balcony as two 30-ish Americans tried to squeeze the already reasonable rates for the hotel's cheapest rooms

(\$11 a night) down an extra 50 cents a night. These did not appear to be people down on their luck, needing every quarter they could muster, so what was their point? Winning? Not paying retail? Proving with monotonous redundancy how obnoxious Americans can be?

Being here during the tail end of the rainy season may be a great thing after all. What few tourists there are seem prepared to put up with partial days of sun, and (generally) a couple of afternoon hours of gentle tropical showers. The bright equatorial sun is a liability from a photographic point of view, so the A.M. clouds are perfect for bringing out the bright Balinese colors. At least that's the theory. When I have the film processed, I may have to search about for a different theory.

This noon I decided to walk across the street for lunch at Pantai Ayu, which, the guidebook claims, will give you the warmest welcome in Padangbai, as well as good food. The place was empty when I walked in ("in" is merely a rhetorical convenience; all the tables are outside, and with some your feet are literally in the sand) and the only humans in evidence were two young women napping on the floor behind the counter. Since there wasn't room for me to join them, I tried to rouse them sufficiently to order lunch. My gentle, at-an-arm's-length entreaties only got a raised eyebrow and briefly opened eye from one of them, but eventually someone appeared from the kitchen to start the process. From my perspective, the guidebook got it backwards. The meal was another fabulous triumph, this time for \$2. It was a plate of shrimp, cooked with a colorful (both to the eye and on the palate) combination of fresh chili peppers in a tangy sauce. It was a literally perfect combination of heat and flavor, and I found I had a few swoons left over from last night's snapper. It left me feeling such contentment after having

finished it that I was easy prey to a passing sarong seller, though I did bargain a little on the price.

In late January, Robert Conine and I were talking about the creative process, not that either of us had any more than a nodding acquaintance with it, and I said that I found it difficult to switch between linguistic and visual ways of thinking. I found that becoming more evident in November, after I bought my new camera (and, correspondingly, began spending less and less time writing in this journal). As I tried to take more, and better, pictures, I found that writing became more difficult. That same conflict is apparent now as I attempt both to write down my impressions here and take pictures which do justice to the time and place, as well as have a certain visual interest which might raise them above postcard triteness. I won't know how successful I have been until I have the film processed, but I am adhering to the practice of taking an excess of exposures, based on the well-known theory of blind pigs and acorns, i.e., the more ground a blind pig sniffs, the greater the chance that it'll find an acorn.

The number of wild dogs, and to a lesser extent cats, amazes me beyond even what I had been warned to expect. Last night, just after ordering the snapper, a mangy yellow kitten/cat of less than a year's age came meowing to the leg of my table. Everything in Bali is open-air, so it is quite a task to prevent animals of any sort from entering an establishment. It was quite skittish when I reached down to pet it, but after I gave it a quick "Around the World" to indicate I knew my way around feline erogenous zones, it leapt into my lap and commenced to purr loudly when I got to the good parts. That little slut, I thought, she heard me order the snapper, and is just waiting for it to be delivered to snatch it from my plate and disappear into the darkness. But, amazingly, after I had given it all it could handle, and before my dinner was brought out, it

sprang straight from my lap to the adjacent chair, and slept there for as long as I took with my meal.

The dogs are different. In sheer numbers they are a problem, but some of them are a little aggressive, as well. I'm wearing my Big Dogs shorts and T-shirt today as an attempt at intimidation, but they're buying none of it. They're not a wild species of dog, just a lot of free-breeding descendants of former housepets. From the numbers of them, and their fearlessness, it is evident that the Balinese have made no serious attempt to include various canine cuts in their cuisine.

Once I start thinking about food, I can't stop. It's 4:15, and while I'm not yet hungry, my mind is on dinner. Since the snapper special has been replaced by shark, I may venture down the beach for whatever sounds (or smells) good. I've been thinking about Japanese use of fish in their cooking, and what I've tasted of the Balinese. When I first considered the Japan move, one of the primary pluses on the ledger was the chance to eat more fish. It hasn't materialized to the extent I had hoped it would. Most of the fish I eat in Kobe is sushi, and then only a few varieties. There is what seems to my western palate an excessive emphasis on the exotic in what Japan eats from the sea, as well as how they eat it. The species are often remote, and the ways they are prepared and served occasionally border on the bizarre (the blowfish craze should allow me to rest my case). The food I've had in Padangbai, on the other hand, seems to be just what is customarily drawn out of the sea each day, cooked with locally grown additives, and served with Balinese rice, or some other easy to find starch. I could eat this stuff every day, while only *norimaki* is a Japanese staple that I have found wears well. And I'd forsake it in a heartbeat for a

lifetime of Balinese food from the coast.

February 10, 1996 - Padangbai

At 1:30 in the afternoon, I am sitting in the Dharma Restaurant, having just ordered fish curry and a short beer. I am not a late riser today, but have just finished a whirlwind tour of mountains, temples, and terraced rice paddies. It was no problem waking up for our 8:00 A.M. departure time; the fishermen of the town shoved off for the Indian Ocean at 4:00, with what sounded to me like more fanfare than was necessary. There were drums, there was singing and chanting, for all I know there was a torchlight parade down Main Street with the homecoming queen being carried aloft on the points of 4 fishing spears. Well, the Dharma hasn't provided a welcome as big as all outdoors, either, so maybe I've caught this burg in a collective sulk. The fish curry was a good portion for \$1.50, but could have used a touch of some hotter ingredients. Four Japanese skin divers came in from their sub-aquatic frolics. I've only seen three sets of Japanese tourists in Padangbai, and so I'm about to launch a hasty generalization, excoriated by logic texts both near and far. Why is it that American tourists seem to shun, and maybe even resent the very presence of, in some cases, other western tourists while they're out "in country?" I'm a little that way, I find; my attitude seems to be that I didn't come all this way to run across Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Claude from Topeka. In Padangbai, it's more likely to be Eddie, the guy I flunked out of Western Civ 10 years ago, and his 18 year-old squeeze out in the world for the first time. It's not just the obnoxious westerners I don't want to see out here; it's none of you assholes! The Japanese seem to seek each other out exclusively, travel in Nihon packs, and avoid all non-Japanese people unless they are needed for their well-scheduled plans. So why is

there this difference? None of the Caucasian people I've encountered were very friendly, but I didn't encourage any conviviality, either. The easy answer might be a national smugness and superiority complex borne all too eagerly by the Japanese, but even if that's the answer, it's only half the answer. What is on the western side of the equation? A cultural self-debasement? Tell the 3 French people in cottage #2 that (to our prurient American sensibilities, the thought of 2 Frenchwomen and one French man in 2 adjacent twin beds in the same small bedroom is too decadent for words. Probably 2 are married, and one is an ex-wife, so it's all perfectly innocent).

I'd like to say a belated word for sunscreen. Yesterday, my solar exposure apparently stopped just short of the Epidermal Mendoza Line, and I noticed nothing. On today's trip I packed, but did not apply, my K-Mart SPF 0.5 (it actually doubles the sun's effects) Burn Magnifier. By 10:30, my sporadic darts in and out of the sun produced that familiar tingling warm glow on my neck and shoulders. Only then did I lavishly apply the unguent, like someone taking out car insurance after pushing his wreck to the breakdown lane following a collision.

One thing I was unprepared for was how much of a 3rd World country Bali resembles, at least the part of Bali I have visited. That was more evident today, as I ventured away from the beach towns and into the highlands and rice paddies inland.

February 11, 1996 - Padangbai

It promised to be an ordinary day, and I was determined to keep it that way. Last night's sleep was more sound than any so far this vacation, thanks in part to being able to sleep through the ferry horns (Padangbai is the primary port of embarkation/debarkation for the island of Lombok) as they sound to warn of departure, and in part because no 4:00 A.M. fishing send-off

was apparently scheduled. I've taken to leaving my watch in my room, but mid-to-late morning is a good guess for the current statistics. It has been either overcast or rainy all morning, and the day has taken on a sort of timelessness that is the sister of languidness. The breeze is just right: strong enough to keep the flies off me, but not so brisk as to ruffle the pages of the notebook I'm writing in. I've got a little buzz as well, which has added to my personal languidity.

I was finishing up breakfast on the porch of the inn, wearing bathing trunks and L.L. Bean cool-weave shirt, when Nengah Taman, yesterday's guide to the temple and mountains, rode up on his motorcycle. Since I was talking with Made and Kadek, who also works at the inn, Nengah came to our table and joined in. Only a few minutes later, a procession wound by the inn, heading for the cemetery at the end of town, and I snapped a few desultory pictures. Nengah told me that his uncle had died three days ago, and I remembered a funeral procession on my first evening here, heading in the same direction. It seemed to me that everybody in town was in that earlier procession, though the wrapped-up corpse appeared small. At the time, I guessed a child had died, not a 65 year-old man who smoked too much. Today's procession was only a few dozen people, and Nengah asked me if I wanted to go to it with him and take pictures. This was the feast and celebration held three days after burial, and is customarily a family gathering. Roast suckling pig had been prepared, as well as several ducks and chickens, all washed down with a slightly sweet, cloudy, fizzy coconut wine, made from sap which had been allowed to partially ferment. I was overjoyed, and sped back to my room for a good, all-purpose lens (28-80 mm zoom), plus my flip-flops, sounding, and perhaps looking a bit like Jimmy Buffet.

Since the decedent was Hindu, as were most of the Balinese I've met, sacrifices were first

prepared and made at the grave site. The final disposition of the body will be cremation, but that's an expensive proposition, and also constitutes the "real" burial in Balinese tradition. As a result, the in-ground burial places that we in the west would deem as cemeteries, and pretty hallowed ground, are treated very casually by the Balinese. No upkeep is done, it appears, and walking or sitting on the graves and markers of the buried is no big thing. After sacrifices were prepared, the priest arrived and the ceremonies proceeded. I felt odd snapping pictures during this time (another western inhibition), but a Balinese man who identified himself as a son of the deceased was doing so from time to time, and indicated to me that it was all right for me to do the same. After 15-20 minutes, the religious part concluded, and everybody made for the food and dug in. We made hand "bowls" out of doubled banana leaves, and the food was just piled on. There was another westerner invited, a Canadian writer in his 40's, and everyone made sure our banana leaves never went below overflowing. I have found that Balinese rice is particularly fragrant, and after eating the Japanese sticky version for half a year, it is a welcome return to separate grains. It was the foundation upon which everything else was built. Shredded roast duck was mixed with some fairly potent chili peppers in one dish, chicken was shredded with mild vegetables and onions in another, and then a separate pig recipe in some sort of brown gravy was thrown on. Then sticks of sate, pork and chicken, were thrust upon us, and no sooner had we made some headway on that assortment than the suckling pig was cut open and slabs of skin and meat were forced on the already unbalanced banana leaves. In deference to our cultural inexperience, we were not made to drink the wine from banana leaf funnels, but were provided glasses for the occasion. Everything was eaten with the fingers, and laughing and jollity

prevailed. No mourning seemed to be going on, at least outwardly, even at the grave site. The widow had a few functions to perform, but she did them stoically, and seemed more interested in keeping the show moving than any display of her private feelings. When we were through, the remnants were thrown on the ground for the ever-present dogs, pacing at the graveyard's edge, to finish up. We all walked to the beach, where the kids jumped in for a swim and the adults ambled back up the road to continue on with the day.

By now you are probably saying, "Okay, pal, drop the other shoe; there's got to be a down side to paradise. What is it?" I guess it would be classified as 'creature comforts.' Most westerners seem to want one of two things on vacations: pampering -- that is, better treatment and better facilities than they have at home -- or parity -- the same familiar things they have at home, such as name brands, air conditioning, toilets that flush. I take it that most westerners wouldn't consider it a vacation if they had to put up with living conditions a bit diminished from their par. So what might be objectionable at Padangbai?

- Outdoor, cold water shower;
- No towel or toilet paper provided (but available at local stores);
- No evidence of interior decorating in the recent past;
- Sharing every meal with flies;
- Incessant hawkers of tourist goods;
- No A/C (and none needed -- I haven't even used a fan yet)

I can see how a few wimps who cling to the mistaken belief that their asses are made of gold, or the terminally hypersensitive (both self-induced conditions, I am convinced) who can't

have a whiff of the unsanitary sully their lives might find any or all of these foregoing conditions unsatisfactory, but the remaining 5% of the western world should find this place extraordinary, as I have. But maybe that's just the palm sap talking.

Traveling to this place alone is something I have found to be a little unsettling, and not because Balinese maidens hit on me with maddening regularity. Joy and delight are meant to be shared, and I feel like a hoarder here. To anyone who evinces an interest, I show a picture of my wife, but that doesn't seem to help, it makes things worse: she is young, I am old; she is lovely, I am ugly; she is black, I am white; and of course, she is there, I am here. I must have invented a marriage, and bought some old wallet-sized pictures from a defunct modeling agency. No other tourist has come here alone, as far as I can see; all are couples, except for the ever-resourceful French. I eat alone, walk the beach alone, tour temples alone, and nearly every Balinese I encounter asks why. Even in paradise, there's something forlorn about solitariness.

I just came back from what was an apparently midday stroll on the beach. At such times, the words and music of Noel Coward's "Mad Dogs and Englishmen" come to mind. They are helped by the fact that only tourists can be found about at that hour, along with the ubiquitous dogs, mad or merely feigning. Even the hawkers of sarongs and postcards set aside their normally insatiable quest for the transient rupiah, and plunk themselves under a tree, content to let riches pass them by for an hour or two. Perhaps their attitude is, with some justification, that anyone crazy enough to be walking the beach at that time doesn't have enough sense to know the value of the fine merchandise they have to offer, and therefore are a waste of a seller's good time.

Perhaps this is just a male preoccupation (perhaps?!?), but are some women born to walk

gracefully and sensually (the two are not separable), and others not? And if so, is it biology or culture we have to thank? On an idle equatorial afternoon, as several of the lovely young women employed by the Rai Beach Inn go about in their duties, it seems as if they writhe in slow motion to some unheard gamelan of the soul. To avoid the Uncle Pervy label, I try to avoid staring at the walks of pre-pubescent girls, but this is anthropological research, dammit! Even Balinese schoolgirls glide beautifully. Yet many of the loveliest of my Japanese students walk as if the primary goal of the activity is to deny there are moving parts involved. Ayako Taniguchi, who has the world's most fabulous legs, and a wardrobe chosen, it would seem, to confirm that judgment to all, walks with all the appeal of a puppet. It just looks like a lot of expensive clothes moving by, and one has to look carefully, and above the neck, to discover that there is a person under them. Ayako is not alone in Japan; my unofficial survey, though admittedly skewed toward a preponderance of Kobe women, barely finds a ripple in the collective air currents of the world by the movement of their, admittedly diminutive, butts. The Kobe disclaimer has to do with last year's earthquake. It could be that a Kansai-wide skittishness has made all the local women walk with a little less confidence and swagger than they usually do; not being certain the ground will remain under their feet for the next step might do that. However, if I see the same thing from Kyushu women, Kobe gets no special dispensation.

Well, let me get all my sexist observations crammed into the same day's entry, he says naively. I have also noticed with great comfort and joy that women on this island have given me a small and highly treasured gift: eye contact. In the West, and in Japan, women do not acknowledge the presence of unknown men by locking eyes, thus leaving us as nonpersons.

Somewhere, and sometime, men and women began to see each others as The Enemy, and you dehumanize The Enemy, not fraternize with him or her. To look, and smile, and nod to a stranger of the opposite sex is an element of affirming the basic humanity of another. To women on Bali, men are human beings, worthy of the minimal respect denoted by acknowledgment of our presence on earth. This is not a 3rd-world country in this important aspect, but the most civilized one on the globe.

February 12, 1996 - Ubud

Only 45 minutes from Padangbai, but worlds apart in every way. Ubud is almost sophisticated, with none of the 3rd-world street urchins and old women hawking blurry postcards and cheap sarongs that marked the hotel and restaurant row of Padangbai. It had both an edge and a friendliness to it, and while Ubud seems more peaceful, it is also more standoffish. The cost of the place I'm staying is between that of the first night in Kuta and the Rai Beach Inn, and far superior to either. Here I have the cheapest room in the place (\$30) and it's clean and spacious. The rainy season, which, it now seems, had only made a cameo appearance at Padangbai, came back in force today. I went to a Barong Dance, which was elaborately costumed and held on an outdoor stage. The patrons sat in a covered wicker amphitheater, and at the beginning of the 9:30 performance, the heavens opened up, and stayed open for the entire 40 minutes. The show went stoically on, with performers exhibiting enormous dignity and aplomb throughout. They certainly deserved a standing ovation, but since the audience was predominantly a German tour group with their Blaupunkt camcorders, that was out of the

question. The downpour prevented most, but not all, from venturing on stage during the performance to get a better camera angle. A bunch of muttered "*Gott in himmel*"s was the best they'd offer. From there, I had asked to be taken to a silversmith/jewelry maker to have my wallet efficiently cleaned. The village of Celuk has scores upon scores of such places, large and small, and every driver/tourguide seems to have an agreement with at least one. Made and Nengah were with me, and took me, without hesitation, to a back alley off the main drag to what appeared to be a medium-sized operation where they did the work on premises and sold the product. They first showed and described making the silver alloy (92.5% silver, 7.5 % copper), and then working it in various manifestations. The sales/showroom was a lesson in the meaninglessness of list price on Bali. Mata's birthday was less than 2 weeks away, and since I would be paying her a surprise visit for the occasion, I thought I'd see what they had in her birthstone -- amethyst -- set in silver. There were several lovely young saronged Balinese women all over the facility, to hold an umbrella over your head as you went from car to one building, or between buildings; and in the showroom, more sweet maidens awaited to bring you additional selections, but when price was mentioned, out of nowhere came an older woman in blue business attire and no-nonsense demeanor, and you might as well know at that point that you are sunk. I should have just taken out my wallet, emptied it of rupiah on the counter, and begged her, "Please have mercy on me. Send me home with a little trinket, I implore you." But no, I had to act out the foolish illusion of the classic dupe; that I had a sporting chance in her arena, and thus, humiliate myself further.

Well, this dupe had eyed some fairly nice pieces: necklace, bracelet, earrings, and they

had about 4 or 5 of each from which to select. I picked out one of each, and she said “Three million (rupiah, or about \$1500; I had about 240,000 rupiah on me, for the brief time being).” But for me, a million and a half. No, wait, it’s the first sale of the day for her (almost certainly untrue), and it’s bad luck to start off the sales day with an unhappy customer (which actually appears to be a Balinese custom or superstition), so let’s say 800,000. Way out of my range, I say; how about this bracelet with that necklace? Much better. Here she only started at two million and still ended up in a world I didn’t inhabit. Well, how about eliminating the bracelet, substituting amethyst studs for the dangly ones I favored, and starting the process again? We did, but only got to 450,000. I was running out of options, so I said: “Look, 200,000 is all I can pay for the whole outfit.” She gave me a look as if I’d asked if she’d throw in her daughter’s virtue for an extra hundred, and then said, “Sure, no problem: necklace and earrings for 200,000.” But she kept the bracelet in her hand, and asked the fatal question, “How much do you have left?” Knowing I was a goner, I told her the truth: 40,000 rupiah. I even spilled the contents of my wallet on the glass top, everything down to my spare eyeglass prescription and AARP membership card. She would throw in the bracelet if she could be permitted to clean me out. Permitted? Was it ever in doubt? Of course, I said yes, and they boxed the stuff up and sent me to the recovery room, where the sweet ladies of batik were once more in evidence, presenting coffee and condolences, and, eventually, an umbrellaed return to the van.

February 13, 1996 - Ubud

Last night, the storm trooper in the room overhead practiced goose-stepping in his hobnail boots, and also awakened before I did (with Bali’s omnipresent roosters) to continue the

routine. This morning's breakfast at pool side was more placid, with the songs of tropical birds and the gentle lapping of water to accompany the banana pancake. The man who served it to me said what appeared to be, "Mrcyztwo, lsgureed incupbraees?" I've tried to get over the habit of smiling and nodding when someone says something in an attempt at English I don't understand. It may have happened last night at dinner in the Cafe Wayan, where my Thai Seafood Curry seemed to have an excess of calimari tentacles. So I asked this morning's gentleman to repeat himself, but was not illuminated thereby. He said it again, and suddenly it began to sound like, "Are you a friend of David Farrah?" I must look like Everyman, or at least Mr. Chameleon, since, in the restaurant last night, an American woman came to my table, asked me to excuse her rudeness (perhaps to prove she wasn't German) and then asked me, "Are you Art?" To which I answered, "No, but I know what I like." True story, as is every second syllable of this journal. Of course, "Are you a friend of David Farrah?" may be the secret dooper greeting used in Bali, though my '60's roots may be showing. In Padangbai, I heard two male tourists openly discussing the merits of the mushrooms they had consumed the day before, so paradise is far from an innocent Disney adventure.

But innocence is exactly what this morning's little interchange embodied, since it was through the insistence of David, another expatriate American teaching in Kobe, that I made my first Asian vacation a Balinese one. He told me to look up a man who worked at the Ubud Inn if I needed help in getting around the area, but this guy (another Made) had scoped me out instead. In a very short period of time I've committed to a tour of Lake Bratan and other scenic wonders on the way to Lovina. You can run, but you cannot hide.

I also saw the storm trooper at breakfast; it's Brunhilde! A rather trim and snazzy one, at that, but will this revelation interfere with my enjoyable practice of stereotyping? I should hope not. After breakfast, I walked out onto Monkey Forest Road and hired a driver to take me to the Neka Museum: a negotiated 3000 rp. After spending 2 ½ hours in that beautiful place, shadowed by a uniformed guard with the inescapable name of Made (on Bali, all first-born are named Wayan, 2nd are Made, 3rd become Nyoman, and the 4th are Ketut) who seemed less intent on protecting the collection than in selling me a tour of his village, a date to see his own paintings (how convenient that he is an artist!), or the best route to see this afternoon's cremation. He struck out on all accounts, but at the conclusion of my perusal of the collection, I let him summon me a driver: 7000 rp., non-negotiable. I've decided to treat this trip as a shakedown (well termed) cruise for future visits. Learn my lessons, pay the price, and avoid the mistakes of utter stupidity, most of which are really misplaced vanity. I guess the first rule on Bali is: **If someone else arranges it, you overpay.** The two drivers this morning are an example, as was the bus ride from Kuta to Padangbai on the first morning. Ubud is pretty laid-back, it seems, with most of the real hawking concerning the modes of transportation available. Bicycles, mopeds, motorcycles, cars to rent, drivers for hire are at every curb, and as you walk by, they'll inquire about your needs. Most won't rise, since their success rate is probably very low, and energy is not expended needlessly in the tropics, except by white guys with oatmeal legs. I suppose some tourists resent even this low level of hassling, at which point I would aim them toward Padangbai. At that town, it's impossible to enjoy a meal in peace, since kids come to your table in most eating places, pressing you to buy their cheap models of outrigger canoes,

postcards, or sandalwood fans. The Rai Beach Inn and Restaurant was one of the few places with a posted policy of no soliciting, and it was fairly well enforced. In comparison, Kuta is like one huge, disorganized midway at the Hieronymous Bosch/Paul Gauguin State Fair.

The second rule is: **It's available elsewhere.** I promise you, this is true. Whether it's a room, a painting (tourist variety), a carving, a guide, a meal: if something about what you are offered is unsatisfactory, vote with your feet. In most cases, this is possible because the retail establishments are adjacent and in competition. It's a buyer's market unless you are a stupid buyer and let the sellers set the terms of the exchange. One way you do that is by ignoring Rule #1. I did that at the museum today and paid more than double what I should have. In the sweet clarity of retrospect, I know I should have told Made that it was a lovely day for a walk and that the road to Ubud was downhill all the way (which it is), and then trekked off on foot. As Rule #2 states, there will be another driver along shortly (I would have been unlikely to have gotten 10 steps without an offer) with whom I could have negotiated individually.

Part of the aromatic beauty of Bali is the liberal use of incense everywhere. It was in the restaurant last night, it accompanies every religious sacrifice -- even the simple ones each morning and evening in front of each place of business and residence. I encountered it in an unexpected place this morning: at the Neka Museum. As I gazed at some pieces in the Early Balinese collection, I saw, in the reflection permitted by the glass covering the painting, a man walking through the room and out the open door to the courtyard. He had a small tray on his shoulder, and it barely registered, since I was trying to concentrate on the painting beneath the reflection. In less than ten seconds, the scent of sandalwood readjusted my sensual focus from

eye to nose. It also seemed to blend with the visual elements of the paintings, most of which were stylized renderings of Hindu/Balinese tales. How thoughtful of the museum to offer such a lagniappe. If only they would muzzle their guards.

Other than by paying for things in Ubud, there's another way to know it's a more expensive town than Padangbai. In that poor little fishing village, it was often hard to get change for a 10,000 rupiah note. Let me remind you, that's \$5, American. Can you imagine a restaurant in Key West, or Ocean City, asking, when you paid your bill, "Hey buddy, don't you have something smaller than a five?" That happened every night I ate at the Rai Beach Restaurant, with the manager having to take the 10,000 and go across the street to the Inn to have them crack it. In Ubud, sarong sellers don't blink at a 20,000 rp. bill, which is about the largest in general circulation. While a 50,000 has some limited applications, I'm sure none of the money changers handles it. I'm traveling with yen, and have brought all *ichiman* (10,000 yen notes, the largest Japan issues), worth something less than \$100 currently. Yesterday I found the best rate I could - - 21.10 rupiah/yen -- and changed 40,000 yen. I ended up with a wad of 10,000 rp. bills that felt like a 3rd cheek of my ass as it bounced around in my back pocket. Try cramming your wallet with \$400 in fives and see what it feels like.

February 14, 1996 - Lovina

Actually, it's Kalibukbuk, but Lovina is easier to write. A touch of the trots ("Bali Belly") started showing up yesterday afternoon, interrupted my sleep last night, and continues today. I'm leaving Ubud a little earlier than I might have, since there was still more to do there. But Ubud, nice as it was, is still too touristy for my tastes. The whole town seems predicated on the tourist

rupiah, while laying on a patina of art. Padangbai had its own life, but was too 3rd-world for a long-term stay. There must be a mid-point between schlock and squalor, and the Rini Hotel might be it. The room I have is enormous, larger than the one in Ubud, with an equally large private veranda, huge bathroom (WITH hot water), and breakfast included. It's immaculate throughout the walled compound of 20 rooms and cottages, and my ground-level room is \$15 a night. One floor up, the same sized room would have the addition of a decent view of the ocean, and costs \$20. It seems to be a few decades old, and employs GOBS of extremely well cared-for tropical woods in the decor, doors, trim, etc. The beach is just one hotel down the lane, and is supposed to be composed of black volcanic soil. The enclosed nature of the property keeps the hawkers as far away as you want them, and for as long as you want them there. I had my first glance at either one hell of a lizard, or an alligator/crocodile in need of a meal. It was about to enter my porch as I sat there, writing my Lovina batch of postcards, and both of us fled in opposite directions.

February 15, 1996 - Lovina

Inquiring about the monster mentioned above introduced me to yet another Made, this time a sweet, lovely, delicate-looking young lady, who is married to a friend of David. She is my Lovina contact, and she beats all other Makes yet encountered. She let me know that the menacing creature was a caiman, a reasonably benign crocodile, and only the most diminutive of patrons need fear for their lives. The Lonely Planet book said that this place encouraged families with children, and now I think I know why; without that regular influx of fresh tender meat, the crocs would be reduced to foraging on the petite staff members.

Bali Belly shows no sign of waning, and I'll spare you the clinical details. As a result, however, I can compliment the hotel on the softness of their choice of toilet paper. Were I absent the condition just mentioned, last night would easily have been the most restful of the trip. I'm thinking of tearing off the bedding to discover the brand and model of the bed's mattress.

As Made and I were getting acquainted last night in between the demands of her job waiting tables at the hotel's restaurant, I showed her a picture of my wife, Mata. Made was genuinely shocked, and wanted to know why her skin was so dark. Was she really an American? When I said that she was, Made was perplexed. She knew there were black people in Africa, but the fact that there was another branch of the family in the U.S. seems to have eluded her. I'll ask her if she'd ever heard of Magic Johnson, Martin Luther King, Whitney Houston. If all draw a blank, I may be driven to bringing up OJ.

February 16, 1996 - Lovina

Travel Tip #67: If you value your sleep just before dawn, don't book a hotel near a mosque, especially during Ramadan. Quiet prayer and silent meditation don't seem to be Islamic specialties, but PA systems do. Not that I was getting much sleep anyway, between the internal rumbling of the still-active gastric volcano, and the memories of the lovely Balinese women I had seen and talked with the day before. It's the electronic equivalent of being roused by the Jehovah's Witnesses at 4:15 A.M.

Yesterday I had my first truly dreadful meal of the trip. On the strip where the Rini Hotel, and several others are located, there are also souvenir stands, refreshment stops, and restaurants. One advertises itself as specializing in Chinese dishes, and I thought a change of cuisine might be

both useful and tasty. It is called the Sanary Restaurant, to sear its name in our collective memories, and one thing an enthusiastic eater likes to do is find a neglected, though wonderful, out of the way place that no one else knows about. Usually, a deserted restaurant on a main thoroughfare would not qualify for the above description; it's likely to be abandoned by consumers for reasons directly concerning the quality of its offerings, and not simple public amnesia. I had never seen a customer in the Sanary in all my times walking past it, and, unaccountably, failed to find that fact ominous. It advertised a lobster special, which sounded good, especially at Balinese prices, as well as an asparagus-crab soup which summoned delectable images to my palate's eye. I went in at 6:20 and only the owner and cook/waitress were there. When I fled at 7:00, the *dramatis personae* hadn't changed. The place was dingy and not well-swept, and the waitress had a much lower level of English comprehension than most Balinese I had encountered. The lobster prices in the menu were not encouraging: 32,000 rp. (\$16) for each of the variations on a theme. I chose the soup which first attracted me, plus grilled prawns in a house specialty sauce, jettisoning the lobster dreams for another time and place. I asked her to substitute fried rice for steamed as the accompaniment since both were 4000 rp. a la carte, but several attempts at explaining and pointing to the items in the menu left her still acting as if she were participating in some sensory deprivation experiment. I noticed they had Carlsburg beer listed by name in the menu, so I pointed to it enthusiastically, and asked for a large bottle by name. I even mentioned that it had a green label. The owner brought the beer, keeping its label turned away from me, and poured a glass for me that way, finally setting the bottle down on the table with the label facing away. It was not Carlsburg, of course, but Bintang;

not the worst beer in the world, but no Carlsburg. It's like expecting to go to Arthur Bryant's Barbecue, and ending up at Gates's.

The soup arrived a very long time after that -- 15-20 minutes -- and for an asparagus-crab soup, it showed little evidence of either. The seafood pieces in it seemed to be cut into what someone might think were crab-like strips, but it was much more like tuna or marlin in texture and taste. The solids were in a rather weak chicken broth -- that flavor was certain -- into which a thumb-sized piece of peeled ginger had been dropped, and remained. The equivalent of ½ scallion had been sliced on the bias and thrown in, as well as what appeared to be a leftover half-layer of shallot. When the prawns arrived they were quite small, 6 in number, still in the shell with heads attached, and the sauce tasted too much of tomato paste. When I paid the 14,000 rp. bill, the owner acted like I had just saved him from eviction, not an unreasonable expectation in the near future.

Sometime late this morning, the intestinal sluices closed again as abruptly as they had opened. My explanation is that I intimidated them. After breakfast, and a night as difficult as the previous two, I decided to go to a local general store which stocks a modest supply of medicines, and find **something** to help my condition. I had been there before to buy water and stamps, but hadn't done any serious inventory of the pharmaceutical stock. I only knew of American brands, such as Pepto-Bismol and Immodium, and they appeared to be absent. What the store did have in copious amounts and varieties were cold, cough, and flu remedies. I guess I had forgotten how brutal the Balinese winters can be, especially when the wind comes off the mountain; you'll be glad you have your Gore-Tex sarong for the pilgrimage to Besakih. I finally located some pills

of Indonesian manufacture, but without a syllable of English on the carton for guidance. There was a cartoon-like drawing in one corner of the package, however, of a man doubled over in obvious pain, clutching his abdomen. I wondered whether these were the symptoms the pills were meant to cure, or an attempt to depict the side effects of undertaking the treatment.

Undeterred, I bought them for 1000 rupiah and headed back to my room. The Chicklets I bought in case of any unpleasant aftertaste cost nearly as much as the 12-pill pack of drugs. I'm guessing that for 50 cents, the sophistication of the therapy is akin to drinking Plaster of Paris. My innards were witness to all this, and realized I was seriously intent on putting an end to the trots once and for all, no matter what else came to a halt, and for how long. They were also aware I was not bluffing, and capitulated. Thus, I've temporarily relented about taking the pills immediately, but they're in plain sight on the nightstand, should any change in sentiment below be detected.

February 17, 1996 - Lovina

The main attraction of the Lovina area appears to be the dolphins. Most of the touts and hawkers on the beach are trying to sell you a morning trip to see the dolphins out in the Java Sea beyond the reef. Made's father owns a boat, and I told her I would utilize him for my requisite trip out. The Rini Hotel, like all Balinese lodgings, will arrange any locally available tourist activity, but one of the women who works there has arranged to have her husband's boats get all the hotel's business. She is surpassingly beautiful and, according to Made, is making a tidy sum and living in a large house. Made isn't permitted to shill for her father the way this woman does for her husband, at least on hotel grounds, so we had to agree on a little story about how I, as a hotel guest, might be found one morning in an outrigger canoe other than one owned by the

monopolistic entrepreneurs.

The boats leave around 6:00 A.M. as the sky begins to lighten; mine left about 6:25 and was one of the last to shove off. At the last minute, Made's father couldn't get his outboard motor to work, and I was transferred to Ketut's (Made's husband) cousin's boat. The canoes are just that; about 2 feet deep and a foot and a half across, with a length of perhaps 16 feet or more. Two large bamboo stabilizers are held on outriggers about 6 feet on either side of the shell. Five passengers would be crowded in one; there were 2 of us. When we first pushed off from the beach, I felt there was only one real problem I faced, other than death; it was the running death called diarrhea. Reports, yesterday, of its death had been greatly exaggerated. It merely closed down briefly, and then reopened under new management. When I heard our captain finally get his outboard started, I realized that death through exposure was far more likely as his motor sounded certain to conk out permanently in deep water out of sight of land, and only he could swim, or at least, in the correct direction. The sound emanating from it was a series of pings, cracks, zowings, and other random percussive sounds, that I thought we were being followed by a gamelan all the way out there. Once all its pings and shrieks appeared to be in some sort of rhythm, I noticed it was pushing us along much more slowly than the other 15 or so canoes -- boats we had let get a head start anyway. The voyage out was 40 minutes, the one back, 35. About an hour was spent chasing the sea mammals around. What happens is this: sometime just after sunrise, a group of 30-50 (a generous guess on my part) bottlenose dolphins surface to feed. There are other, more mystical or ludicrous New Age-ish interpretations of what seems to be a strictly biological activity, having to do with greeting the sun and paying homage to the new day.

Everybody seems to converge on the same spot in the sea, and by the time we got there, no dolphins had yet been spied. They finally started rolling on the surface, and a scant few actually did leap a little; maybe 3 or 4 in the entire hour actually left the water completely. I wasn't expecting Sea World, by any means, but it was, in sum, a little underwhelming. The real pageant turned out to be the flotilla itself, chasing those poor creatures around while Nikon motor drives whirred, and Fuji and Kodak licked their lips. Perhaps I should be ashamed to say that I snapped about 40 myself, but if it's any consolation, I can assure you from previous experience that they will all turn out to suck. At one of several lulls in the action, our captain passed forward a plastic bag containing about 8 greasy little fritters of some sort, folded over and slightly sweet, followed by a single small bottle of water with which to swap saliva. The other passenger turned to me with a wry comment, in Aussie English, about the lavish amount spent on catering. As I looked about, all the other outriggers were serving their in-flight snack as well. Apparently, there was a timetable to it all, previously worked out, in the same manner that the prices were stabilized at 10,000 rp. a few years before. I wonder if the dolphins are in on it. They probably have a union that bargained for a one-hour show, 20-boat maximum, and no more than 4 Germans on any one boat, since they have been known to attempt to relive old war movies and attack other canoes, making Erich von Stroheim noises. A little before 8:00 it was all over, and we headed back to shore, again proving the virtue of having the healthiest motor. Our arrival was greeted by -- what else -- hawkers of dolphin memorabilia, including **truly** tacky rubber or plastic flexible replicas of the creatures. They followed me halfway up the road, still trying to

unload what they had left on the last boat in from the chase.

February 18, 1996 - Lovina

Last night I went to the well-regarded Rambutan Inn and Restaurant for dinner. Their outside menu listed Seafood Mornay which, I thought, might be a nice change from all the South Seas presentations of the subject, and it might also be beneficial to have something cheesy and greasy clogging up my innards. In addition, it also turned out that these people would actually deliver the Carlsberg I ordered. On the menu was an item called "potato salad," a fairly standard effort in most places other than, of course, Germany. Even Japanese potato salad is indistinguishable from Shoney's, by no means a compliment. But since I have not observed the mayonnaise excesses of that Asian country repeated in Bali, I felt it was worth a try as a rice substitute with the Mornay. When it was delivered, I felt a little cheated. It just appeared to be boiled and sliced/shredded potato, still hot, with some minced onion and shallot sprinkled on top. Somehow it was magical, with the flavors clean, pure, and direct, reminding me of the perfect fries from Padangbai, and some very good ones a few days ago in a late lunch at the Rini. Upon further tasting, the difference appeared to be due to the potatoes themselves. They really had an intensity and concentration of flavor beyond that I had experienced before. They were slightly yellow in color, and when still warm, produced the loveliest bouquet of potato/shallot imaginable. The Mornay was very decent, but had a slightly processed taste and texture that led me to believe that the path back from my plate to the kitchen would lead directly to a can. But a high-class can, to be sure; it was a pleasant meal.

I will be off with Ketut, Made's husband, this noon, in what promises to be a comedy of errors with my wallet as the butt of the jokes. I wanted some advice on whether the shirts, sarongs, etc., I have purchased on Bali, both batik and non, will shrink when washed, and how much. Ketut had already said that he wanted me to come to their house for dinner one night before I left, and we settled on Tuesday, without consulting anyone else. When I talked to Made about it the next day, it was news to her, and I silently hoped I hadn't precipitated a marital rift, and if I had, how could I make it work to convince Made to come back to Japan with me. Sure, leave Happyville, and go to the Land of the Perpetual Funeral (*a la* Dave Barry). With Mr. Hyde.

That was a few days ago, and last night, as I was returning for dinner, Made asked if I had any plans for dinner (other than worshipping at the altar of Her Ineffable Petiteness? No.). She got off work at 4:00, and we would walk home together for dinner. Apparently, this was a compromise with the original Tuesday chow-out, and of course I accepted happily. When we talked about fabric care yesterday, Made mentioned that her aunt was a tailor, somehow thinking that revelation was an answer to my shrinkage question. Perhaps she was saying that I should wash everything I bought in Bali, and if it shrank, throw it away and have her aunt make me new ones. This morning she announced that I need to be ready at noon, since her husband will be waiting to take me to the tailor (or the cleaners, more likely). Since it's Sunday, I suppose I'll also be fed as well, but not after a walk home with Made. There is one more garment I do need to buy: a hatching jacket for Mel's (my step-daughter) last two months of warm-weather pregnancy. I guess I'll just choose a nice batik, then try to explain the size and circumstances of the fit to Made's aunt.

The potato thoughts earlier also remind me of the fabulous bananas I had in the fruit salad, and morning pancakes, at the Rai Beach Inn at Padangbai. They were fairly small, with about 3 orange streaks running the length of the fruit, and had a real Platonic Form of Banana Flavor: it had to be the perfection or ideal banana from which all others were imperfect attempts at replication. Same with the spuds. Of course, food spends less time in storage here than in “developed” countries, a term I am beginning to view with greater skepticism. The species of fruit are different, but why do we in the “first world” end up with all the flavorless pap that money can buy? The problem is not that it’s what money can buy, but what money can sell, or chooses to sell. We buy only what is for sale, and sellers/growers/financiers only sell what is cheap to grow, or what can yield the largest tonnage per hectare.

It’s nearly 5:00 P.M., and another chapter entitled “The Inscrutable East” is about to be written. Ketut showed up at noon, and since we were going to his house and I was to meet his family for the first time, I discarded my Big Dogs shorts and shirt for khaki poplins and polo shirt. I also gave myself a precautionary daubing of sunscreen. He first asked me about the need for a tailor that Made must have relayed to him, and so I explained the shrinkage question to him, and he was sure the articles would shrink a certain amount, but could not specify it exactly. Fine, I said; there was one more article of clothing I needed to buy, and it could be off the rack for all I cared. Great, he said. He would take me to the well-known market in Singaraja, the Big Papaya of Northern Bali. We walked out of the Rini Hotel courtyard and he mounted a nearby motorbike, indicating that I was to get on behind. My life flashed before my eyes as I remembered the driving I had seen on the roads of Bali. Passing on curves, making 2-lane roads

into 3 by carving your own out of the middle, double parking or stopping on a busy road without the least attempt to pull over: I had seen them all and flinched each time the vehicle I was in had a near-death experience. I also remembered the pins in my right hip and ankle which were needed in 1970 when an old coot behind the wheel of his Chevy in central Oklahoma saw neither me on my 125 cc Hodaka, nor the red light summoning him to stop at that intersection. And I finally remembered that I had no medical insurance currently in force. I also noticed only one helmet, and Ketut's hospitality seemed to stop when it might be at the price of his personal safety; he wore it.

We rode down the lane toward the main road for about 100 meters, and I was NOT feeling good about this venture at all. But we stopped at a roadside stand where a teenaged boy, a Balinese woman, and a young child all greeted Ketut effusively. They also proffered another helmet. He said, I believe, that this was one of his interminable number of cousins (the teenager, I think), and suggested that I might even want to shop there for the dress I wanted, since the woman had a good supply of garments on display. Great, I thought to myself; buy what I need here and call off the ride into the 11 km valley of death (the distance to Singaraja). The woman was not only lovely, but also voluptuous, even by Balinese standards, and before I had left the town for good, two other of my family members would have Balinese apparel upon my return. Ketut was wearing the clothes of the hotel where he worked, so I rightly guessed that he was on his noon to 3:00 break and wouldn't be planning an complex itinerary. I took my purchases back to my room and he met me in the courtyard again, and insisted on showing me the Singaraja market anyway, since I looked like I still might have a few rupiah left on me. In a previous

conversation, I had expressed a desire to return to the big produce and flower market at Candikuning, near Lake Bratan, and he promised we would stop there on the way to the airport Wednesday afternoon. On my other visit to that market, I had seen enormous bags of saffron being sold, and if the price were reasonable, I thought I'd take a couple back with me. Just another excuse to make paella, I suppose. We'd see what Singaraja's market had first.

The helmet gave me little peace, since it appeared incapable of surviving a serious onslaught of falling limes. It took me half the trip to Singaraja before I got comfortable back there, with all sorts of traffic whizzing by us from all directions. No saffron in Singaraja, and on the way back to the Rini, we sustained a flat tire. All told, from departure to deposit, 2 hours. Ketut sped back to work, and I greeted Made and asked her if I should meet her at the front desk or in the courtyard at 4:00 so we could walk to her house together. She looked at me quizzically: why? I had done what I needed to do. What was the deal, I wondered silently. No meal with the folks unless I pay auntie the seamstress? I still wonder, but at least that leaves me free to attend the big Legong Dance plus Balinese feast held at the Rambutan tonight for 8000 rp.

February 19, 1996 - Lovina

I strolled the beach last night at sunset, shrugging off the dolphin trip touts, chatting with a schoolgirl, and watching the couples -- both tourist and non -- attend to each other in the delightful little cocoon that couples weave for themselves. Sunset came, the volleyball game ceased, hawkers put their merchandise on mopeds and left. I've been here long enough. It was long enough a few days ago, but now all I want to do is buy the saffron and head to the airport. The trip there now sounds a little questionable, as well. Ketut said he wanted to take me there (in

his car -- we clarified that yesterday during the motorbike follies) and he would be happy to stop at the market by Lake Bratan on the way. While the initial motivation seemed to be expressed as friendship for David, and any friend of David's, as the saying goes, it has begun to sink in that everything on Bali has a pricetag. Subject to bartering, of course, but eventually we are all customers and we all pay. So how much will I pay for the ride to the airport? In K.C., Inga is picking me up and taking me home. Though she seldom has two dimes to rub together, she'd be rightly offended if I asked her how much she was charging for the service, and she won't have her hand out when she boots me off the ride on South Benton. So I'll ask Made sometime today, but I shouldn't expect an unequivocal answer, since that would form a rift with our recent tradition of misunderstanding. I think I'll arrange another dolphin trip for tomorrow morning. I got the feeling that the 17-28 mm fisheye zoom might be the best lens to use for getting a sense of the vast armada loosed to pursue these innocent creatures, an armada in which I am a willing participant.

Nothing pleases me this morning. I'm seated adjacent to 4 Germans at breakfast (where I am writing these words), the banana in the fruit salad is a little green and the papaya is completely missing. The sky is clear and promises stifling heat as well as few picture-taking opportunities, and Made looks distant and sullen today. It's really time to go. I skipped the Legong Dance and pig-out last night out of sheer lethargy. I'm not sick, just disinterested in anything on this island except its saffron prices. I tell you, it's being alone here that does it. I'm not a party animal -- in fact, I once wanted to have a T-shirt made for myself with some spears of asparagus on it, and the caption, "Party Vegetable." In large festive groups I aim for planter

status, and usually succeed. Just a day later, someone will remark, "Were you at that party? I don't remember seeing you there." I was that Duane Hanson work of a man with a faraway look in his eye, holding a wine glass with a speck of pate in his beard. But get me with just one other person, and I come alive. Maybe I should have gone into therapy -- on both sides of the couch. Even here in Bali, when large groups are about, I cringe and hide, but when I have a chance to talk to someone as a person, I jump at the chance. The schoolgirl on the beach last night, named what sounds like 'Weedy,' is someone who just said hello and asked where I was from, and most tourists, if they answered her at all, would have kept walking to preclude further conversation. But I stopped, and we chatted as long as she wanted to, which turned out to be until her little 2 year-old sister, splashing naked at the edge of the sea, decided she wanted some attention. We promised to meet again today. It was fun. I'm not nominating myself for the Nobel Prize in Soulful Intercourse, merely trying to make a point about why I'm no longer interested in remaining in paradise. For me, paradise includes a sense of connection to another individual -- emotional, intellectual, biographical, maybe all of them if I'm lucky -- embedded in a context of great beauty both of us can enjoy and which can form the basis for more avenues of connection between us. There's no one I am connected to here, and paradise has become intolerable because of it. It's quite a flaw in my makeup, I know. And it's not that I don't need a lot of people; but I need them one at a time.

At noon today I went out for a bottle of water, and I stopped at the desk to call and reconfirm my departure flight, and to ask Made precisely what Ketut was going to charge for "volunteering" to take me to the airport. That was a question she understood; it would be the

going rate: 75,000 rupiah.

In Bali, traffic drives on the left, and to these American eyes, it seems as if the cars are continually going in the wrong direction. They aren't, of course; they're just going in a different direction, and if I can't handle that, I shouldn't drive on this island, which I don't. I'm certainly not going to alter their way of doing things by renting a car and resolutely driving on the (in the?) right. We all know how that will end. It also seems that the concepts of 'host' and 'guest' on this island run the wrong way, as well. If you are my guest in the U.S., and I have chosen to be your host, either by inviting you over or by spontaneously deciding it where we stand, I take on a certain set of obligations concerning you. Now you have some obligations in this relationship as well: show some respect for my attempts to please you, even when those attempts fall short; show a modest amount of gratitude, as well; and don't take advantage of my kindness by slipping the towels and silverware into your luggage. But these are the minor expectations of courtesy, and should not bear repeating. The obligations I take upon myself are those of caring for you and your well-being as if it were my own, and eventually -- because it always comes to this -- shouldering the costs of hosting you unless those costs are especially onerous. If I suggest we go out to dinner, I shouldn't suddenly plead poverty halfway through the meal and suggest you pay for everything. There are privileges and expectations you, as a guest, have a right to possess and exercise, and they all amount to not being treated as a mark.

In Bali, you go through the looking-glass, where all the privileges go to the host, and all the obligations fall upon the guest. The word 'friend' has as much meaning describing tourist-Balinese relations as the words 'beach' and 'seaview' do attached to motels which are tucked

behind mountains or next to rice paddies miles from any significant body of water. Of course, if I decline to accept the kind offer of transportation to the airport by my “friend” Ketut, and choose instead the shuttle for 12,500 rp., I will have betrayed his hospitality by not letting him pocket my rupiah. I don’t mind paying the money; \$37.50 for a cab from one end of the island to the other is reasonable. What I resent is the pretense under which the money is extracted; the idea that because Ketut has appointed himself as my host I am obliged to pay him top dollar for a mundane service available in a much cheaper medium elsewhere. When I came to Bali, one thing I hoped to be a part of was the life of Balinese people. What interests me most about a place is how people live, raise their children, prepare their meals, treat those they love, make a living. What are the outward signs of relationships between people? How do they relax? What do they revere? That’s also what I want to photograph. Mountains, sunsets, temples are for postcards; people, and what they do, is what makes a place a place. With only one brief exception, I’ve been excluded from the fascinating mundanities of everyday life: the funeral feast in Padangbai, where I got diarrhea.

A subconscious mind is a terrible thing to ignore. For the last three or four days, a song has been darting in and out of the Cartesian Theater of my mind. It’s not a favorite of mine, nor one I can recall having heard recently, but there it is: the Beatles’s “Can’t Buy me Love.” And, of course, that’s it! I want love in Bali, and I’m not getting it, and my money’s not getting it for me, either. Not carnal, sweaty, soil-the-sheets love (though I haven’t ruled out the wet, slimy, slipping around in a running shower variety yet, though I might as well); just mutual respect and caring, even at the superficial level that only a week or so’s acquaintance must dictate. That

would really make it paradise. Do I hear another Beatles's tune in there? "All you need is Love."

February 20, 1996 - Lovina

One more day! I tried Balinese pizza last night: not too bad. There's a place in Kalibukbuk called the Malibu Club, which is mainly a watering hole/nightclub, but they also have an eclectic menu which includes several varieties of pizza baked in genuine pizza ovens. Their Large Special, which is about the size of American medium, was 10,000 rp., and had shrimp and pineapple on it, as well as green olives and a fairly flavorful sauce with real tomatoes. The crust was decent, the cheese plentiful, the customer semi-satisfied. Service here, as elsewhere on Bali, is measured in geologic time. From when I ordered the pie to the time it actually went in an unlit oven was 22 minutes. It was 6:20, and I was one of the few paying customers in the club, but most of the kitchen activity seemed to be of the variety accomplished with both hands in pockets. Later, I stayed for the movie. Many Balinese restaurants have purchased laserdisk players, and last night I regretted sitting through "First Knight," a pathetic, predictable attempt at an Arthurian saga, with Sean Connery as Arthur, giving yet another conclusive argument for his immediate retirement. John Gielgud again caused a collective "Gee-I-thought-he-was-dead" response from the audience, in a performance remarkable only for its (generally) unaided verticality. Upon my 10:00 p.m. return to the hotel, Ketut was waiting for me, anxious to confirm that he would indeed take me to the airport on Wednesday, and all that talk about the shuttle was merely a smokescreen to drive down the price. Of course, the price did not go down, but he did bump the departure time up from 3:00 to noon, which is fine with me.

In Padangbai, I tried to strike up conversations on the street with various people, and

commerce always intervened there, as well. If I was unwilling to buy, they were unwilling to talk, and would look for another mark. The sarong woman, Wayan, was that way, so the second day I bought a sarong from her. That seemed to allow her to chat a little between sales pitches to other tourists, and she told me about her 8 year-old daughter, and several contradictory stories about whether in fact she had a husband, and if she did, whether he was unemployed, a farmer, or an unemployed farmer. But at some point in time, an inaudible (to me) timer went off, and the congeniality turnstile demanded more rupiah. Wouldn't I like to take home this nice batik sarong for my wife? Fun and games were done and paid for. The next day I bought the batik sarong, and we sat under the trees at 2:00 P.M. and talked about how life was in Padangbai. She wasn't from here, but from Klungkung, and had a boss who provided her with sarongs and took the lion's share of the income. What she can bargain for with the tourists is what she makes, above a very slender margin he gives her, or so she said. But by late afternoon, the more expensive batik increment I had paid for had expired, and she had another sarong for me. The next day I bought it, and hid from her thereafter. It was the way I imagine a John feels, but on this rock, Jagger can be heard from too: "I can't get no Satisfaction." Perhaps I'm just fighting the death, at age 55, of another element of my naive idealism. Don't people just want to talk and find out about each other without any crasser motives behind that desire? Are sex, money, or power the hidden agenda of all superficially innocent attempts at human contact? I had hoped these would be absurdly rhetorical questions, but now I'm not sure.

February 21, 1996 - Lovina

I'm outta here! Yesterday, around 1:00 P.M., Made came to the porch of my room, where

I was sitting with my feet up, locked in a life-or-death struggle with the ideas from a book by Daniel Dennett. She wanted to know, Mr. Dennis, what was wrong. So I told her, in slightly less metaphorical ways, what I have relayed on these pages above. Her understanding seemed to be fragmentary, but she did comprehend my frustration and disillusionment, and tears formed in her eyes as we talked. I wished I could join her, but I reserve my weeping for what I often perceive as the unraveling of my marriage. Made seemed to think that Ketut and I had a falling out, and kept asking me about that repeatedly. Of course, it wasn't that, but the repeating of my thesis in general terms wasn't enough to nudge her from the particular she either understood or feared. We spent a long time talking there, both of us expressing a different kind of sadness, and neither of us able to console the other. Another terrible form of loneliness. She left with reddened cheeks and swollen eyes, and I was sorry that was the price of explaining myself.

That confrontation was what seems to have been some sort of dramatic conclusion to my stay here. I had dinner at the hotel, served by Made, and we were polite and cordial. This morning's breakfast was the same story, and I feel we'll all be relieved when I leave, and this little episode of turmoil I created leaves with me.

A final (I sure hope it's the final one!) monkeywrench seems to have been thrown squarely in my escape mechanism: Ketut called at 10:00 this morning to tell me that he couldn't get away from work at noon, and that I'd have to find my own way to the airport. Unfortunately, the shuttle bus has to be booked a day in advance, and is now full. Most cars for the day, and their drivers, have been taken. One-way rentals are not done here, so it's time for me to stop writing and find some wheels!

Same Day - DPS (Bali Airport)

I didn't have to go far. About 20 meters down the road was one of those all-purpose Balinese stands that sells candy, condoms, water, sunscreen, sarongs, and tours to the hot springs. They also advertised a charter to the airport for a rock-bottom price of 50,000 rp. When I inquired, however, there was a catch: their one-and-only vehicle was pledged to a couple going to Kuta, which is near the airport, and those two were coming back to Lovina after prostrating themselves before the officials of an Indonesian bank, begging for a business loan. If none of us objected to the extra stop or two involved, it was a done deal. And so it was. We stopped at the market, as I wished, and it turned out to be a good break point in our journey. They got out and bought some fruit to munch, and I went to see if I could liberate some saffron. Not only could I, but the negotiated price for a bag about the size of a baseball cap was \$3. I was so overjoyed that I also sprang for a kilo of Balinese coffee beans, and two containers of industrial-strength sandalwood incense, guaranteed to purify entire fetid Zip Codes with just one application. We'll see how it works on 64132.

Wednesday, March 6, 1996 - Letter to Made Mandra, Bali

Dear Made,

It was very enjoyable to stay at your hotel last month, and I have many wonderful memories of my holiday there. Most of the good thoughts concern the people I met and talked with, and I took many pictures of them, as well. I always promise to send copies of those photographs when I take them, and in this envelope are many of them. I am asking you to be my

“assistant” and help me by giving them to the people who are in the pictures. Most of them should be easy, since they are at the hotel or restaurant, or work on the street where the hotel is located. I would be very grateful to you if you could make certain all the pictures ended up in the right hands.

The largest number of photos are from the burial feast for Nengah Taman’s uncle. I think that’s the way his name is spelled; he was my driver and guide during the day I spent inland at the Mother Temple and other places. Just give all of those pictures to him, and I’m sure he will be able to distribute them to the members of his family who are in them. I’ve tried to put them all together so it will be easier to find them. Also please give him my thanks, and ask him to thank his family as well for permitting me to be there for that morning. It was a truly memorable time for which I am grateful to him for inviting me.

There is a small group of pictures of a young schoolgirl, Iluh, and some with her young friends in them. She sells postcards on the street by the hotel, so please make sure she receives the ones with her in them, and also, please give her one of my business cards I have enclosed. When she and I talked one day, she said that her school didn’t have writing paper, or at least enough writing paper, and asked me for some. I gave her a notebook I had with me, but I would like to know whether what she said is true, or did I not understand her accurately? If the school doesn’t have enough paper, I would be happy to buy some and send it as soon as I can. Children need to be able to write, I believe, and if the supplies are not available, something needs to be done. I know Bali is not a rich place, except in its beauty and the beauty of its people (and in these 2 ways, it is the richest place on the earth) and I would be glad to help out, if I may be

permitted to. Could you investigate whether the school needs paper, or other supplies, and write to me concerning it? I would be very grateful. In addition, if anyone wants to write to me for any reason, I'd be a willing letter writer. I remember very kindly the sweet family who ran the restaurant and had the very lovely baby I photographed often, though I'm sure she's too young to write!!

Best wishes,

Dennis Lowden

Thursday, March 21, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Dear Inga,

Your packet of letters arrived this morning, and I'll begin a reply before leaving for school, but I doubt that I'll finish it unless these flashing fingers (want me to flash you the finger?) move faster than they are used to. Yesterday was a national holiday, the vernal equinox, and I must admit I like national celebrations based on celestial events rather than wars in which our side murdered more than their side did. While it was a holiday, there was still a Shoin event I was expected to attend: a graduation party. Yes, a mandatory party, which sure sounds redundant to me. What made the party interesting also made me feel like I could never teach in the U.S. again after being over here. I've been to what pass for graduation parties at Baker and KU, and they aren't worthy of the name next to the Shoin one yesterday.

First of all, it wasn't held in a school gym, where the food smelled like unlaundered jockstraps and the scoreboard buzzer would go off accidentally during the invocation. It was at

one of Kobe's most expensive hotels (think Ritz-Carlton), and catered by God as worshiped by Julia Child. All the students were dressed extraordinarily, most in kimonos, and they all gathered in the main ballroom at tables, but the faculty weren't allowed in with them, and we gathered in a separate, smaller room for green tea. The school's president was with us, as well as Kurazowa, the ex-president and wannabee future president, so I figured we'd be treated all right. We were. At some secret signal, the two of them got up, and so did we. We walked out of the room, which was adjacent to the ballroom, and followed the president into the main hall. There, all the students stood and cheered and applauded at our entrance. Now, I have to tell you, it gave me goose bumps, and I was seriously afraid I was going to start crying and have to be led to my seat like some dottering octogenarian unable to control any of his bodily fluids any more. I can never recall having been applauded by my students, which might be as much a reflection of my teaching success as the value our culture places on teaching. In one sense, it was a formal act; the students were expected to show their gratitude to us, and they did. But it was touching nonetheless. Then the president got up and droned on until the natives got extremely restless (the food was already on the buffet tables in the center of the room, and I have learned the hard lesson that one doesn't stand between a Shoin Woman and a meal unless it is with a tank and several grenade launchers), which only took about 5-6 minutes. It was interminable to me, mainly because I couldn't understand a word he was saying. But I could still tell he was boring. Then the chaplain got up and did a boring invocation, though I did understand the word "Amen." One of my favorite religious words, since it means something is finally over and maybe we can leave and play catch. Or in this case, chow down. But it merely meant that The Padre had to make

way for yet another speaker while I watched the salmon get cold on its silver tray. But then I thought, "Wait a minute, that salmon is raw; it's already cold." But it sure could get devoured in a pair of seconds by 21 year old vultures in kimonos. The last speaker was the senior member of the English Department faculty, Takagi-*sensei*, whose job it was to propose the traditional Japanese toast (Champagne was in the process of being poured for all as he spoke, and he dragged out his remarks until each had a full glass), which ends with glasses raised, and the word "*Kampai!*" uttered, sometimes shouted. A nanosecond after that formality ceased to echo in the hall, its sound was replaced by what might have been mistaken for that of a herd of panic-stricken wildebeest heading for the banquet tables. Luckily, there was plenty for all, but next was another delightful show of affection for us as teachers. Not only were we expected to go from table to table to greet our soon-to-be-former students, but they also shared their meal with us and demanded to have their picture taken with us as a final momento of their years at Shoin. At Baker and KU (I never went to a Rockhurst graduation, but I'm guessing the story would be the same there) most students are so self-absorbed that having a kind word for, or to, their teachers is out of the question, let alone some formalized, culturally approved vehicle for doing it. Of course, we were also there to recognize their achievements and wish them well in their futures. It was extremely difficult to get students to let you take their picture at an American graduation, let alone pose with you in cap and gown (or kimono), but at Shoin it was something they wanted to do, and would almost fight to get next to you, handing off their camera to a friend to snap a final momento. What was truly amazing, and it paralleled my experience on the "Sylphide" for the Shoin Festival party in November was that young ladies I had never seen

before wanted to pose with me, arm in arm, as a momento of I truly do not know what. There was the traditional bingo game with prizes (in this case, faculty got all the losing cards) and wine, beer, and potent punch flowed freely, even though it was only late afternoon. Most of us had taken the monorail across from the downtown (the Portopia Hotel is located on Port Island in Osaka Bay) so driving was something somebody else was doing.

It's far from over. Today is graduation, and I leave for it in about 15 minutes. A full report is probably just below this paragraph. Shoin consists of a 2-year junior college and a 4-year university, but both students enroll in both kinds of classes, and I teach some of each. Yesterday's party was the college one, and there's a university one on Friday, at a different luxury hotel, and it will be much bigger (about 250 people were at the Portopia party). Today, both have a common graduation, and if you thought graduation speeches by self-important dignitaries were boring in English, think about listening to them in a foreign language. It will probably be a little like the Christmas Candlelight service I went to on 12/23 in the chapel. The sermon was in Japanese, the carols were in Japanese, and even the passages from Luke and Matthew which I have known by heart since I was a wee one were incoherent to me. Plus, as an esteemed faculty member, I was required to sit in what would pass for a sort of in-front choir loft (but unlofted, at congregation level) facing the attendees. Thus, I couldn't even sleep, work a crossword puzzle, or do a casual check of my privates. Bummer.

Five hours have passed far from enjoyably, but profitably. Graduation lasted what seemed like months but was timed at just over 90 incomprehensible minutes. We sang old hymns in Japanese, did what was apparently The Lord's Prayer also in Nihon (everybody was

mumbling it more or less together, it was led by a man in a priest's robe, This is nominally a Christian school, and it lasted about as long as the English version; but for all I know they were swearing a blood oath to the Emperor and vowed to rid the land of foreigners as soon as the service was over) and heard a commencement address with the inspirational content of a sheep farting. But the students were even lovelier than yesterday, since this was a day for their BEST kimono, and the school, ever the most thoughtful institution I have ever been associated with, passed out little bags of presents to all the graduates, as well as a box of pastries to all the faculty members who endured it. For gorging ourselves at the trough yesterday at the hotel, as well as suffering through the adulation of countless students, both known and unknown, we were presented with a pair of real nice (and maybe Real China) coffee cups with the Shoin logo on them.

For me the big news was in my mailbox. The travel agency in Osaka I had faxed Tuesday to see if any of the invisible airline seats might still be available to get me back in time to see my plays produced came up with a seat at the time I wanted, though the price is double what I paid to get home in February. But the school is reimbursing me, so as long as they don't object (and they don't -- I checked it out as soon as I got the fax) I don't object. All I have to do is fax my acceptance to the agency (which I should be doing now instead of finishing this chapter of War and Peace) and it's a done deal.

Mata had asked me whether I thought you would be willing to go walking with her. I told her the truth, but she called you anyway!! Actually, I did relay your poor "track" record on our planned walking expeditions, but you might be right about her feeling that being with you is the

next best thing to being with me. If you feel her hand on your crotch, however, she may be taking this "next best thing" idea to extremes. I walked about 4 miles today, and in a blue suit, too. It turned out to be a beautiful afternoon, so I walked the 3 miles back home from school, stopping at a produce market and a sushi stand along the way.

Great to hear from you, as it always is, and it looks as if I'll be seeing you sooner than I had thought.

Love,

Dennis

Tuesday, March 26, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Dear Inga,

I haven't written for several days because I've been in shock over what I saw on the TV this weekend. Now, I think of myself as a fairly worldly person, and I've seen and done things which might amaze and disgust you (details available if you buy some of that wonderful Champagne we had at EBT [Veuve Cliquot Brut, in case the name slipped your mind] and pour it down my throat some evening), but I was unprepared for the sheer depravity I witnessed on network TV last Saturday evening. It was so appallingly crass and disgusting that I am determined to watch every minute of it this week, not just the last 30 minutes I accidentally happened upon last time.

I can blame it all on the Friday afternoon Shoin party, at which the students, being on average 2 years older than the ones reported on in the last letter, were more sophisticated, sexy, poised, and beautiful than I had any right to be associated with. But not long after I made that

observation, I made 2 others: that I would never see any of them again, and certainly not in such a lovely state; and that there was an open bar at all 4 corners of the room. Thus, I got a fairly decent snootful, took the train home, and crashed (not the train -- I left that to the engineer) at about 7:00 P.M. I slept the sleep of the innocent for a full 12 hours, which just shows you that sleep is no gauge of one's moral character. All that meant was that I couldn't fall asleep on Saturday night, and after tossing and turning, I got up to pour a glass of juice and see what was on the tube at midnight in this country. That's when I discovered The Nippon Nipple Network. Does American Cablevision have it available to its subscribers? It's Channel 3 in Kobe, and during the day it broadcasts news, cartoons for the kids, and cooking shows for mom. But on the weekends it's apparently whip-it-out-and-lay-it-on-the-table time. When I switched it on, there was a guy, lying on his back on a gurney, or perhaps some sort of padded massage table, with only a pair of briefs on, flanked on this table by 2 topless young women. There was also a loudmouthed M.C. lurking and leering about, so I finally figured out this was a game show of some strange sort, which it appeared to be. Here's what I surmised it to be: the guy had a whistle in his mouth, like a London Bobby's police whistle, and he was supposed to blow it when he began to get turned on, sexually. And the more he was turned on, the harder he would blow (which sounds about right, except I've always heard it expressed: the harder she blew, the more he was turned on). It was the job of the topless lasses to do the turning on, and they already had my interest without doing anything. They were definitely cute. Once the MC got his obnoxious ass out of the picture, things started to happen. In about 5 seconds, one of the women started

stroking the outline of his penis showing through his briefs. I was thinking: okay, she'll nibble his ear a little, maybe suck a nipple if she wants to get especially daring for NETWORK TV! But no; she just ups and goes for the groceries. He's not even giving a weak-ass toot on his whistle (I'm thinking he's probably swallowed it in the excitement), and she must have taken this as an insult, since she pulls down his drawers, and buries her head in his groin. Now, when she pulled down his briefs, something is supposed to pop out, right? After all, it may have been a long time for you, but it hasn't been THAT long, has it? You do remember that there is normally something down there under the Hanes. Well, when she pulls them down to reveal all, and simultaneously dives in for a taste, the TV screen suddenly gets blurry at the crucial location. Everything from her nose northward is clear, and likewise south of his crotch, but the center portion is that squared-off, blurry shit they use in a courtroom when they want to hide the identity of someone. Suddenly it dawned on me. This cock is in the Witness Protection Program! Why else would they take such pains to hide its identity? I began to speculate what it must have seen to require this kind of treatment, and also to wish, wistfully, that I had seen what it had, and as closely as it had. Still no toot, however, and he eventually won the competition, which appeared to be a certificate for one night's free accommodations at one of the program's sponsors, a "love hotel" called the Tam-Tam. This is true.

And it's not over. The same thing was tried on a woman, topless but pantied. A couple of guys started up top with lips, ears, neck -- eventually got to the nipples -- and had some pretty fair success. The toots started to become quite regular. One man finally worked his way down to her crotch and seemed to lose his nose somewhere down there, and the whistle began to get

rather shrill and insistent. He peeled off her underpants, however, and the camera angle changed from at-the-side to head on between the feet. Not only was she hyperventilating through the whistle, the same blurring effect was observed by the eager viewers when focus came to the area of most intense action. Perhaps her pussy was in the same government program, since we were never able to get a clear shot of it. The rest of the half-hour was similar, with an in-studio panel comprised of half men, half women in see-through blouses, pontificating on what was transpiring. ESPN

should try it out for a few weeks.

So that's it from boring, staid, repressed Japan. If I knew how to understand the VCR manual I'd tape it next Saturday so you would know I'm not bullshitting you. Hope your walking turns out well.

Love,

Dennis

Monday, April 1, 1996 - Letter to Mata

Dearest Mata,

Happy April Fool's Day from your year-'round fool. I know we just talked yesterday, but sometimes I just feel like saying hello, even though our last goodbye has not been long ago. It will sure be nice when we don't have to think perpetually in terms of protracted apartness and combating its effects. You probably have no idea how much of my energy goes into that ongoing project. Yesterday afternoon, as I mentioned on the phone, I went into Osaka for the Bach St. Matthew's Passion. I had been to Izumi Hall, where it was performed, twice before, but I was

usually in a hurry, since both other times were evenings after school, and never got an opportunity to explore the area around the hall. Since the temperature was in the low 60's, lots of people were outside strolling about under the few actually opened cherry blossoms. Izumi Hall is adjacent to a river near Osaka Castle, with a luxury hotel next door and the inevitable upscale shopping arcade within a block or two. With extra time to kill, and an *ichiman* in like condition, I wandered into the dome of commerce and bought 2 new neckties at 1000 yen apiece. They are all silk, and confirm my belief that the Japanese neckwear industry has only one real goal: to produce viable candidates for next year's Ugly Tie Contest. Mine will surely be in the running, even without the festive blobs of *sukiyaki* or *okonomiyaki* which are bound to festoon them in a matter of months. But the walk along the river was pleasant, and some men who were cooking out on a gentle hillside invited me to join them for whatever they were grilling. At least I think what those gestures meant. With all the anti-American sentiment continuing to seethe in Okinawa, I wonder whether they were planning to stake me over the fire and carve me up. I'm guessing we'll go there for a few concerts, so I hope we'll be able to enjoy the same peaceful ambiance, especially accompanied by warmer weather than we had in December and January.

Robert Conine called this morning, and David Farrah did tonight, and the 3 of us will likely get together this weekend to swap yarns about our vacations. I'm debating giving David a copy of my Bali journal, since he was instrumental in my going, and also figures prominently (albeit, *in absentia*) in its content. I don't recall characterizing him as a mindless imbecile in it, which he is far from anyway, so it's probably okay. I also saw Akiko Odake in the halls of Shoin and we chatted for a few minutes. Zits be damned! I still think she is one of the most beautiful

young women I have ever seen in my life. Today most continuing students with last names in the middle of the alphabet appeared to be on campus for physical exams, though I was unable to convince any of them that it would save them a lot of time in line if they would let me perform, in my office, the part which requires disrobing. I also got back the photos from last week up on the mountain, which turned out, as expected, to be a waste of good film and money. Many of the subjects will probably like them, but I'm becoming rapidly disenchanted with my own willingness to accept mediocrity in my photography. If I could summon up the same feeling for mediocrity in letter-writing, this effort would have ended paragraphs ago.

That sounds like a cue to feed this into the printer and go to sleep. You'll be happy to know that you will have your own futon when you get here, so we won't be as crowded as we were at Robert's. I hope it won't be like the twin beds at Bill and Gloria's. I must be going through some sort of ascetic period in our separation; my sexual urges seem like a dream of faraway times and places, and not a part of the here-and-now. Even my appreciation of Akiko is more aesthetic than carnal, and that probably translates into my feelings for you. There are times (recently) when I don't care if we **ever** have sex again; there are also times when I don't care whether I ever have sex again, no matter with whom. That's a departure for me, and I'm not altogether comfortable with it, but I'm too stoical to even get pissed off at my own acquiescence to this set of feelings. Not a good sign, I would say, but perhaps it's just temporary.

Thursday, April 11, 1996 - Letter to Sandra Mori, Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Sandra,

So when do you travel out to these shores? Confession is insincere without conversion,

as St. Thomas used to tell all the faithful. If you let too much time pass, I may pass you permanently. This summer I am looking into the possibility of taking the Trans-Siberian/Mongolian or some other place Railroad from Beijing to (approximately) Budapest, and then rail my way into France, where they can laugh at my KU linguistic proficiency. Mata may go with me, as long as I can convince her that toilets actually exist in some place other than America. She was not convinced by her Xmas trip out here that Asia had become civilized sufficiently for her continued residence, and returned to Kansas City (speaking of 'civilized!!'). Perhaps you and I don't know each other well enough for you to answer a woman/toilet question, and you probably hope with every ounce of power in your body and mind that we never do, but here it is, anyway. In your experience as a woman -- and please tell me of any experience you may have had as another gender; I'm writing a book -- do toilet conditions play such an overwhelmingly important role in one's decision-making mechanisms that potentially wonderful experiences will be sacrificed if just of whiff of sub-standard facilities comes one's way?

Fair warning: if I take this trans-Asia trip this summer, it will be in August and early September. Plenty of time for you to find a new place to live without telling me. I've heard the trains in Switzerland are second only to those in Japan, and maybe Zambia, Libya, and Western Samoa. Perhaps I'll try them out.

Love,

Dennis

April 16, 1996 - Kobe

The new semester began on April 5th, and it's always the most exciting part of the

academic year, for me. Seeing the new faces which will soon become familiar, feeling genuine pleasure when an old face from last semester comes into view, fresh notebooks, fresh texts: it's the most wonderful time of promise in my life. I bound through the halls, singing, smiling, laughing, bouncing off the ceiling like an overinflated helium balloon. On the afternoon of the first day of class, I encountered my colleague Peter Mallett, who looked like he had just finished running a marathon, and come in a distant thirty-sixth. Nearly simultaneously, we asked each other the opposite rhetorical question. He wanted to know how I could stand it, and wouldn't I be glad when this week was over; I asked him wasn't it just wonderful to begin another term of classes and see all the new eager faces. Rhetorical questions are supposed to be answered affirmatively, if at all, and we both had negative answers for the other. It seems to me that a person who can't get excited about the first day of school is someone in need of a career change, but, by all indications, Peter is a dedicated and able teacher. The first week of classes is a little like the honeymoon, a time when possibility is in unlimited supply, and the future looks like the lottery is going to be won every week. Maybe Liz Taylor treats honeymoons like Peter treats first weeks of the semester; let's get this ghastly business over with quickly: it's all too tiring and artificial. I, on the other hand, and in the words of the McGarrigle Sisters, want to kiss until my mouth gets numb.

Cherry blossom season has also arrived at the same time, and maybe my spirits of the semester's opening have affected the way I'm experiencing this phenomenon as well. I had heard that the Japanese go completely, and irrationally ape over the cherry trees, and their transient coating of pink (the trees, of course), and I was fully prepared to be the cynical westerner:

tolerant, but not wanting to be a part of such a tawdry display of affection. And to tell the truth, when I saw a large grove of the trees in full flower last Saturday, it was so garish and cotton candy-like that I was almost repelled by its monolithic excess. The flowers have no variety, no aroma, and apparently bear no fruit, but they are a national obsession over here. What won me over was the way Japanese become during this time. For the 3 or 4 weeks (maximum) the cherry blossoms are visible, the nation goes into a sort of mellowing-out period. Families, couples, groups of friends, get together on weekends, pack a picnic lunch, and go somewhere that allows them to spread a blanket or tarp under a cherry tree or two, and spend an afternoon having a good time. For the Japanese, that means posing for the same picture eighteen times, eating a variety of raw fish and drinking sake. Many of the trees have been planted on river banks, so that's where groups flock to frolic, within the limits imposed by culture. One sees the people at their most "unbuttoned" during this time, and they are genuinely charming and hospitable. Even the ones who probably glare at me in the train during the week, wondering who allowed me in their country, seem affable and contented with my presence as I slowly walk by their family's tarp. In the Kansai area, 90% of these picnics do take place on the standard bright blue plastic tarp, which seems a jarring incongruity to the tradition being played out. After the 1995 earthquake, the government is reported to have passed out these tarps to anyone who wanted one, and they are being put to use in a variety of ways.

My official *sakura* (cherry blossom) picnic will be this Sunday, if the flowers last that long. Today's rain washed quite a few trees nearly bare. One of last semester's students, Shoko Hori, has invited me to join her, her older sister, Hiroko, and a couple of friends, and go to Osaka

Park, near the castle, for a feast of our own. I'll bring American stuff -- chicken salad and a container of ice cream -- and they'll have the sushi and sake. Last October, when I first encountered Shoko in class, she was low on both confidence and English vocabulary, and it has been a joy to observe her blossom in both areas in the past six months. I like her company a lot, and her sister plays violin in the Kobe Philharmonic and wants to have a way to practice her English without it seeming like school. The three of us went to a Bach concert at Shoin last Saturday afternoon, and spent an hour chatting at a coffee-and-cake house in Rokko.

I mentioned today's rain above. It is Tuesday, my weekday off, and I had hoped to go to Kyoto during *sakura* time, but not on a weekend. The long-range forecast last week seemed to predict rain for today, and when I saw the blossoms on Saturday, they looked at maximum splendor, and I knew that was the weekend. So I went to Kyoto on Sunday, the next day, to tread the Path of Philosophy once more, this time under a ceiling of palest pink. While I knew that many other people would be there, I also reasoned that nothing could take the centuries of charm accumulated in Kyoto and dissolve it. True. Not dissolve it; but trample it underfoot? You bet. Buses and trains were SRO all day, but that's happened before. When I would set foot inside the grounds of the *Ginkaku-ji* Temple, or begin a measured stroll on the Walk of Philosophy, all those contemporary nuisances would vanish, and I would find myself in some magical state of timelessness. Kyoto can **really** do that. But not today. The line outside *Ginkaku-ji* suggested that perhaps the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition was being shot on its sand gardens, and all of Japan had been invited to watch. I struggled back down the path to where philosophers take their

refuge, and began a trek on it, along the canal which is its eastern boundary for its total extent. It was no longer the Walk of Philosophy, but the Gridlock of Philosophy. The ground was barely visible, and anyone with a telephoto lens, or an erection, was taking up more space than his allotment. At least the walk would be at an ambling, philosopher's pace. Phillippa Foot had told me once that Wittgenstein said that in philosophy, the race always goes to the slowest. We would all be philosophers today. It was not just the numbers on the path which determined our collective speed, or lack of it, it was what they did while on the path. At every low-hanging *sakura* bough, and at each footbridge regularly cutting a perpendicular angle across the canal, the first group in our cluster of several dozen had to stop and take posed pictures, complete with mandatory "V" or Peace sign by all participants. Each member, in turn, would handle the camera and take the same picture of the remaining members, which means that a five-person group would have five pictures taken at any given branch or bridge. Then they would move on to make room for the next group to do the very same thing. Of course, I brought my camera, and most of the pictures I took were of groups of other people taking pictures of each other. When a group got to the next bridge -- identical to the previous bridge, I hasten to remind you -- they stopped again and posed for the same pictures they posed for 200 meters back. And we all stopped and waited for it to be finished with great equanimity and good cheer. I probably had less of those qualities than anyone on the entire Path, since I was apparently the only one who saw the redundancy in all those meaningless repetitions of banality. I'm sure they all recognized what they were doing, however, but didn't identify it as meaningless, or banal. I have to think about this a little, it seems. Photography is another Japanese obsession, and it is truly boggling to see

all the 100,000 yen Nikons and Canons around the necks of accountants and plumbers. Yet the pictures they take with them seem to indistinguishable from ones my students with their throw-away Fujis pose for. What am I missing here?

April 21, 1996 - Kobe

The long-anticipated introduction to Nara occurred this Saturday, and it was worth the wait in many ways. Not the least of the treats was the group of guides who had assembled for the trek: my student from last semester, Nari Tsuda, her friend Sakurako, and a childhood friend of Nari's, the stunning and enjoyable Yasue. We were to take the JR from Osaka, where they lived, to Nara, 45 minutes away, but a few days before the weather forecast contained a mention of rain, so Nari's father decided to pile us all into the family Camry (called a Windom over here) and join the group. He spoke no English, and part of the purpose behind all these treks was to give Shoin students another reason to use English for an extended period of time. In his car, the trip that put us square in the center of Nara in three-quarters of an hour by train, took twice that to get us to a distant temple on a very distant suburb. The traffic jams on the various superhighways were maddeningly frequent, and their severity was compounded by the generally erratic driving displayed in and around them. Tsuda-san was as bad as any of them; not knowing what route he was going to take before setting out on the road, and then trying decide at ambient speed whether this was the exit or not, or whether he might have to suddenly swerve six lanes to the right to make a turn in the next 50 meters. Only the Balinese drivers are worse than the ones I've seen here, a condition that could be changed quickly were the Japanese roads in as pathetic a shape as the ones in Bali. The people over here seem to have a natural ability to drive like paranoid

rodents in a maze, and are saved from national destruction only by well cared-for roads and excellent cars.

Well, we got there, got hungry wandering around a temple interesting mainly to Nari's father, who does appear to know his Japanese history, and got fed in a restaurant which did turn out a decent bowl of *soba*. We next discovered reason #2 for taking the train to Nara, particularly during a weekend during *sakura* season: parking. Every lot was full within a reasonable distance of the Nara Park, which is where everything of interest for a tourist in the town is located. We drove that Camry down to fumes to no avail, and the afternoon was beginning to slip away. Tsuda-san got on a toll road which wound up a set of hills east of the city, and we sped by some lovely cherry blossoms in a now-frenzied search for parking. The road terminated on the highest hill overlooking the park, and we took the last available spot and stretched our legs. We were immediately greeted by three deer, nosing about our pockets and privates in search of who-knows-what. Well, I knew what; I'd read a guide book. They wanted food, and we hadn't even made it to the first deer-yummies hawker before those antlered vultures were upon us like Hare Krishnas in an airport. We bought a few bags of 3" diameter disks of some kind of confection big in the hooved set, and began feeding them. Actually, the disks looked pretty tasty, and since I have been known for devouring Milk-Bones in my time, I thought I'd munch on one myself. Well, they were **damned** tasty, and I began ignoring the deer and noshing away on my own. Not a good idea, since this seemed to piss one of them off, and a big one, at that. He used his nose to reach around me (I had turned my back on him and his buddies)

to get at my bag of goodies, and, failing at that, to physically turn me around with that snout. They are powerful animals when they want to be, and I suddenly found myself with a deer with his nose in my bags of treats, getting deer drool all over the ones I wanted. I relented, you might say. These animals are everywhere in Nara, including the city streets, but tend to hang around the deer snack dealers in the park. Close up they are pretty mangy looking, but mild-mannered and even pleasant to be around, as long as you remember whose gullet the treats are supposed to clog. As we wandered about, just enjoying the afternoon, which never really warmed up the way we had hoped, from the looks of the clothing we wore, I began to take notice of the relationship between Nari and her father. There wasn't a whole lot I could tell since they spoke exclusively *Nihongo* to each other, but they seemed to have a wonderfully easy, relaxed way of being together, with neither one seeming to want to prove a point with the other, and often drifting together like two bodies with a mutual attraction in the same space. It was, in its own little modest way, magical. But it also filled me with unaccountable longing and sadness. I have no daughter, and suddenly realized how much I have missed in this world by not having that relationship to nourish, and be nourished by. I've had two step-daughters, but Kim was barely in school when Robin and I divorced, and I have no contact with her at all. Mel was 15 when Mata and I were married, but she spent most of the intervening years being angry and resentful at me both taking away her Momma, and bringing her into a house she despised. Only since coming to Japan has she acted as if she genuinely likes me, perhaps out of relief because I'm only sporadically in her, and her mother's, life. If there's something of the surrogate father in my feelings for my Shoin students, I know their affections for me are hardly the genuine article. I

recalled a verse from Theodore Roethke, in an elegy for a female student of his, where he recognizes that his mourning, and the words of pain he utters over her are inconsequential, "being neither father nor lover." My concerns and cares are much the same over Shoko, Akiko, and Nari. Fathers and lovers are the ones you listen to out of turn; the rest of us take our place in the rotation and treasure what few minutes we get. So, an important part of my life is over, and I must find a way to mourn it. Its passing amounts to something, at least to me. The chance to be either father or lover to anyone, but especially one of these young ladies around whom my life is spun, is forever past.

April 24, 1996 - Kobe

A magical thing happened in my American Studies class this morning. I'm sure there's a more rational explanation for what I am about to relate, but I'm also not so sure I want to know it. Perhaps my advancing years make the enchantment of life more interesting than the explanation of it. Last semester, I sprang Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* upon the unsuspecting students at Shoin who had, apparently, already had a semester of civics and boosterism as their first half of American Studies. They never recovered from Leopold's wonderful imagery, and the need to think carefully and comprehensively about the relationship between humans and the non-human sphere of nature. They all passed, at least the ones who came to class regularly and did the assignments, but I knew they had been treated unfairly. This is a new year, and they will know, coming in, what they are getting. I found a Japanese edition of the Almanac, with a large glossary in the back (in *kanji/hiragana/katakana*, the three written forms of the Japanese language), with each chapter reduced to a sensible bite for the slow-going that the editors knew

would obtain in English-as-a-Second-Language classrooms. It's a good job, and I'm grateful for it. I designated the class as one you could attend before signing up, so everyone would get a chance to see the way I operated, and also know the theme of the year's endeavors. The book was already in the bookstore, so that was available for their perusal, as well. Another section of American Studies is available at the same hour, taught by Phil Nicoloff of the U. Of New Hampshire, and I have no idea what his theme will be. While I had wanted to set a limit of 25 to the class, and had requested a room commensurate with that number of students, I found about 30 showed up the first week, and I gave approval to them all, wondering silently what I would do to squeeze them all in the room, let alone get interaction and participation every week from them. Not to worry. Last week 11 showed up, and this week 12, so the problem has sorted itself out by the oldest academic method known: make them think they'll have to work, and see how many stay. I was at my most ingratiating and ebullient during the first couple of sessions, but I also let them know what we would be tackling, and let them read from the text for confirmation.

What is magical about this does not concern the fact that two-thirds of the potential enrollees dropped, but the dozen who stayed. Today we made headway into the "January Thaw" chapter of the Almanac, and I asked selected students each to read a paragraph. I merely went to my tentative roster, now greatly depleted, and started at the top. The first name was someone who had just added the class and didn't yet have a book, Mie Akayama. But she sight-read the strange prose wonderfully, and I praised her in front of everyone there, and then reached into my folder and pulled out a Kansas Jayhawks T-shirt, and gave it to her for her efforts. You might

have thought I had presented her with the Nobel Peace Prize. This seemed suddenly destined to become a three-hanky class, but everyone pulled herself (and himself) together, and we continued. More people read, some well, some hesitantly, but all did something well, and worthy of mention approvingly. I had run out of shirts with one, and said so, and they all knew it wouldn't be an every-reader-gets-a-prize kind of class, but something happened in that hour and a half that I can't explain. A cynic would brand it as the power of bribery, I suppose. But by the end of the hour, we were all on the same page, both literally and figuratively. No one was nodding off, though I hadn't resorted to my usual triple-digit decibel display to prevent a return to the arms of Morpheus. I was speaking softly and slowly, both a departure for me, and we were all rapt in our attention to each other. The key is, I think, that I was as attentive to them as they were to me. There was an interchange going on (I would love to use the word 'intercourse' but I know you wouldn't understand) with us, and I think we could both see it in our eyes. We bonded like Super Glue and a careless finger, and after class one of them gave me the ultimate compliment: she asked us to get together in front of the chalkboard for a posed picture, complete with "V" signs and arms around each other. That often happens at the end of a semester, more usually as a formality than a sign of anything. This was really **IT**. These people will be in my will.

Wednesday, April 24, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Dear Inga,

It's easy to tell you don't pay for your E-mail service; sending 3 consecutive letters of ONE SENTENCE EACH would have sent me out to the nearest convenience store with an Uzi

when the bill came.

As for as me writing that I had been sleeping with 40 of my students, it is both true and something that I hoped you'd read and HAVE to get an explanation for as soon as possible. That sure didn't work, but here's the true story, with little or no literary embellishment. In the last week of March there is a short, 4-day long course in English for incoming sophomores, and I volunteered to teach a section of it. Several of my former students were among the 44 people who signed up for it, and the last day of the actual teaching was held up in the mountains above Kobe, in a place the school owns called the Rokko Seminar House. All day we taught and they pretended to learn, and then we had a great *sukiyaki* meal at night and played silly games until about 10:00. Then the teachers retired to a room where we were to sleep on the floor, but had also sneaked in a six-pack of beer and some chips. So 3 of us, Akiyo Miyamoto, the department chair this year, Chris Starling, my office-mate from New Zealand, and myself, sat around cross-legged on the floor, listening to 19 and 20 year olds sing karaoke and giggle the night away. We slept there, in the room next to these sweet, fresh young ladies, and so, in one way of speaking, we slept with them. Not quite the image you had?

Well, you wrote just in time, since this weekend my plays are presented, and your absence from one of the performances would have been noted, and the penalty would have been severe. There will be an admission charge, I am told, but I'm sure that I could find a way to get you a freebie, if that was the only thing keeping you from attending. See. It's a lot more fun to write regularly, since I don't feel as if I have to be an information source for you about the weekly or monthly goings-on in my life, but can resort to the kind of horseshit that draws correspondents

from near and far, and sometimes for weeks at a time before they bail out in disgust or boredom. So Mata will pick me up at the airport, and I'll be in town until the 7th of May, and the plays are Saturday night, the 27th, at 7:00 (the one about the talking Tree -- no word yet from the Disney people), and Sunday afternoon at 2:00 for the one about Mata and me. Of course, it's not really, but everyone will think that's what it is, so I'll have to prepare for that. So I'm heading for school now, and it was great to hear from you, since it eliminates the need for me to be rude or pouty when I get back to K.C.

Love,

Dennis

April 29, 1996 - Kansas City

This weekend I saw two of my plays performed, and very nicely, by actors associated with the Metropolitan Community Colleges of Kansas City. I suppose many playwrights never see one of their works performed, and I **was** thrilled by the experience, but I was more interested in what other people were writing, and found the viewing of the rest of the programs at least as interesting as seeing my own stuff up there. We are all amateurs, but I was struck by a lot of similarities among plays with which mine were competing for honors and money. One thing which amazed me was the paucity of humor being put on stage. Most of the plays were grim recitals of ills and treacheries with which the authors were apparently bludgeoned in their own lives, and wished to transfer to the audience. The leading lament these days seems to be "what my parents did to me which was unforgivable," whether deny them the red wagon they deserved

on their 4th birthday, or molest them one summer's eve in the gazebo. Curiously enough, few of the high school writers dwelt on this subject, even though the occurrences, if they ever existed for them, would have been much fresher in their lived experience. They were angling for bigger fish, such as awakening to AIDS, and the randomness and senselessness of everyday violence in this country (America, lest we forget the by-line of this particular entry). In that respect, I found the high school dramas far more promising than the adult ones. The dreary, humorless recitations of the petty complaints of the aging and disillusioned many makes for a real yawner of an evening in the theater. The younger dramatists, however, seemed incapable of sustaining a thought, no matter how potentially interesting, for more than a page. Many of their plays were a pastiche of brief scenes, cut to and from with dizzying rapidity. The pace of an MTV music video came immediately to mind. Perhaps the pulsing sap of adolescence makes continuity superfluous in their lives as well as their writing, but to a person looking for connections between ideas on stage, it was a little disorienting. Another prominent absence on stage was an intellectual core to any of the works. Even the older works which purported to explore the remembered treacheries of life did so at nothing more than the superficial level of flash-point emotions. That's why I would term them 'recitations' rather than 'explorations.' No new territory was hacked through by the writers, certainly nothing new to them. In one disappointing way, they played it safe, luxuriating in their stale resentments and pitiful whines for attention. They were backyard explorers, remaining on turf they have been over countless times already, comfortable in their roles as resident victims, and perhaps most fearful of discovering something more behind their emotions which might require that they reevaluate the correctness of that role

they have grown to cherish.

Well, I've put others's feet to the fire; I suppose it's my turn now. I had always liked the play which was given Honorable Mention more than the First Prize winner, and seeing it on stage for the first time made me realize what an idiot I was to think that. It was a terrible play, wordy, boring, didactic; I could barely stay awake during it. I still like reading it, and that's the way it should be approached, if ever again by anyone. It started off as a philosophical dialogue about feminism and nature, and I think it's pretty successful in that format, but on stage it's nothing more than boring talking heads (and one talking tree).

When my Shoin colleague, Molly Gould, read *The Man in the Glider*, the other play, she really **hated** the woman character (it is a two-character play, husband and wife), describing her as a meddling little wimp, interfering in her husband's private moments unfairly. I was truly amazed at that interpretation, since I felt I had written her as a strong woman who has good reasons and arguments for acting the way she does. My belief was that I had written two strong characters with very different ideas of the way a marriage ought to proceed, at least in this one area, and I used this play as a way for these two points of view to be presented and explored. But I wrote them as equals, intellectual and every other way, since I didn't want an audience to be led to my conclusion -- whatever that might have been. Well, Molly was right. The actress who played the woman, did so just as Molly described, and I began to realize that it was the only plausible way to approach the role, using only the words I had written, and not my unexpressed beliefs. And the audience hated her, too, and for good reason: she **is** a meddling, no-good tramp and I want to have nothing more to do with her! That's not entirely true. I treat her unfairly by

giving the man an opening soliloquy where he can put his case before the audience without an alternative point of view being stated. It's much like an opening argument before the jury, with no opportunity for rebuttal. When she finally comes on stage and interrupts his reverie, or whatever it is he is doing, her standing with the audience is ruined forever. I've got to rewrite the opening, or else accept her as the repugnant character she is. I now incline toward the former, but it will certainly be after my time in Japan is up.

Monday, May 6, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga from Kansas City

Dear Inga,

Sorry I didn't call you yesterday as I said I would, but activities got moving and couldn't be stopped for anything. When you called Saturday night, I was sitting next to Mata and couldn't talk as openly as I wanted to. Of course, after I hung up, I told her it was you, and then had to explain what the conversation concerned. Apparently, the question I asked you, "How big is it?" -- referring to your mother's cellar, of course -- was not one that sounded particularly innocent. So I figured I'll tell her everything, since it doesn't seem like a good idea to have a marriage with too many family secrets. The "political" considerations I mentioned on the phone -- and I used that word at the time to avoid letting her know the real subject of our conversation -- were family relations. If I moved the wine out of the house because I feared for its safety with her brother and son living there, it would be insulting to their integrity (whether or not they actually have any) and pretty much set me against them, in their eyes. One way I (potentially) lose wine, the other, I lose family peace. I can replace the former, but seldom the latter.

We compromised after I told Mata about what you had suggested about your mother's

cellar. She wasn't at all unhappy with you for suggesting it, though she was surprised that your mother would make such an offer to one who is nearly a stranger. So I THEN had to tell her about your mother and I dating right out of high school, but she breaking it off for the man who eventually became your father, and both of us..... oh, sometimes I'm so full of shit I can hardly stand myself. The compromise we arrived at was that I would catalogue all my wines, something I've been meaning to do for several years now, and check them again when I returned in 1997. Her brother would pay an inflated auction price for any missing bottles. That sounded acceptable to me, and so I spent more than 4 hours yesterday doing that. Final bottle count exceeded 525, but thanks for thinking of me in my hour of need, or what I feared would be need. You're a real friend.

So keep writing, and have a great graduation. It really is one hell of an important milestone, getting a degree, and I'm much more sorry to miss that than your birthday. Being alive 30 years only requires continued breathing. Getting a degree from a good school demands more from you than you ever thought you'd have to give when you first undertook it. But you did it, and in the process found out it GAVE you more than you ever thought you'd get from doing it. One of the things it gave you that you could never have gotten any other way was ME! But this is starting to sound like a commencement address, and not a letter from a grateful and adoring friend. Thanks again for being at the play. It really was a special night that I'll always remember.

Love,

Dennis

Tuesday, May 14, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor from Kobe

Dear Inga,

It's a pretty nice day: sumo is on the tube, I'm wolfing down freshly-made red beans and rice, and tomorrow I get to teach my favorite class first thing in the morning. Your letter arrived this morning -- or at least, I picked it up this morning -- and that always adds something special to whatever else was happening. As far as Mata thinking you are, or are wanting to fuck me, I doubt it is something she seriously entertains. As far as sex with other people, I think she and I have different ways of thinking about it, but probably arrive at the same conclusion. I assume, and I think accurately, that nearly every man she meets would like to go to bed with her. But rather than making me incredibly jealous of everyone, it actually liberates me from feelings of jealousy and paranoia. I do it by realizing that whether or not she fucks around while we are married depends entirely on her. I trust her not to, and that's that. I've never had any evidence or reason to question that trust, so I let my rational side rule my actions and attitudes. I mention that because I've had several rather sexually explicit dreams while in Japan, and they have ALL involved Mata doing all sorts of things with other people. They are a little bit of a turn-on, in some ways, but mostly they are disturbing and saddening. There is obviously a part of me that doesn't buy the rational argument I am putting forward, and finds its own way to have its voice heard.

When I started back in graduate school in 1986, and started teaching at KU at the same time, I made a conscious decision to assume that no woman at a college, nearly all of them at least 20 years younger than me, would be remotely interested in me, romantically. It has proven,

I believe, to be extremely accurate as well as profoundly useful. This was only 2 years into our marriage, and there were a lot of rough spots to be dealt with in this area, as well as others. We would go to parties or gatherings with students and other teachers, and after we got home she'd ask me about how I felt about a couple of women coming on to me that night. Well, to me, no such thing was happening, and I was surprised that Mata thought it was. She still reacts that way, but to a much lesser extent than she used to 10 years ago or so. To hear the parts of her life story she has been willing to share, even at this late date, she has been consistently shafted by the men she has allowed to get close to her, and, in some very basic way, I am still a man, and therefore still suspect at the level of my groin. So the short version is that she doesn't quite trust me, and when I have a friendship with a lovely young woman such as you -- as well as the ones over here -- her suspicions are not as much about you as they are about me.

And I don't think she REALLY believes you and I are fucking, planning to fuck, or even seriously contemplating fucking (each other, that is; I'm seriously contemplating fucking every day of my life, but I know better than to attach a real person to that contemplation, since that would be a quick route to disillusionment), but she feels it is only a fool who doesn't allow for even a slight possibility to come up and bite her on the ass. In one sense, she's being more realistic and rational than I am, since she is acting on the world as it really is -- full of sinners and backsliders with either good or hidden intentions. As The Who sang, she "don't get fooled again." I choose to believe in her virtue, which might be unrealistic, and could eventually result in an ugly, nasty surprise (or so my dreams keep telling me), but it keeps me from wasting my time and energy on worries and fixations which I cannot effect or change.

So, I don't think Mata suspects you of harboring any carnal desires for me. She's just a little naturally suspicious based on her past life. I've never done anything to justify or raise her suspicions, but I'm also unwilling to modify or drop any friendships just to keep peace at home.

So how's everything else in life? The weather here is lovely, I just did a thorough cleaning of the apartment this weekend and it feels great to be here ever since the dust bunnies went extinct. I know your graduation day is nearly here, and I want you to know how great I think you are for accomplishing what you have so far. I know there's a lot more in your life to be proud of in the future, but this month, I hope you can sit back and enjoy this very important moment. My thoughts will be with you.

Love,

Dennis

Saturday, May 18, 1996 - Kobe

The Inscrutable East strikes again. In January, I ordered textbooks for my classes this semester. Some of the classes have a standard text, one had an excellent book by my colleague, Alan Jackson, which was easy to reorder, but two were going require something new. As chronicled earlier, I found a Japanese edition of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, and it arrived in late March, and is proving to be a very good choice for American Studies. In Oral English II, I went for a one-year old text published by McGraw-Hill, but it had not been delivered by the first day of classes. Glitches occur, and so I said nothing, but gave my students a little play I had written that March as an introduction to American slang and humor. By the end of the

3rd week, April 18, no book and no word, so I went to Chieko Noguchi, one of the excellent, and English-fluent, secretaries in the department, and asked her what my next step should be. I figured that rushing into the administration building, shouting and waving my Kalishnikov, firing a few rounds into the ceiling for effect, would merely reinforce stereotypes the Japanese already hold dear about Americans, and so I decided to use the system, for once. This is an **enormous** departure for me, since direct action and baleful glares have been the M.O. in most of my life. She said she'd look into it and get an answer, and within a few hours, a two-page, hand-printed letter was in my campus mailbox. It was pre-dated by exactly one week (April 11), and, of course, the UPH had a field day with that phenomenon. Was that the actual date the letter had been written by the order center in Osaka? If so, was the Shoin administration sitting on it until I started pissing and moaning about lack of a text for two class periods? Or was it hastily scrawled by someone in Kobe, pre-dated to dupe the ignorant *gaijin*? Innocent explanations are immediately discarded by the UPH as credible only to the naive or gullible. The final sentence of the letter, which described in admirable detail why the distributor should not be held accountable for the problem, but that I should be sticking pins in the McGraw-Hill voodoo doll, said "We will do our best to get the textbooks to you as quickly as possible." Fine. I was leaving for the states in a week. I'd give them until my return on the 8th of May to have them piled high in the bookstore.

Of course, they weren't here last week, so I gave them another week of grace, and asked Chieko again yesterday about them. She was shocked they hadn't come yet, and said she would get me an answer as soon as she could. An hour later, she asked to see the letter I had been sent

in April, and I gave it to her. When she read it, she knew immediately that the books would **never** arrive. As she explained, that was what that last sentence I quoted above meant. It didn't mean they were on the case, as I interpreted it, but that they were dropping the case once and for all, and that I was left twisting in the wind each day the class met, for lack of a book. The important part of the letter, apparently, was not that concluding sentence which appeared to pledge continued efforts to deliver my texts as quickly as possible, but the body of the letter which recounted all the travails and difficulties -- insuperable ones, it now appears -- which they had endured on my behalf. I am not amused, nor am I impressed by the problems paper-pushers regale us working stiffs with. The real difficulties were endured by my students, as anyone who has ever read my lesson on American slang and humor will readily attest.

Wednesday, May 22, 1996 - Kobe

Yesterday was my day off, and on the Tuesday previous I had discovered that the Hanshin department store in the Umeda shopping area of Osaka has a very well-stocked wine department. I discovered this fact, regrettably, ten minutes after spending my weekly wine budget at another, lesser store down the hall. I window, or label-shopped then, but determined to return with spare yen in my jeans. I did, and found several interesting bottles, the primary effect of each, at this point, is to confound my attempts to find a storage place for them. While my stomach might seem the obvious choice, it is far from a short-term likelihood. Upon arriving with them yesterday afternoon (and having nothing more serious planned for that evening than watching the tenth matches of the Tokyo *basho* of sumo), I promptly opened three of them to test my shrewd wine-buying expertise. Besides, if anything was amiss, I could blame Robert M. Parker, Jr. His

books and newsletter, *The Wine Advocate*, have guided my palate for over 15 years, especially in areas where I have not yet tasted extensively. I brought the 4th edition of *Parker's Wine Buyer's Guide* with me yesterday for consultation. Even in a Japanese department store, Parker is known by middle-aged women, not an unenviable characteristic. One of the clerks, in her 50's, and probably possessing no more than ten words of English in her vocabulary, displayed two of them for me, while beaming approval: "Robert-a Parker." I smiled back, and, not knowing what the best response would be, just gave her a thumbs up sign. After which I fully expected her to say, "Gene-a Siskel." But no such luck.

In my apartment, I opened a 1991 Guigal Gigondas, since that was a pretty pathetic vintage in the southern Rhone, but Guigal, as usual, managed to make chicken salad out of chicken shit, though it was a bit sharper in the palate than I would have liked a normally voluptuous Gigondas to taste. The next was a 1992 Chassagne-Montrachet "Morgeot" from Jean-Noel Gagnard, and after a few minutes of excessively mineral notes, it started to wrap me around its little finger. Finally, a slurp of a 1989 Morey St. Denis single vineyard red Burgundy from Olivier Leflaive, a firm known more for competent, but seldom spectacular, whites from that region. Does that describe me, too? A white who is competent, but seldom spectacular? Whether or not, this was one rancid bottle of wine. Something has to be close to unprocessed goat urine before I'll refuse a second glass of it, but I spit out the first **mouthful** of this dreck, and poured the remainder of the glass in the sink, then ran the disposal for five minutes. It smelled like Campho-Phenique had been used to top up the bottles, or perhaps to rinse them out before filling. In America, a bottle like that goes back to the store where you bought it for a cheerful or

surly refund or replacement. Is that kind of thing done here? I determined that I would find out.

Since my class day was over at noon on Wednesday, I took a train to Osaka, toting the recorked and partially depleted bottle in its Hanshin bag. Since the train deposited me at an adjacent and competing department store, the Hankyu, I thought a visit to their wine section might be instructive. This latter chain of stores is more upscale than Hanshin, and their beverage department showed it. Less total variety of bottles, but fairly spacious and genteelly laid out. Even a white-gloved, tuxedoed somellier-wannabee hovered to answer my every question, until it was discovered they would be in English. A tasting bar was revealed, with four vintages of Chateau La Mission Haut-Brion, from 1970 to 1989 available, in a proper tasting glass, for anywhere from 1000 to 1500 yen. I had the 1985, which was fabulous, and then bought a couple of Hugel's wines from Alsace (the only producer represented, sadly).

At Hanshin, I first inquired about the possibility of conducting this distasteful business in English, and a 30-something young man presented himself. I tried to describe the aroma and taste to him, but linguistic limits were reached before understanding was. He asked if he could take the bottle with him briefly, and, of course, he could. I saw him disappear to their version of the tasting bar, but he did not return for several minutes, so I tracked him down. Three of them were back there, each with a hefty glass of **MY** wine (I add, indignantly), swirling, sipping, talking animatedly, forgetting whose 4500 yen was beginning to stain their uniforms and soil the bar napkins. One of them was clearly the boss, probably the head of the entire beverage section at that store. She was a lovely, early-30's businesswoman, and she had nearly as much English at

her command as I had Japanese. She did, however, have her minimally bilingual underling at her beck and call, and there was no doubt about who was becking and who was calling. The chain of command was clear and immutable. What was also clear was that she was a tough cookie who was there to protect the bottom line of the corporation from the first to the last. The camphor odor was flooding that small area, and I began to wonder if I hadn't wandered into a pharmacy by mistake, or maybe the post-op section of a hospital. Through the English-speaking employee, she tried to pass it off as "mineral" scents common to wines from this section of Bourgogne. That was a totally bogus response, and I knew it and would not be mollified by it. She then asked if I had ever drunk a wine from Morey St.-Denis before. A "no" answer, and she was home free, and she knew it; she could make the "mineral" explanation fly like a college senior with a new American Express card. Of course, I knew it, too, plus I had tasted more red Burgundies than she had tasted hot meals. I mentioned the Morey St.-Denis of Domaine Dujac, which used to be pretty good, but had fallen off in the '80s. I then hammered home my knowledge that Olivier Leflaive was much better known for his white Burgundies than his reds, and maybe we could indulge in something both our nationalities enjoy enormously: **blame the Frogs!** You should have been here during the French nuclear tests in the Pacific to understand how much that became a national pastime. Leflaive WAS clearly at fault here, anyway. She decided to send for another bottle of the swill from the shelves, and it was duly opened, four glasses being poured for our consideration. The same stench erupted from the rims of cheap stemware (it had actually subsided a bit in the bottle I had brought in, so it was great to have them experience it in its fullest measure of putridity), and The Boss wouldn't even taste it; instead, she recoiled from the

glass like it contained a cobra poised to strike. She then grudgingly authorized a refund, and did apologize for it. Once she had set her mind to the inevitability of taking at least 9000 yen in wine off the books, she was quite gracious and prostrate in her apologies. But I wonder if she, personally, has to eat the loss; she certainly defended the wine's integrity as if any refund would come out of her pay. But, maybe that's just an example of pure loyalty to the firm's well-being, no matter the facts of the matter. She surely could have intimidated someone a little less sure of themselves concerning wine than I am, but how does it help the company to have unhappy, temporarily cowed customers, at home drinking wine they do not like, but were forced to keep by a zealous manager? With the Hankyu store less than 2 minutes from the Hanshin, I can't imagine that they could keep people coming back with that kind of treatment. But then, I'm just a visitor here, an American at that, and know little of loyalty.

Friday, May 24, 1996 - Kobe

When I first heard that the price of admission to movies in this country was 1800 yen, I determined that motion pictures would unlikely be a part of my cultural diet over here. That remained in force until Akiko Odake called me last Sunday to invite me to a flick in the Harborland shopping area of Kobe. Of course, it's hard to name an area of Kobe which isn't a shopping area, but Harborland has no other reason for existence. She and I had gone to the Musee d'Orsay exhibit of 19th-Century French paintings last week, and I had enjoyed it immensely, as I do every time we get together. Sunday was looking like a day of nothing special, and this appeared to be a notch above the doldrums, at least. I let her choose the movie,

unfortunately, as it turned out, but anything else would have been boorish. She wanted to see “Mr. Holland’s Opus,” about which I had read a paragraph on the in-flight magazine United Airlines uses to make the barf bag impossible to extricate. It didn’t sound promising, in spite of the presence of Richard Dryfuss in a dominant part. But we went, and one thing I noticed was that your eighteen bucks doesn’t buy you anything extra in the way of ambiance. I halfway expected to be given a little *obento* (box lunch) at least, and maybe a small buffet table in the back of the theater. Nothing. And the seats didn’t have any magic fingers (or magic corn-hole, to be more anatomically correct) option, let alone sufficient butt-and-leg room for even a svelte westerner. As the movie began to drag on, I noticed another phenomenon at variance with many American practices. Silence. Of course, there were no babies or unruly children in attendance, a characteristic shared only by movie houses at Del Webb tracts in the U.S. But even the adults were silent (though most of the patrons were revealed, upon the final raising of the house lights, to be under 30) and respectful during nearly all the 2+ hours of pain. When I attend the odd length of cinema in Kansas City, it is often an audience-participation activity. When the heroine in a scary movie is about to enter a room we all know has an axe murderer lurking in wait behind the door, cries of “Don’t go in there, girl!” are heard from every corner of the darkened room. So when the singer was coming on to Mr. Holland after singing “Someone to Watch over Me,” I was astounded to hear...well... nothing. Where were the admonitions of “Keep your hands off him, girl; he’s married!”? Or even, “Keep your pecker in your pants, pal; she’s nothing but trouble!” AWOL. And you call this a movie?

As a Siskel and Ebert kind of criticism, I hated the goddamn thing because it was so

obvious, predictable, and manipulative. I've been thinking for several years about art that manipulates, or manufactures a response in the audience, and have found it to be strictly despicable. Most popular art is that way, and as such, it is nothing more than aesthetic propaganda: designed to use quasi-artistic properties to bludgeon a specific response out of those who view it. Art, I have felt, was beautiful in large part because it left the response to the perceiver, and yet most who perceived it were moved to **some** sort of genuine, personal, response. The kind of crap typified by "Mr. Holland's Opus" sets up certain situations which lead nearly everyone to tears, or rage, or laughter, and are designed to produce exactly that response, whatever it is. Which is what propaganda does, but in the social or political sphere. It is virulently anti-democratic, since it abhors the genuine response of the human, distrusting it to be what is desired, and so cheap artistic tricks are resorted to in order to guarantee a uniform response.

As sniffing and sobbing inundated the theater during the last reel, I could only think of Oscar Wilde, which probably indicates why I am not fit companion for man nor beast. He is quoted to have said that, unless one has a heart of stone, one cannot read about the death of Little Nell without laughing. My heart beats of flesh and sinew, and laugh I did, but I did feel the censure building around me. Akiko daubed at her eyes fitfully in the last thirty minutes, yet I often averted mine to avoid witnessing the aesthetic carnage on screen. Are we that different? And if we are, is it culture, gender, age, or just her normality versus my off-center view of the world? I wish I knew. I also wish, at times like this, I could accept the ordinary and tritely mundane as easily as others. Life would have so few speed bumps that way.

Saturday, May 25, 1996 - Takamatsu, Shikoku

Would I like to judge an English language speech contest on the island of Shikoku? A little less than a month ago, my Shoin colleague, Ken Tamai, asked me that question in the hallway after class. He had recently returned to his native Japan from a month-long siege at the University of Delaware, riding herd on some Shoin students over there for an intensive, between-the-semesters course in English. Among the students was one of my special favorites, Shoko Hori, and Ken had some encouraging reports on her progress, as well. Ken had taught at a university on Shikoku just prior to getting a permanent position at Shoin, and his contacts in the higher education grapevine over there asked him to scare up a warm body -- native English-speaking variety -- for this weekend. Since all expenses were paid to a place I had never visited before, the words "put me in, Coach!" leapt from my lips. It turns out that they make a particularly well-received variety of *udon* in Takamatsu, and I never met a noodle I didn't like. In addition, Mata is due to arrive on Sunday night, and I needed something to occupy my time, other than clock-watching.

Since I was also designated 'Chief Judge,' I was expected to prepare a small speech for the opening ceremonies, the main purpose of which was to reiterate the contest rules and judging criteria, all clearly printed in the program everyone in attendance had received upon entering the auditorium. I was told by others at Shoin who had performed as judges in speech contests to expect a substantial cash honorarium in the same sort of plain envelope favored by Maryland politicians for generations. The train tickets arrived last week, and constituted a mixed message. On the positive side, I was given a reserved seat in the Green Car of the *Shinkansen*; the toniest

of the tony. On the negative side, only tickets to Takamatsu were provided. As the UPH quickly counseled, I need to be certain that The Right People get the prizes, or I'll be slurping cheap *udon* until Shoin can bail me out with carfare home. Being uncertain of my fiscal standing with the school's money watchdogs (after all, I had just touched them up last month for a quarter of a million yen to fly home and watch a couple of plays by an obscure American dramatist), I drew out a substantial sum from the ATM. It's easy to be morally incorruptible with money in the bank.

The *Shinkansen* was quite an experience. All the praise I have thus far lavished upon Japanese railroads has been faint indeed alongside my thoughts of The Bullet. The trip from Kobe to Himeji on JR's next fastest express takes about 50 minutes; the *Shinkansen* doesn't even get rolling at high speed to make it in 16. I had to transfer to a more mundane express (with a much shabbier Green Car) at Okuyama in order to cut over to Shikoku, but the transportation part of the weekend has been a winner.

The other four judges were young Americans who taught in Shikoku secondary schools through a program sponsored by the Japanese government. They were relaxed and enthusiastic, and the day provided no snags or clashes. Two for two in the ambiance count. The contestants were students from a consortium of universities on the island with active English language programs. We heard and judged 13 prepared speeches in all, awarding six prizes. The number of native speakers teaching English in Shikoku's universities is shockingly low, I was told. One school has a Dutchman as the only non-Japanese teacher of English, and his students stood out not only because of their wooden shoes, but because their speeches sounded like bad attempts at

“Hans Brinker and his Silver Skates.” The best students at Shoin were considerably more fluent, but at both places, the quality falls off quickly after the upper 10% are heard. But could you find 13, say, Nebraska natives age 20 who could even utter a sentence in Japanese, let alone write and memorize a seven-minute oration?

Sunday, May 26, 1996 - On the *Shinkansen* to Kobe

The schedule for last night listed a party to commence at 10:30, after each of the judges had separately and personally critiqued each individual contestant in our rooms. Following the awarding of prizes and ceremonial pelting of the judges with overripe vegetables, the contest left the auditorium downtown and repaired to a *ryokan*, or rooming house/hotel down a side street of Takamatsu. The entire 5 floors had apparently been taken over by the contest's organizers, and all participants, judges, and hangers-on were provided rooms. Students stayed 4 or 6 to a room, and no faculty members were in attendance from any of the participating schools. I was the ranking adult in terms of seniority and education, a thought certain to send a shudder straight to the moral center of all who know me.

For the critique sessions, we were chaperoned by a student from the host university, in case impure thoughts began to seep into your minds. Or ours. One of the other judges told us before the contest that we would be well-served to take copious notes during and immediately after the speeches, and now I know why. Even with only 13 competitors to review, they all became a confused blur four or five hours later. My abstemious note-taking (and an abstemious nature would have served me well later that evening) left one with very little substantive to say to any of them. Luckily, my improvisational skills remained intact during the hour, and I hope they

didn't leave wondering if I had actually been awake during their presentations.

My room in the *ryokan* was on the 5th floor, and the party was being held in an oversized *tatami*, or bamboo mat, room on the 2nd. When I left my room to head down there, I noticed newspapers strewn all over the hall as if by a tidy breeze. It was almost as if they were placed on the floor by design, but I couldn't imagine the reason, aesthetic or utilitarian, for such a pattern. The carpet was far from pristine, and had seen many thousands of bare feet and slippers before this night. Newspapers covered the floor of the elevator, too, and were thick on the second floor -- everywhere but on the bamboo mats of the *tatami* room. Curious.

I entered, and there were low tables, about seven in all, with students seated on the floor around them. Each table was the domain of one of the sponsoring and competing universities, and each was catered by the individual school, if that is quite the word for chips and pork rinds (or at least the Japanese equivalent). Again, no faculty members were in evidence, as few could be found at the contest proper. This was a student-run function, and it was done well. Even the woman who had written to me, officially tendering the invitation and sending me the tickets and written material, found a way to be absent for the entire weekend. Exigency, or yet another inscrutable design? I have yet to meet her. The five judges were there, and the schools seemed to compete for our presence at their respective tables. I was adopted by Shikoku University, the members of which seemed to be showing absolutely no ill effects, or even a modest sulk, from being completely skunked in the competition. They were laughing and singing, and of sufficiently magnanimous spirit as to enthusiastically invite the conductor of their downfall to share food and drink. The ratio of the former to the latter would have to be expressed with the

prefix 'nano,' and included nearly inedible dried and salted sea life with the aroma of a funeral home run by a school of mackerel. We had been served *bentos* at lunch and dinner, so my stomach was far from prepared for an alcoholic onslaught. But we did the obligatory "*Kampai!*" and plunged into the void. I asked the sweet, bezitted student next to me about the newspapers, since I recognized her from both the contest and the critique session in my room. "Oh," she smiled brightly, "they're for vomiting."

It became clear immediately that this wasn't a party with drinking; this was drinking with a party nearby. No music in the background, no dancing, no romantic activities of any sort in this thoroughly coeducational function, no games and prizes, no social pretense at all. And it's not that the people were there for the sole purpose of drinking. That's not it. They were there for the sole purpose of drinking more than anyone thought humanly possible, and getting so profoundly drunk that they 1.) passed out; 2.) puked up meals they hadn't even eaten yet; 3.) died; or any combination of the above. They pursued the activity with a single-mindedness which might have been admirable in another context, and perhaps knowing, with the certainty of the tides, that this was a goal within the grasp of the humblest of them. In this achievement and accomplishment-based society, which has a scandalous number of stress and bullying-related child suicides, perhaps reaching an objective is made so important in their lives that the worth and cost of the objective itself is never questioned. Well, they were nowhere near as serious as I was, with these thoughts rebounding in my mind. They really seemed to be enjoying their demise.

After one or two drinks, just to get the vehicle out of the driveway, it was nonstop slamming by everyone. There are some charming eating and drinking customs on this country,

but I'm becoming leery of the one in which you are not expected to pour your own drink. The effect of this in groups, unless you choose to abstain completely, is that your pace of imbibing is dictated by the fastest drinker around you. This is particularly true where there is an unlimited supply of alcohol. Nursing a beer is not an option. Take a sip on this night, and your glass is refilled or, even worse, someone points to you, starts a chant which sounds nothing like what might have been heard at a Sunday School picnic in the days of one's youth, and you are entreated to chug down the fluid in question.

Some people's success was nearly immediate, with anguished dashes toward the porcelain altar beginning within the first 30 minutes. Toward, but not necessarily to. After an hour, it was sadly simple to observe couples of ashen-faced young ladies, leaning against a wall for support, but attempting to remain as still as possible in order to slow the whirling room. They reminded me of the famous shot of Lee Marvin and his horse in "Cat Ballou." I was impressed with the care exhibited not to sully the unprotected *tatami*. The occasional spill of beer or sake, becoming more frequent as the hour hastened, was set upon by teams of (often) inebriated napkin wielders, and never did I see the merest speck of upchuck upon the mats. Once outside that room, however, and anything could be a target, a fact which concerned me, since my size 12 Oleg Cassini slippers were the largest and most proximate ones to the doorway. I did not relish the thought of pouring a night's gastric labors from them in order to return to my room. But they were spared, perhaps like Kyoto was during the war. Reverence for the Chief Judge is nothing to belittle.

The efficiency of this drinking exhibition was awe-inspiring. Within two hours, the party

was over. Two hours! Nearly no one, at its conclusion, was any better than semi-recumbent, and several were stacked like cordwood in an out-of-the-way corner, while others snored and drooled where they fell. A reliable estimate by someone in the host party the next morning was that regurgitation was experienced by 90% of the students and 20% of the judges. The body count was: two taken to the hospital, one other severely cut on the head from a fall, but refusing treatment, and two tables destroyed. One of the judges, 6' 6" Norm White, used to be in the U.S. Navy, and he said he never saw drinking like that in all his time in the organization whose reputation for unrestrained and boisterous imbibing, let us be frank about it, exceeds what one expects from undergraduates at Kochi Women's University on the placid isle of Shikoku.

The walk back to my room was harrowing. I could not have taken more care traversing a Cambodian mine field. The halls were not well-lighted, though my eyes may already have begun to close in anticipation of the blessed futon. Puddles would usually glisten in warning, but the seeming lifeless bodies splayed out against the walls could suddenly become a fountain of repugnance, and doors would open without warning and disgorge a head in the process of relieving itself in the corridor. If I had felt capable of climbing up three flights of stairs, I would never have gambled on the elevator. Being trapped for that long with anyone likely to spew chunky as the conveyance lurched upward was not an appetizing prospect. But the fates were at my elbow, and guided me safely to repose.

Next morning's breakfast attracted only the still-warm cadavers, and few of us qualified for that high an estimation of our organic capabilities. Several students attempted to entertain us with some hastily conceived skits during an assembly at mid-morning, but the train, and empty

promises to oneself beckoned. My ride to the station was with a former student of Ken Tamai, whose suggestion a month or so ago that I would be a good person for this competition started me on the road which ended with the throbbing behind my eyes that I now experience. Did she have any dirt on him, I wondered. Good deeds like this must not go unpunished. Tomorrow.

Wednesday, June 5, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Dear Inga,

You should charge admission to your cockroach annihilation shows. Every half-hour you could probably get 5 or 10 white people from Raytown fool enough to spend a few dollars on entertainment that not even a Quentin Tarantino movie could offer them. If you get good at it (I'd never heard of the onion bait trick) you might think of taking it on the road. There are warm-weather places with roaches the size of softballs that might prove to be quite a challenge. Plus, you'd be likely to leave your friends behind (ALL of your friends!!) if you decided to turn pro. I remember the waves in Hawaii when I taught there in the summer of 1979, and the second thing I remember (oh, all right: the 3rd thing, since you did mention buxom Jeannie, didn't you?) were that all the cockroaches had their own boards and would compete with us for the waves. And they would never wipe out, since they had a whole shit-pot full of legs, and could always manage to keep 5 or 6 on the board at all time. Now THOSE were roaches. You called them "Sir" if you wanted any food left when you came home from work.

Love,

Dennis

Thursday, June 6, 1996 - E-mail letter to Professor Paul Long

Paul,

It's nice to know you chatted with Beth, thus relieving me of any illusion that I might have a future in play writing in that country. I'm sure it didn't take more than two syllables from her to make you realize she didn't know Jack Shit about me. I was hoping we'd keep it that way.

The semester is exactly halfway through, which probably makes it seem as if the time difference is measured in weeks, not hours. We let out at the end of July and don't return until the first of October. I've been saddled with an extra course this semester, Speaking Practicum, which is nothing more than trying to get the little dears to actually say something in class above a whisper. I swear, this gig is going to ruin me for honest work, if I ever could recognize it if offered.

We went to a Japanese major league baseball game on Tuesday night, and it was just like being at Royals (now Kaufman) Stadium: the home team sucked, and got their ass kicked. In spite of the unpronounceable names of the players, and the incomprehensible (though fanatically organized) cheering, nearly everything else was the same; overpriced beer (600 yen for a paper cup containing a half-liter of Asahi Dry), popcorn, peanuts, ice cream, and a ten-year-old kid in the next section over who got hit between the eyes with a foul ball and went down quicker than Madonna in an NBA locker room. It's comforting that there's so much cultural continuity in one common activity. So the guys behind us who were eating eels wrapped in seaweed had the same kinds of thoughts and feelings as we did: what are those funny-looking fuckers doing at a ball game?

I also had a phenomenal experience a week-and-a-half ago as Chief Judge at an English

Speech Contest on the island of Shikoku. The experience was not the contest, but the party afterward which was the drunkest one I have ever witnessed, and remember: I've been with the Philosophy Club at Mike's. I'll send details sometime later, if my short-term memory hasn't been permanently short-circuited by the alcohol.

Dennis

Thursday, June 6, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Dear Inga,

The problem is obviously this: The ADA office (and Ms. Tammy) are in Raytown, and the lessons you were supposed to have been learning in Talking White haven't been particularly successful. Besides, Tammy-Poo only just took that job a few months ago when her husband (and former cousin), Bubba Joe got laid off the 3rd shift at the Ford plant, and she is pissed off at the world for having to get off her pimply butt and miss her role model Ricki Lake every afternoon on the tube and actually work for a living. She also believes she knows more about dentistry than any of them pointy-headed dweebs with D.D.S. after their name, and is not about to just turn loose the power of the ADA until she is satisfied that I will get the dentist SHE thinks I deserve.

All I need from that redneck tramp is a mailing address for her shabby little office, and I will send her a long letter (already composed and waiting for an address) describing the condition of my mouth, dental history, and when I will be available for torture. I'll then trust her to start the process along by sending it to a person she thinks best fits my needs, and he or she and I will take it from there. See if that appeals to her sense of her own power. If she's still reluctant, you could

mention that I'm a white man with a fabulous collection of velvet Elvis paintings and 6 cars up on blocks in my front yard. That's a sure fire winner line with a Raytown girl. E-mail me as soon as she capitulates, and then we can get our correspondence back to normal, whatever that is.

Love,

Dennis

Sunday, June 9, 1996 - Kobe

In the past week, I have witnessed public habits of the Japanese which are at odds with what seems like their incessant willingness to sacrifice private and personal good and convenience for the public good and welfare. Last night, Mata and I accompanied Shoko Hori and her mother to a concert of the Kobe Philharmonic, mainly because Shoko's older sister, Hiroko, plays second-chair, second violin for that group. It's an unpaid, community orchestra, and thus not trying to compete in quality with the Berlin Philharmonic, but they do attack serious repertoire, and do so with intent to commit bodily injury. For this concert, a young Japanese pianist had been engaged to perform the Beethoven G major piano concerto, No. 4, and she did so competently and with some tenderness. The orchestra's eager performance of Brahms' 3rd symphony made me regret I had just that morning played my Karajan CD of the same work. At the intermission, I spied a water fountain with cold water -- not a common sight in this country -- and took a refreshing gulp or two. I decided to fill up the tank, but stepped back to let others have a drink before monopolizing it for my dromedary-like intake. Mistake. A well-dressed, middle-aged man had a short drink, and then proceeded to hawk up a sizable quantity of sputum

and loudly deposited it on the flat and shining surface of the fountain. Then he walked off. Any future drinkers would place themselves about 2 inches from this steaming specimen, and staring directly into it, as if for a detailed examination. There were other drinkers, but the running water they generated failed to dislodge this lunger. I declined to join them, and Mata said this was not the first such returning of fluid to the fountain of fluid she had observed that evening. Public spitting on sidewalks and streets is common over here, and a little unnerving, and I don't know what to think about this phenomenon, or my reaction to it. Wimpish squeamishness on my part, or unsanitary boorishness on theirs?

The second thing has various manifestations, so I'll just relay the one which struck me as most blatant, and perhaps allude to some others. Riding up a crowded escalator from the Hanshin Railroad's Sannomiya Station, I arrived near the top to find it was impossible to get off, and about 10-12 of us had to back-pedal on the forward-moving surface just to mark time. An old man and woman had just walked one step off it, and suddenly stopped to have a conversation. It was impossible to get by them without being rude and jostling them, as a few people tried to, and were rewarded with sharp words from the couple for their attempts. The fact that dozens of other people were having their lives flash before their eyes (since we were all told by our mothers about the fatal, and excruciating, dangers of being sucked under the moving stairs if we tarried at the top, and/or failed to grasp the handrail with a death grip) was inconsequential. That was where they decided to talk, and that was where it would occur. A similar scene is played out in the narrow lanes of markets and stores, where the activity of hunting and gathering is brought to a halt by droves of perplexed people, nailed to a spot in the middle of a footpath, staring with

seeming incomprehensibility at a shelf of canned goods they had seen every week of their past 70 years. There must be something nice to say about life appearing new and fresh each time you encounter it, but I find it hard to summon up those thoughts when I'm trying to circumnavigate the sandbarred barges in Aisle Nine.

Friday, June 14, 1996 - Kobe

One of the first things I noticed about my students at Shoin, when permitted a close-up inspection, was the exquisite condition of their hands and nails. It has been barely ten years ago that I was converted from a life of oral nail-trimming by Mata, and while I would never consider my nails the right stuff for a career in hand-modeling, they no longer look like they had been recently caught on barbed wire. Nearly all the Shoin women clearly get manicures regularly, a treat, or treatment, I have never endured. Knowing the cost of hairdressing over here, I can only gulp in anticipatory horror at the price of having one's nails done. But my students are overly appearance-conscious, and I have ceased to marvel at the care young women take with their hands. Even Hilomi Nishiki, a world-class lacrosse player, vying for a spot on Japan's Olympic team, has hands Claudia Schiffer would kill for.

This subject merely introduces today's observation, made on a Hanshin Railroads Limited Express from Osaka's Umeda Station during rush hour today. I had made an emergency wine run to the Hanshin department store after seeing they had just gotten a shipment of Robert Mondavi Reserve wines in stock, and not trusting that there was much more than a case of each variety available. When I got to the platform, heading home with my booty, there was a Limited Express waiting, and about to depart in about 3 minutes. However, there were already no seats left, and

the passengers who continued to climb aboard were getting quite cozy. Since that particular train is repeated every 12 minutes, I decided to be first in line for seats when the next one is ready to shove off. When the doors closed, a tidal wave of new passengers rolled down on me from what seemed the rafters of the station to queue up for the next one. I joined them, and in due time, was rewarded with a seat. The car soon filled up, and standing passengers crowded in as close as decency allowed. The scenes of railroad workers outside the doors, pushing new passengers into already filled cars, is something which seems limited to the Tokyo subways, and only upon occasion. These people were willingly impaling themselves upon their fellows in order to arrive home 12 minutes sooner, and needed no tamping down to achieve it.

From my seat, it was impossible to see across the aisle, so all I had was a coat-sleeve vista of the nearest half-meter. In front of me were several salarymen, the name for those who toil in suits for large companies, largely unappreciated, it seems, and made to work very long and uncompensated hours for a base salary. All I could see were their hands, and they looked as perfect as those of my students! Every set of nails was perfectly trimmed and shaped, and some looked very much as if they were covered with clear nail polish. A furtive glance at their faces showed the handsomeness of Japanese men in their late 20's, perhaps about to stop off for a few Kirin or Sapporo on the way home, but with hands which cost them several thousand yen a week in maintenance. Amazing.

Tuesday, June 18, 1996 - Kobe

It has been often, and rightly, said that men and women look for different things in marriage. I cannot speak for women, and probably not for men, either, if it comes to that, but it

does seem as if people marry for different reasons, or with different goals in mind, than they finally adopt while being married. There seems to be a sort of subtle evolution of desires between the altar and the accumulating anniversaries, and it is one secret of marital longevity to be able to cope with your mate's evolution while minimizing the effects of your own upon him or her. You can't imagine what brought this subject up, can you?

I am also coming to the conclusion that the man who tells his wife what he really thinks of their marriage is a man not destined to be married much longer. Perhaps the same thing is true of women, but I am not going to presume so. Actually, I am becoming persuaded that men are more willing to tolerate a rotten marriage -- by their standards -- than a woman will. In the past twenty years, men have become convinced of the ogrehood of their marital actions and attitudes, and have become sadly defensive concerning what they want from being married. Now, I don't have a rotten marriage. In fact, I'm very happy and contented now that Mata and I are together. But I have also become conditioned to suspect my honor and virtue if I am too contented. It can only mean that my wife is being oppressed in some ghastly way, or so goes the propaganda I have dutifully swallowed since the early 1970's. I happen to believe that the propaganda is correct in a descriptive way, though not in a moral way, which is the way it was originally intended. It **does** seem to be rare that a man and a woman in a marriage can be simultaneously happy, for an extended period from the same cause. But if one is perpetually content, odds are that the other is perpetually discontent. When men were made to understand the frustrations women had long endured in a world dominated by men in nearly every facet, the facts of domination were meant to carry a moral obligation, as well. If you see yourself in the

description, then you have moral shortcomings which need to be repaired. It was a blurring of the public and the private which was happening with the propaganda, made necessary with the revelation of the myriad abusers of women who were hiding behind our cultural belief that men and women should work out their own problems in marriage without public intervention.

Abusers are criminals, and need to be treated in that way.

But what I am discovering is that my level of contentment with Mata's presence is generated more by an abstraction than anything directly tangible. There is an atmosphere, an environment of well-being which surrounds me when she is living with me, and that's just about enough for me. Of course, if there's tension or strife between us, the atmosphere has some unsavory elements in it, like L.A. when the air doesn't move for a few days. But I don't need her attention in order to be happy, and the opposite seems to be true with her. The environment I mentioned doesn't seem to exist for her without constant replenishment by me in the form of words, actions, physical proximity. I did that for her first week back, and she was happier than I've ever seen her with me, and I was happy too. But after a week, I needed a break, and some time when I could just be alone, but she wanted this to be our "normal" way of being together. It would have been too exhausting to maintain, and not just sexually, either. My focus couldn't stay on her indefinitely without driving me mad, and yet, that seems to be exactly what seems to make her thrive. She follows me to school every day (she's only been absent twice in four weeks, a record many of my enrolled students would envy) and sits in my classes, reading or doing crossword puzzles. She communicates well with the students, and several of them genuinely seem to appreciate her presence on campus, but I am beginning to feel burdened, not lightened by

her incessant proximity. But she apparently finds the opposite reaction occurring. This had better not be a long-term solution.

Sunday, June 23, 1996 - Kobe

I am truly ready for summer now. Yesterday in Osaka I found Anchor Steam Beer and Schweppes Quinine Water within 5 meters of each other in the basement of the Hankyu store. I had bought a six-pack of my beloved Carlsberg here a few weeks ago, but it tasted suspiciously bland and excessively fizzy. The can was printed primarily in Japanese, but enough English was included to lead me to surmise that it was brewed nearby, under what was euphemistically described as the “supervision” of people from Denmark. They must have been frolicking in the Tivoli Gardens when this batch was made, and mailed in their supervisory approval: it tasted like a slightly hoppier Kirin or Asahi, but at a premium price. In addition, the Carlsberg in Bali was in a proper glass bottle, and was capable of maintaining a head longer than a teenager can maintain an erection. The Anchor Steam was shipped over from the states, with a little slip label slapped on for local consumers.

The quinine water is not to be mixed with gin, but to be consumed alone with ice and a slice of lime. I drank gin and tonics several decades ago, occasionally to excess, until I discovered that the taste I really drank them to obtain was primarily the tonic-and-lime flavor, and that gin was no more than 10% of the attraction (though a majority of its cost and 100% of its unfortunate side effects when overindulging occurred).

About a week-and-a-half ago we received a call from K.C. to inform us that our latest grandchild was now a part of this world. For the record, she is Madisen Camille Cole, born June

13, 1996 to Chuck and Melanie Cole, weighed in at 2.5 kg and seemed to be sound of voice over the phone, as she requested attention from her mother who was trying to tell Mata all the details of delivery of which I am happy to remain ignorant. We had been planning to return to the U.S. for a few weeks at the end of the semester in about four weeks, and this gave us a delightful primary reason for the trip. I quickly booked the seats, and they were not cheap. There was another, and for me, more pressing, reason for going back and spending a long time (we have about 9 weeks before the second semester begins around October 1st): my incisors have begun to feel loose, and I now realize that they are signaling endgame for the upper half of my mouth. They have been the subject of inexcusable neglect for many years, and the time has come to gum the bullet (not enough left up there to bite it, I'm afraid) and throw my mouth at the mercy of a dentist, none of whom I know professionally. So I wrote a letter to the K.C. ADA referral service to help me get everything arranged before I got in town.

Then, on Friday morning at the bus stop, colleague Molly Gould and I were talking about vacation plans, and I told her about the planned six-week hiatus in K.C. to see Madisen. She knew I had been back twice before during this year, and asked if I had reached my 35-day maximum. What was she talking about? What 35-day maximum? It turns out that the I.R.S. will only allow a person to maintain their tax-exempt status if they stay out of the U.S. for 330 days in a year. If one spends less time than that overseas, one is considered a U.S. resident for tax purposes, and my fabulous salary gets squeezed at about a 28% grip. After checking with a few more expatriates at Shoin, most of them agreed on the 35-day figure, and one or two, who will remain nameless, mentioned shady or illegal schemes to sneak back in the country and not

have to become liable for taxes. They also sounded like high-risk undertakings, like laughing at Dennis Rodman's hair within his earshot.

That night was supposed to be wonderful; we were going to the Sylphide for another stupendous French meal with Katrina and several other Shoin teachers. The crew had asked us to come aboard at 6:00 instead of 7:00, so that we could get a chance to sip Champagne and munch canapes with the chef and other crew members prior to the influx of the great unwashed at embarkation time. It **was** excellent, as always, but my tax status was weighing heavily. At the table that night were a Brit, Aussie, and a Kiwi, as well as five Americans, and the citizens of the Empire all were amazed at the punitive restrictions Americans had to obey as foreign residents. They could come and go as they wished, spend as much time at home as they wanted to, and generally behave as free people, supported by a government which didn't feel as if it had to submit its citizens to a bed check. "The land of the free" is beginning to sound like an 18th-century P.R. campaign, and far from an empirical description. But then, when ever was it?

So, on Saturday, Mata and I went back to the travel agency where we had only days before purchased our tickets, and canceled them (with a 10,000 yen penalty, of course). Since we were within three blocks of the Shakey's Pizza Parlor in Osaka mentioned several months ago, we decided to commiserate over a large calimari-and-pickled-ginger-plus-seaweed (with extra corn, of course), but settled for the 600 yen buffet, as a reflection of our recently impoverished state. I reflected, as the tentacles clawed their way down my throat, on the gastronomical extremes of the past 24 hours. From the Sylphide to Shakey's is a tumble of bungee-jumping proportions.

Monday, June 24, 1996 - Kobe

In the afternoon yesterday we went to a concert by the Vienna Chamber Orchestra, held in Osaka. It seems ironic that we are pigging out on Western culture whilst in the middle of a prominent Eastern one. The truth is that Kansas City has a decent symphony orchestra, a fabulous chamber music series, a very competent conservatory, and one Big-Names Once a Month series with the likes of Pavarotti and Andre Watts coming to town to wow the rubes (us). So there is probably one passable concert a week worth missing *The Simpsons* (but **not** "Dr. Katz") to see. In Osaka, there are often two or three a night of special worth, and the local talent is very impressive. The thirty or so musicians from Vienna were excellent, and the woodwinds, in particular, were World Class by any standard. What surprised me about the concert was the conductor, Philippe Entremont. He also doubled as piano soloist in the C major Concerto (#21) of Mozart, and I remembered him as a soloist in the '50s and '60s braving all the knuckle-busting romantic works of Rachmaninoff, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, and Khachaturian. Grace and subtlety of phrasing and interpretation were not among his best artistic traits, if they could be found anywhere at all, even in trace amounts. His Mozart yesterday sounded pretty clumsy and ham-handed; I almost thought Dave Brubeck was moonlighting for him that day. What amazed me was his conducting, once the piano had been lashed to the back wall and locked up (I would have happily ingested the key to prevent him from ever playing it again in our presence). All the characteristics I wished his Mozart piano playing had displayed were lovingly presented to us through his baton as if it were a rare and delicate old bottle of Chateau d'Yquem. He lavished care on phrases which opened a new door to old music for me, and yet never impeded the flow of

the music for effect. How can a person, accomplished equally in two media, be so devoid of laudable aesthetic attributes in one, and display the very some ones in the other medium which were lacking in the first?

Tuesday, June 25, 1996 - Kobe

The main political difference between Japan and the United States is that in America, the cynicism of the government officials is matched by that of the electorate; in Japan, the cynicism of the government is still ahead of that of its citizens. That's another manifestation of the "America in the 1950's" atmosphere which I noted early on these pages. In the past thirty years, American people have lost faith in its elected officials, and, as a result, I feel our democracy is at a standstill. Japan is heading down that path, and unwisely and unnecessarily so. What brought this to mind was the announcement today in Tokyo that the national Consumption Tax, first instituted in 1989 at 3%, was being raised in April to 5%. This coincides with the widening investigation of the *Jusen* Scandal, a more centralized version of our own Savings-and-Loan Debacle, and with a potentially higher price tag for the government bailout. The causes of the two chronicles of financial shame sound remarkably similar in several ways. Big Greed, pursued by people and companies capable of playing that game for huge stakes; government oversight either ineffectual or prominently in the pockets of the major players, overreaching by people who already had an enormous pile of yen; the collapse of the economic system on which it was based; and cries for the government to save all those concerned from more financial calamity. Today, the government of Japan revealed how it would raise the money to deal with such malfeasance on the part of those with public trust and public money: soak the poor. The more mouths you have

to feed and send to college, the more you will probably consume. The rich and reckless who brought this about share no more of the burden for its dissipation than the guy who picks up the *gomi* twice a week. Very little public discontent is being shown on the news, but that's not likely to continue indefinitely, especially with a newly invigorated press.

Sunday June 30, 1996 - Kobe

A strange thing happened last Monday while waiting for the bus. Mata was with me, and we normally catch the morning bus on a busy thoroughfare between JR Rokkomichi station, from which thousands of workers stream downhill toward the jobs at Kobe Steel and the sake plants, or buses on National Route 2 which deposit them at their 8 hours of drudgery. Some make their way, salmon-like, up the hill from Route 2 in hopes of catching the 7:51 to Osaka. As we stood there, back from the street to avoid being an impediment, a middle-aged Japanese woman stopped in front of us and started talking in an earnest and animated voice. It was in *Nihongo*, of course, so I understood nearly nothing she was saying. Both Mata and I tried to explain as best we could that we didn't understand, since the woman appeared to be in some distress, but she cut us off in mid-explanation with a raise of a hand and an increase of decibels, and continued what now appeared to be her diatribe. It seemed to last for minutes, but was probably only 45 seconds long. Once delivered of her heartfelt oration, she turned abruptly and continued up the hill. Not even a backward glance to make certain we weren't following her for a rebuttal.

What makes this worth reporting, in my judgment, is that it seems to connect to something which happened about three weeks previous. Either of them, alone, I felt could be brushed off, but the two, in tandem, give one pause. We were walking back from school at about

4:30 P.M., on a street about 5 blocks due west of this first location, but one with little pedestrian traffic. It was a warm day and our pace was still brisk 35 minutes after starting downhill. I noticed a young man on a bicycle riding toward us on the sidewalk, which is nothing new. While officially, pedestrians are supposed to rule in this country, in practice the weak must submit to the strong, like everywhere else. If you don't have **some** kind of wheels, you're way down the ladder of survival. This cyclist saw us, and then stopped at the curb about 5 meters from us and started shouting something at us. We hadn't impeded his passage, and the sidewalk was atypically wide for a Kobe sidewalk, anyway. It, too, was some sort of oration, it seemed, lasting only about 10 seconds for each reiteration, but literally screamed at us by this late 20's/early 30's young man. We kept our pace and walked by him without reacting, and then he began circling us on his wheels, screaming as loud as he could some sort of message, and I doubt that it was "Welcome to the neighborhood. Would you like to meet my sister?" His circling, or stalking, continued through three complete repetitions, during which our pace never varied and our eyes never strayed. He finally rode off, to my relief, since we were only about 5 blocks from our apartment, and I had no idea what he had in mind, or what his mind might suggest to him once he knew our address.

Mata's interpretation is strictly racial, since I never had that kind of reception as a solitary Caucasian. It's, of course, a sad commentary on the U.S. that a mature, thoughtful citizen who spent her whole life under various forms of American racism has become so expectant of racial hostility because of those experiences that every potentially ambiguous situation is interpreted through the looking glass of race. The UPH with empirical respectability. There is a growing

amount of anti-American sentiment in Japan, and it seems to have taken a leap toward critical mass with the gang-rape of the schoolgirl last September by a group of off-duty GIs. The governor of Okinawa Prefecture, where the rape occurred, has been using the issue politically with great skill, it seems, and something critical of Americans appears on the TV news every night. If nothing happened that day in Japan involving Americans in an unsavory way, there are miles of videotape from U.S. networks available worldwide to help chronicle our domestic moral decay. The governor seems to want to be seen as an Asian version of Boris Yeltsin, standing against the tanks in the cause of freedom. It seems to be playing pretty well, and there are well-orchestrated protests every day outside various Okinawan military establishments which we possess; protests which are also well-covered by the national media.

Monday, July 1, 1996 - Kobe

Events seem to be pairing up. The two disturbing harangues we withstood, as described above, were the worst of it, but not the end of it. Twice in the past seven days I have been on the short end of a language misunderstanding with two separate students named Keiko. A couple of weeks ago, Keiko One (not her real name) told me she was interested in a "career" as a gospel singer, and wanted to know what a good college might be to study it in the U.S. Being an American over here not only means you are personally responsible for everything stupid that Americans have ever done in the world, but that you also know every bit of minutiae any non-American cares to discover. Does Julliard or Curtis have a Gospel Singing major, where they listen to and learn to lip-synch Mahalia Jackson tapes for four years? Beats me. I wrote to my brother Bill, an accomplished church musician but desultory correspondent, and am awaiting his

reply. The next week, Keiko invited Mata and me to a gospel music concert at her church, where, as I understood it, she would be performing, along with many others.

Now, I have a very low threshold of nausea where this kind of music is concerned, even though my grandfather (C. Harold Lowden) was quite a prominent composer in the field during the early part of the century. It all seems part of a manipulative web of deceit used by high-decibel churches to, alternately, pull the emotional strings of guilt and relief. A rule which seems to have stood the test of time with me is that the louder church service is (and I'm not talking about the odd *fff* section of a Bach Prelude and Fugue played as a postlude, the main function of which seemed to be, in the churches I've attended, to awaken those parishioners who were put to sleep by the sermon. It worked for me, at least.) the lower in intellectual content its message was. But, since Keiko was performing, I feigned enthusiasm and accepted the invitation. Mata is much more attune to both the message and the music of the brand of religion I've just belittled, so she was a willing accomplice. The church was no cathedral, and though Keiko met us at the train station to guide us through the subway system, it turned out she was not going to utter a peep from the front of the hall, but she merely wanted us to share the joy and the message which she apparently saw that we so desperately needed. Of course, sleep is impossible in such events, but when the lead singer told her life story, it was in *Nihongo*, which spared the audience my shrieks of laughter. Actually, I wouldn't have minded hearing a bit about the myriad lascivious and carnal depravities from which she extricated herself, through the intervention of The Lord, but you can't have it both ways. It had lasted over an hour and three-quarters when we left in a rainy season downpour with only one umbrella between us.

The next Keiko I had seen on the United Airlines flight back from seeing the plays in April, and she had introduced me to her mother, who was traveling with her. A young and sexy mother she was, but I figured that was that. When Mata arrived about a month ago, I took her to all my classes as an introduction, and Keiko Two was enthralled by her braided-from-the-roots 'do. She said she wanted her mother to see Mata's hair, and suggested we meet at her mother's restaurant for dinner and the traveling freak show (provided by the follicles in question). Sounded good to me, since the last time a student (this time a Reiko) invited us to her parents' restaurant for dinner we had an incredible feast which seemed never to end. When we got to Keiko Two's mother's trough, it turned out it was her mother's **brother's** restaurant, and Ritsuko (Keiko's mom) was a waitress and bookkeeper there. No problem as far as I was concerned. The place was very big by Japanese standards, holding about 200+ mouths simultaneously, and located in a very busy suburb between Osaka and Kyoto. They ordered up all kinds of great grub, from sushi to tempura to what they called barbecue (Arthur Bryant would be amused, were he alive), and we enjoyed it immensely. Mata's hair got the hands-on treatment, and we saw innumerable photos of their last trip to Hawaii. After two hours, Ritsuko had to go back to the customers, and we had to go home, but our hostess first made a quick detour to the cash register to total up the bill and present it to us. I hope my astonishment didn't show as I fished an *ichiman* from my wallet and paid for my evening's entertainment. But somehow, in both cases, I missed a signal about either the cast of characters or the ultimate benefactor. Keiko Two's English is so rudimentary that I don't believe even the most direct and simple question concerning whose treat it was would have been understood. The rule in Japan, I have found, it

this: speak softly and carry a big wad of bills.

Tuesday, July 2, 1996 - Kobe

Yesterday was my weekly three-hour stint in English Island, and Mata has accompanied me to all of them since her return. She had a luncheon appointment with an American missionary named Phyllis who met us during the Gospel Siege with Keiko One. The students who come of their own free will to English Island tend to be the same ones every week, so they asked where Mata was, and showed genuine regret that she wouldn't be with them. I began to realize what she gives to them that I don't, and I truly appreciate it. The purpose of English Island is to provide a relaxed, non-academic atmosphere where people can practice their English without being graded, and by talking with their peers and native speakers on common subjects not found in the classroom. I am also discovering, both by talking with students I am familiar with and my colleagues, that many teachers make every attempt to **minimize** the amount of in-class verbal contact they have with their students. This seems either perverse or just plain wacko. The reason they were hired was to expose their students to a native speaker, and have him or her improve their English by first-person contact. Much of the Oral English courses devote a properly large bulk of class time to talking in English by students, but many teachers seem to let them talk to one another, while they (the teachers) sit at a desk grading journals or reading workbooks from another class. Those people could be replaced by VCRs, and I would be willing to donate one of my own, or at least a few thousand yen to a fund to replace absentee professors. I tend to be an in-your-face English teacher, and maybe that style doesn't suit everyone, but when your estimation of what is comfortable for you to do clashes with what

improves your students, the decision always, ALWAYS goes to the benefit of the student, or you get out of the business.

In English Island, I always find myself asking the kind of pitty-pat, easy lob kind of questions that anyone can answer, but being bored with it. I want to challenge them, but I know that many, if not most, come to English Island for a little reassurance and self-confidence after a week in the trenches as an English student who emerges shaken, but not stirred. Since my time with them is Monday afternoon, the obvious question to ask them is "What did you do this weekend?" It's question they have been asked, or have someone else asked, every week. Entering freshmen can answer it, and seldom does the most obvious follow-up question drive them to sullen silence. It's amazing to watch their body language after an hour. Of course, watching their bodies is not something I like to catch myself doing to excess (after three or four straight hours I like to rest my eyes), but it can be instructive. They might come in as if to a job interview, and sit rigidly and prim, their backs far from the support of the chair, and their nearly non-existent butts balanced on the front edge like a Karl Wallenda routine that never made it to the Big Top. And often, within an hour or less, they are lounging back, laughing and making spontaneous comments on other speakers. But that change doesn't come from a confrontational beginning to the hour; it comes from their realization that they can handle whatever comes up. They're on top of it.

Mata does that for them, and that helps me. When she's there, all those comfortable preliminaries in the form of easy lob questions are taken care of, and once they're all purring, I can ask them to do something they aren't expecting, like write a dream sequence together, or

something else that wouldn't garner any participants unless they were already into the flow of easy English.

Tuesday, July 16, 1996 - Kobe

Before coming to Japan, the two national obsessions of this country that most westerners find most incomprehensible are probably the ingesting of raw fish, and the devotion to sumo. In addition, those are the two obsessions most westerners are destined to share once exposed to them over here. For me, a day without raw salmon is hardly worth ticking off on the calendar. Every two months there is a Grand Sumo Tournament (and I have yet to see **anything** petite in sumo), and for those fifteen days the headlines of corruption, scandal, and the Wicked Americans in Okinawa are crowded off to mere sidebars, while each grunt and huff of a *yokozuna* (the highest ranking a fighter can attain in sumo) is the lead story in every edition. I arrived last year during a tournament, and was amazed that **every** TV set I encountered was tuned to the afternoon bouts on NHK. At the airport, upon clearing customs, I took a bus to the boat ramp, and the bus driver had sumo on in the bus, as much for him to try to watch out of the corner of his eye as for the entertainment of the customers. Once on the hydrofoil which would take me across the bay to Kobe, every monitor showed the grappling of the behemoths. And in the next bus to the hotel, the TV again kept me informed as the driver tried to negotiate the narrow streets of Port Island, Kobe, with one eye on the screen.

It seemed so ridiculous to me then, and what amazed me most of all by this phenomenon was the large number of Caucasians who were also hooked on sumo. What has happened to these people? I soon roomed with one such specimen (Robert Conine) and decided to wait for

the next tournament to observe this curious breed close-up. They didn't seem dangerous to anyone other than themselves, and there was certainly no likelihood that I would fall victim to the same malady that afflicted him. I was a boxing man, pure and rabid. When I was in elementary school in Spring Lake, New Jersey, Church League sports were very popular. Those players not sufficiently skilled to make the school teams would be organized according to what church they attended, or what church could recruit them, were they a talented heathen, and on Saturday mornings, the gyms at schools would be filled with enthusiastic basketball, volleyball, and other teams separated by all beliefs except the ones which dictated that being a good sport, a generous victor, and a gallant loser were the soul of athletics. In Spring Lake, while I was there in the early 1950's, there was also a Church **Boxing** League: Protestants against the Catholics. There were two establishments of each general theological persuasion: St. Margaret's and St. Catherine's on the latter side, and St. Andrew's Methodist (the place where my father was pastor) and another Protestant church, now forgotten. We would meet in the church basements, lace on gloves larger and heavier than sofa pillows, don gargantuan protective cups for our diminutive, grade-school privates, and finally put on face masks which would even discourage Hannibal Lecter. We were then ready for what passed for combat, considering the physical restrictions just mentioned. I realize now that what we wore was not meant to protect those of us who wore them, but our opponents, instead. Our skinny ten and eleven year-old frames had all they could do to keep from collapsing under the weight of our "protection," and so the thought of launching a meaningful punch was only that: a thought. Before we even touched each other, we staggered around the ring like someone who had walked into a Jersey Joe Walcott left hook, hoping to stay

vertical until the bell. I never remember giving or receiving a punch of any effect.

But when the November *basho* (tournament) came, Robert surgically attached himself to the screen, and I watched from a discreet distance. One advantage he had was a satellite dish which received many English-language broadcasts, including the bilingual sumo broadcasts of NHK. Robert would explain some of the details of the action, as well as the traditions of the sport, and the English-speaking commentators on the tube, particularly my Shoin colleague, Katrina Watts, did an exemplary job of making the proceedings comprehensible, as well. Little by little, I found myself conversing with colleagues in sumo-ese, and to my astonishment, it seemed as if I had been paying attention during the bouts. Not only that, but I was becoming a partisan of one fighter or another. There are three Hawaiians in the top division, including one of the two reigning *yokozuna*, or grand champions: Akebono is an impressive and fearsome spectre when viewed from across the ring, even to a spectator; and Konishiki, a demoted *ozeki* (the 2nd-highest ranking) is a mountain of past-its-prime flesh, but nationality was not a consideration in this kind of loyalty. Plus, they've both now become Japanese citizens strictly for commercial reasons. A retired *ozeki* can live a comfortable, if not pampered life in Japan; if he returns to Hawaii he might be able to get on as a bouncer for a Waikiki nightclub. As a Japanese citizen, he can buy into a sumo stable and get a piece of the very lucrative sumo pie for the rest of his life.

After the November *basho*, I never missed another tournament on television, though pieces of the March and May joustings occurred while I was in the U.S. My TV now is plain, and my sumo is heard in Japanese, but I don't view it with any less enthusiasm. So when Katrina

asked if Mata and I wanted to attend the Nagoya *basho* in July, there was never a doubt that I'd find a way to arrange my schedule around one weekend. Her friend, Miyoko, made all the hotel arrangements, and even stood in line Saturday morning to buy our tickets. Katrina and Peter Mallett showed me an out-of-the-way storefront under a set of railroad tracks in Kobe which sold discount *Shinkansen* tickets (20% off), and we made all preparations, including the purchase of a 500 mm telephoto lens, since I was informed that we could only obtain cheap seats that weekend.

Our hotel room, at 14,000 yen a night, was nearly microscopic in size. While it had a double bed in it, that took up more than half the floor space, by actual measurement. The bathroom defied my attempts to sit on the crapper in any position other than sidesaddle, and the tub/shower was an irregularly-shaped polygon which narrowed to less than butt width at the spigot end, and would have cramped attempts to bathe a comatose Chihuahua. But we did get a free toothbrush, with bristles like those of a wire brush used to clean grout. Across the hall **was** a dispenser of free green tea, so not all amenities were forgotten. Katrina had suggested we meet at 7:30 Saturday morning to make a run at one of the training camps and watch their early morning practice. In her position as NHK commentator, she has gotten to know everyone in contemporary sumo, and her Japanese is so good that she can converse with anyone without hesitation. Plus, she is tall, handsome, has miles of lovely hair in a single braid, and is gracious and polite without being reticent. In the world of sumo, she is a luminary, and Shoin wisely gives her a lot of flexibility in her teaching schedule to attend to her NHK duties.

On Saturday, we took a cab to where the fighter Ganyu would be working out, though

there were several others in that stable of ten or twelve she liked. Katrina is not a snob, only hob-nobbing with the *ozeki* and other superstars; she knows acneed fighters who have just begun, the guys who sweep and water the clay ring periodically, referees, criers, even the ushers. And she treats them all with the same respect and good cheer she does a *yokozuna*. When we arrived at what appeared to be a Shinto Shrine the other 50 weeks of the year, practice was well under way, and the dozen and a half visitors were worshipfully silent. Katrina had cautioned us against speaking during practice, and not employing flash photography, and even had me demonstrate the noise that my Pentax makes to gauge whether it would offend, even unaided by artificial illumination. Since it has a motor drive, the decibel level was judged to be excessive for the delicate ears of sumo practitioners. It was like a church service in there, one of those pretentious Protestant ones where the droning of the minister is nearly matched by the snoring of the congregation. Or closer to metaphorical home, it resembled a golf tournament, but without the requisite "You the man!" shouted after every successful arm throw. It was more like the 18th green of the Masters, at Augusta Cathedral. In a way, I appreciated this restriction, since it gave me my first exposure to the physical sounds of sumo. And it again helped me realize how much TV distances you from the events it purports to transport you to. The sound of flesh pounding flesh never gets transmitted via microwaves, nor the grunts, cries, gasping for breath, and whimpers which are a part of every sumo encounter. Television abstracts the experience to the most formal, pictorial, and generic elements, often the ones which can be described by the commentators. Even the size of the *rikishi*, which is what the combatants are called, is minimized on the screen, with the exception of the extremes, Konishiki and 6 foot 8 Akebono.

Everybody else looks normal size with a serious beer belly. In America, we've all seen truck drivers the same size as these guys. Wrong. There is **nothing** on this planet like these guys. In televised bouts, they lumber across the ring, grapple for a few seconds, and one of them pushes the other one outside the line. In camp, they practice lumbering across the ring, grappling, and pushing, but they also do exercises which demonstrate and enhance their flexibility. They can bend the way a case-of-Bud-a-day peckerwoods at Lake of the Ozarks can only dream about, and couldn't do after he hit 100 pounds at age four.

Wednesday, July 17, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Dear Inga,

One thing I'm good for is answering questions you never asked. I found this answer recently, and thought I'd share it with you. You have, more or less, asked the question, but not in so many words. You implied the question and I'm sooplying the answer.

In the Asian zodiacs, there is a meeting of certain signs which happens once in every 60 years, when the Japanese, Chinese, and (I think) the Korean birth signs coincide to make something truly ghastly. The next one will happen to babies born in the year 2026. Early in this century, another such year was also the year of the San Francisco Earthquake: 1906. There was another one in that cycle, and you will discover it was the year of your birth, 1966. The hex of which I speak only affects girl babies, and it is called the Year of the Flaming Horse (better than the Year of the Screaming Queen, I suppose). The birth rate in all Asian countries plummets in those years, and all women born then are said to be destined to live loveless, lonely lives. Just something to cheer you up as you turn 30. Of course, I will always love you, but that won't do

much except look good on your resume. But in case you wondered about the astounding luck you have been having with men, it's not REALLY you, it's the stars, fate, and the doom of thousand-year-old cultures. Have a nice day!

This is the last week of the semester, and something strange and wonderful happened to me this morning. I was walking on campus to the snack bar to buy a container of juice, and walked about 15 yards from a group of about 30 students, all dressed perfectly, aligned on some steps by the official school photographer for a class picture. Two professors were at one end, posing with them, and they had all been arranged in the classic, three-quarter turn pose, and the photographer was trying to get the work done, it seemed. I only noticed the scene, and not any individuals in the scene, but as I walked by them, I suddenly heard what turned out to be LITERALLY half the students begin to shout, "Lowden, Lowden!!" I turned around and looked, and half them were waving at me feverishly, much to the chagrin and consternation of the photographer. I waved back, and yelled some thing to them, and they yelled greetings back. I had my camera with me, and so I took their picture as they waved. Then I motioned to the "real" photographer, and they quieted down and he did his work. Of course, I had to stay and say hello to all of them after the scene broke up, and it turned out that I had been, or was currently, the professor to about half of them, and not the shy half. I had one shot left in the roll, so I took another of 3 of my favorites, Satomi, Yuki, and Yuko, and then went to get my juice. But what a fond memory to take with me!

Love, Dennis

Saturday, July 20, 1996 - Kobe

I have to continue the sumo narrative, since it was such a striking experience, and one which most Japanese find culturally mandatory. Once Saturday's practice ended, most visitors dispersed, probably to other camps, or to stand in line at the downtown Nagoya venue for tickets for today's bouts. We stayed, and Katrina went to speak to what was truly a mountain of a man, Kanesaku, who looked particularly bushed, sitting in a heap on an overtaxed folding chair. It's easy to impute menacing motives to these warriors, as their facial expressions in combat seldom display the gentler side of the human condition. I hung warily back in our group, allowing the women to be devoured first while I got a limping start with my gamy hip and ankle, in case the conversation turned sour. Even in his exhaustion, and he had been worked cruelly by the stable's manager in the earlier session, Kanesaku was genuinely happy to talk to Katrina. And when she introduced Mata and me, he apologetically wiped the dirt from a mitt the size of a basketball to shake our hands. He and Katrina talked quite a long time before he excused himself to take a well-earned shower, and she would occasionally supply a brief translation of salient passages. But most of the time, they just conversed like old friends, catching each other up on the intervening months. The man must have weighed 400 pounds, standing 6' 4" or so, but there was an unmistakable gentleness and innocence to him. It became necessary all weekend to remind myself that many of these young men were barely in their 20's, since size, and their ubiquitous battle scars add the appearance of years to them. Looking at those sweet eyes and the round, jowly face it was hard to think of the high level of mayhem he engaged in as a profession.

We were about to leave when the camp's manager came over to Katrina to practice some very halting English. Of course, she introduced us, and we became his sounding board. His

language skills needed work, that was certain, but he mentioned that breakfast was bubbling away in a couple of cauldrons, recently liberated from cannibals of New Guinea from the size of them. Would we like to join him, and the stable's highest ranked *rikishi*, Ganyu, for the first meal of the day? All of us had empty stomachs, and while it was too early for caffeine withdrawal to kick in, we had been looking forward to an exit to a coffee shop. This was too good to pass up, however. We removed our shoes and sat around a table in a large tatami room while Ganyu, possessing a fearsome scowl just this side of impassive, arrayed all of himself across from us. As it turns out, he likes to try out his glare on strangers just for practice, and I would be eager to offer testimony as to its effectiveness. But like Kanesaku, Ganyu was kind and mild-mannered to us; funny, even. He chatted amiably with Katrina throughout the meal. It turned out that he was fighting Konishiki today, and it was an important bout, since Konishiki's bouts are very popular, and everybody would be watching it. Most of the other fighters in the stable had finished their showers and were ready for breakfast, but the meal was served in order of your rank in the sumo hierarchy. Ganyu was first, along with the manager and guests, and everyone else had to wait until he was finished and had left the table before the next diners could chow down. We ate exactly what Ganyu ate, just significantly less of it. First up was a full-size dinner plate of rice with a curry sauce with vegetables and chicken poured over it. At times like this, I find I have a misplaced competitive streak; I can eat as much as anyone in this house! I dared not throw down a gourmand's gauntlet to these gargantuans, and yet, something inside urged me to match him, chopstick load for chopstick load. That lasted one plate full. When he sent his back for seconds, I knew I was beaten. Besides, the second course had already been

placed on the table for us. Something like four **dozen** eggs had been beaten together and scrambled in a wok. Then they were tossed out onto an enormous serving platter and cut into 6 wedges equal to about 8 eggs each. That was one serving, and Ganyu took two. As we westerners struggled to lift an eight-egg slab with our chopsticks, the salad was brought out: many slices of tomato on a bed of lettuce, with what seemed to be Thousand Island Dressing poured over it. Glasses of cold tea washed everything down, though the manager decided it was the perfect time to begin draining his daily six-bottle sake ration.

Our departure led us, on foot, to the nearest coffee shop, where we fed the monster inside with a diminutive 300 yen cup of coffee and a plate of salted peanuts as a gratis side dish. We needed to get to the hall where the tournament was being held, since, as previously noted, Katrina's friend, Miyoko, very kindly stood in line to buy our tickets this morning, in the hopes that there were some reserved seats left to be had. The plan was that we would arrive outside the hall, telephone Miyoko on her cell phone, and she'd come out and give us our tickets. She wasn't answering when we first tried, however, and Katrina was afraid she'd have to buy one of the standing room tickets just to go in and locate her friend. However, Plan B was much more effective: she merely went to an entrance where the guy taking tickets knew her, and explained her problem. What problem? No problem! The three of us were allowed to walk right in, and that was that. It turned out that Miyoko had purchased the tickets and then gone off for Japan's second favorite activity: shopping. But we were inside, and once there, it was nonstop sumo until 6:00 P.M. Since the Big Names don't fight until the last hour and a half, most people wait until then to show up and claim their seats, which means that hideously expensive four-person

boxes (120,000 yen for four, one day only) are ready to be occupied by squatters until evicted by the rightful landlord. So we sat on the front row, but the angle upward was not photographically interesting, unless two *rikishis* were plummeting toward you like sweaty asteroids out of control.

They could attach a copy of that picture to your obituary. Our “real” seats were in literally the highest row in the building; the only spectators with seats higher in altitude than they were some baby sparrows. They got in for nothing, while ours cost 4000 yen each. We spent the last 2 hours in the seats we paid for, and the previous 5 scrounging about the pricy cushions for the vantage point which pleased. Hundreds of others joined us, and it was just an accepted way of seeing sumo up close without having to know somebody from Mitsubishi.

Sunday, July 21, 1996- Kobe

By about 1:00 P.M., Katrina was spied by someone in the sumo biz, later explained to be the owner of a fairly large and well-known camp of fighters, two of whom were in the top division. She performed the introductions, and he promptly invited us to lunch, an unnecessary meal, even at that late hour. I had a fleeting vision of myself returning from Nagoya possessing Ganyu-esque dimensions, frightening the students and terrorizing my wardrobe. But we went, and dined on a delicious meal of tempura, miso soup, rice, and salad. Ironically, the Sunday before, I had gone to a Seiden appliance store in Kobe and purchased bathroom scales, since I detected a slight girthiness to my figure, and something even worse to Mata's. I had dropped nearly 20 pounds in my first six or seven months away from the U.S., though part of that may be attributable to the case of Bali Belly, which is a weight loss technique much in need of refinement. In the two months since Mata arrived in Kobe for good, I discovered that I had

gained it all back, and added a kilo as some sort of obscene gesture in body language. Mata weighed more than she ever had in her life, including pregnancies. The explanation was easy to supply. Upon my arrival, I both became enamored of Japanese cuisine, and was ignorant of the locations of places which sold American snack foods. I still must have my weekly nori-maki and soba meals, but chips, cookies, and crackers are all too easy to find, now that I can navigate the underground shopping amoebae, like Umeda and Santica. Plus, Mata and I reinforce our own worse tendencies, rather than counteract them. Perhaps each of us, individually, would like not to munch worthless trash and balloon up, but together we seem to do it unless we resolve not to, and try to keep each other honest. After weighing ourselves on the 7th, we decided to work on our tonnage immediately, but this weekend in Nagoya may send us back to square one.

On the next morning, we showed up at the training camp for the Hawaiian *ozeki*, Musashimaru. He, and another prominent fighter, Musoyama, worked out with the usual assortment of lesser lights and hopefuls, and the place was crowded with spectators. We watched for a long time, but it finally disbanded, and Katrina took us over to Musashimaru. She is an able photographer, and carries a sizable stack of pictures in her purse for the fighters. In the case of The Moose, she also remembered what kind of candy he misses most from Hawaii (some sort of coconut covered with dark chocolate) and brought him a sample. She had also baked some brownies and other confections for her many "pets" among the *rikishi*, which, I have found, is a tradition over here. Each fighter has a fan club, and members often present their favorite with a gift of some sort during the *bashos*, and poon-tang is not always at the top of the list. Since weight gain is not a pressing concern of the stars, discovering their favorite pig-out food, and

supplying it, seems to be the preferred way to receive their attention. Another amazing element of the sumo phenomenon is the prevalence of 30-something women who make up the fan clubs and who attend the tournaments. They often roam in pairs, appear to be unmarried and unattached (Katrina has introduced us to several such women), and have made sumo-hero worship a significant part of their lives. I suppose they're working women with rapidly declining hopes of marriage, but needing the attention of a powerful male figure in their lives to give them something their culture claims is required. But there's a fascinating complexity in the apparent feelings the women have for the *rikishi*, a significant portion of which seems more surrogate motherly than longing for romance. Calling Dr. Freud! From talking to my students, it seems as if most of them get zip emotionally from their job-fixated fathers, which might account for why they seem to appreciate my attentions. Perhaps the *rikishi* and I perform the same general function, though a glance at both of us would categorically indicate that physical attraction is not the hook.

Katrina seems to have a nice comfortable blend of the personal and the professional in her dealings with the men of sumo, and Musashimaru was genuinely pleased to see her again, especially when he saw the goodies she had brought. He had just lost on Saturday, and was in danger of embarrassment if he suffered many more defeats in this tournament, but he kept his good humor, and also spoke in English the whole time. It turned out that he and Konishiki had played football in Hawaii as high school students, but for schools on opposite sides of Oahu, so their battles with each other did not originate in Japan. Mata and I were eavesdroppers, as we were all along the way, but it was interesting, and an opportunity few sumo fans get.

We had to speed back to the venue on this day, since we had to get our own tickets, and only standing room was likely to remain. There are two rows of unreserved seats on the north and south ends of the hall, at the very top, and they are first come, first served. It's still 2500 yen to get in the door, but with no guarantee of a place to sit. Some people camp on stairs, and the rest clog the aisles, but no one seems to get bent out of shape. When we got there, most of the good seats on the south side were gone, but we were able to secure three together on one row and two more directly behind them, those latter for two of Katrina's single, female, 30-ish, Japanese friends. We had met before on the Sylphide in May, when they confessed, upon hearing that I was from Kansas City, that they were particularly fond of a *rikishi* from St. Louis, named Henry. Of course, that's not the name he fights under, since all the fighters adopt, or are assigned a name once they are inducted into sumo. His is *Sentoryu*, which is a stone's throw sort of phonetic version of his home town. The *yokozuna*, Akebono, was born in Hawaii and named Chad by his parents. He doesn't look like any Chad I ever met.

Our seats were ours as long as nobody else thought they were unclaimed, and the best way to assure that is with your ass unwaveringly plunked onto the plastic. The second-best way is to place some sort of personal property on it as a signal that someone was there first. Unlike the expensive seats, one's ticket stub could not adjudicate disputes. We sat there for a few minutes, gazing longingly at all the vacant boxes begging for our butts down below, and then draped pieces of day-old newspaper over the seats and took off for ringside.

The remainder of the day was spent much like the previous one; staying one step ahead of the *gendarmes* down at ringside. When Kanesaku lumbered up to do battle, we cheered lustily.

It was truly gratifying to hear, at the end of the *basho*, that he had won his division. Eventually, the number of empty boxes dwindled down, as if in a mammoth game of musical chairs, and we were reduced to occupying what we had paid for up in the rafters. From that vantage point, the action under the lights is often upstaged by unruly children, men with more Kirin under their belts than manners, and the pall of smoke which accompanies nearly every enclosed event over here. Ganyu lost for a second straight time since our breakfast together, and I wonder if he has the UPH working for him, too, advising him against letting us live one more day. The three of us took the *Shinkansen* back, and, mindful of the fact that it was Bastille Day, shared a bottle of Pommery Champagne with our *nori-maki*.

Sunday, July 28, 1996 - E-mail letter to Inga Taylor

Dear Inga,

So, have you given up on finding another place to stay? Sounds like you need one worse than ever. By the way, I was in the USAF and I don't know of ANY tech school that's shorter than 2 months AFTER basic training is over, and that's the Staying-Awake-And-Keeping-Your-Trap-Shut-While-On-Guard-Duty School, a course she is bound to have to take several times before she passes it. Basic Training can't be less than 4 weeks, and probably 6-8, followed by whatever school they send her to. In addition, every recruiter lies his or her ass off just to get you to sign up, so she may have been told it was just a couple of months before she can see her bundle of terror, when in actual fact, the kid may be voting before setting eyes on Mama again. And if you do poorly in a school, or a part of a school, they don't just send you home, they make you repeat the school, or section of it right there on the spot, often using the promise of a week or

two of leave as an incentive to encourage your study habits. When she finally passes, and is sent to her regular duty station, she'll certainly be staying in a barracks until she can locate off-base housing for her and what will by then be the kid who no longer recognizes her. In short, JUST SAY NO!!! She ought to have family who will do that, and if she doesn't, she has no business dumping the child on you. Normally, I'm a milk-of-human-kindness kind of guy, but this is a time when you need to run screaming into the night and never look at her face again.

This morning, in about one-half hour, the apartments where we live are having a ceremony to celebrate the completion of repairs following the Great Hanshin Earthquake. Apparently, there will be a brief Shinto solemnity, including the salt and sake of purification, and then it's party down! Right. At eleven in the ayem.

We have another festival to go to later in the day, so we'll probably go easy on the sauce, and should go easy on the chow, as well. Within 2 months of Mata's arrival, she has ballooned up to the most she has ever weighed, including when she was pregnant with Raymond Burr. Okay, a cheap shot, but what the hell, it's just between the 2 of us (I sure hope!). When we went to the sumo tournament in Nagoya, it was a close call on the cellulite-puckered butt and thighs contest, traditionally held in an abandoned blimp hanger left over from Double-you-Double-you-Two.

Love,

Dennis

Sunday, August 11, 1996 - Kobe

School has been out less than three weeks and already I'm having withdrawal symptoms.

What will I do to cope with the next month and a half? I hope I'll do what I did this past Friday. At the end of each class last semester, I put my phone number on the board and announced that free English-speaking companionship was available upon call, no questions asked, no conditions, no grading, no cover, no minimum. It turned out that quite a few students showed a mild interest in a mid-vacation linguistic constitutional, and some actually made appointments on the spot. One such was fulfilled on Friday, as I met with four delightful Shoin women for lunch and an afternoon together on Rokko Island.

They chose the meeting place, since one of them, Yukiko Kazao, lived on the island, and it was a place I had never explored. That task can be accomplished in under five minutes, if only the places of marginal or higher interest are included in the itinerary. Not knowing that at the time, I arrived an hour and a half ahead of our date. Rokko is an island in Osaka Bay, immediately south of the eastern suburbs of Kobe, and made entirely of material dredged from the bay itself and deposited in a pile. That pile is named Rokko Island, and to give the powers that be credit, they have smoothed the pile down a mite, and built a lot of tall, modern buildings on it. I'm sure it is meant to be some sort of showplace to impress foreign business visitors, and it seems to have worked with Proctor and Gamble, which located their Japanese headquarters on the pile, from whence, I can guarantee you, they are making a pile. It is the second such island in Kobe; Port Island, about a mile to the west, being the first. On that first attempt, the planners appear to have tried to put residential and white-collar business locations cheek-by-jowl with the stevedores and the gritty realities of the docks. It didn't work, especially for the former types, who deal with business abstractions like numbers, and not the noise, congestion, pollution, and

physicality represented by those numbers. Rokko is still a Business Island, no doubt about that, but the abstractions are never confronted and challenged on this new and improved version. The island is set on two levels, and the upper, human level, never hears or sees the lower, dockside level, unless it makes an attempt to do so.

The preferred way to arrive on the island is by monorail, high above anything but The Big Picture. There is a bridge for traffic, but it is clogged with trucks during most of the daylight hours, and connects primarily to the realities of the Underworld. A strip down the center of the island is a pedestrian mall, with fountains and wading pools, as well as the odd tree and bush. On either side is shopping, much of it shamelessly aimed at the western patron. I saw so much Balsamic Vinegar that day that I thought for a moment I had been transported to Modena. There is a Wendy's there, as much to show the flag as anything, I suppose, since this is meant to be an upscale experience. There are several high-rise apartment buildings of 40-odd floors, and also some single dwellings of lavish size, by Japanese standards. The island has only been open since 1991, and yet it already has a run-down appearance. For a country which can't seem to stand to allow a scrap of wild nature to intrude in its cities without it being properly trimmed, controlled, and disciplined, the flora of Rokko Island seems to run unacceptably amok. Weeds thrust themselves between what were meant to be quaint cobblestones when they were laid, and shrubs neatly planted in rows along the boulevards are truly unkempt, and one wonders whether they have ever seen shears. Flowers planted to encircle the trees near the pools have been allowed to become dry and brown. Is Rokko Island another experiment the city powers have decided to give up on? Perhaps it was just the summer, but it looks like a place abandoned by all but the most

stubborn or dim. A few children splashed in the pools, and the scores of tennis courts (proper Wimbledon grass, too) seemed to have no waiting line. Stores were open, and what few shoppers I saw constituted a large concentration of foreign faces, perhaps 10%. The art museum looked deserted, and a couple of the upscale restaurants next to the Sheraton looked like they had been closed longer than just since last night's final patron was wrested from his seat and dispatched into the night.

One thing Rokko is known for now is a large government-financed and built homeless settlement to take care of people whose houses were destroyed in the earthquake. It was visible from the monorail as it slowed to approach the first island stop. Acres of tiny, two-room apartments in single-story lines lay on large vacant lots at dock level. The compounds (there is no nicer word for them) are sturdily fenced-in, as much to keep the occupants from wandering around Upstairs as to protect them from marauding mobs of penniless westerners staying in the Sheraton for \$300 a night. Of course, the incessant noise and aroma of the trucks is not too much for **these** residents to bear, or so it must have been decided by the people who chose this site for the warehousing of their fellow citizens, innocent of all crimes but that of not having enough money saved to rebuild on their own.

I met my students at noon, and it was wonderful to see them again. While I see Shoko (Hori) for three or four hours every week or two this summer, and have made an excursion to Kyoto with Miki and Ryoko two weeks ago, that's barely enough of a fix for an unregenerate junkie like me. For the record, they were Miho Ijuin, Kanako Adachi, the aforementioned Yukiko Kazao, and Shoko Oya, in an order chosen for reasons never to be revealed. They were

from two separate English I classes, and were 18 and 19 years of age. Their English was initially halting, but improved as the afternoon proceeded, a phenomenon I observe consistently on excursions such as these. Yukiko's skills were best, which eliminates **that** as a ranking consideration, and she was the most outgoing. She also lived on the 34th floor of an island skyscraper, to which we repaired after the afternoon's heat became too much for delicate young constitutions to endure.

They were from what are called "B" classes at Shoin. All incoming English students must take a placement test, and its results determine what class you will be assigned to once you begin studies. At the beginning of a school year, the teachers have the option of sending a student down to the next lower class, if her work appears to be clearly inferior to her peers, or recommending that she go up one level if she seems to be well ahead of others in her class. This is done in the first month of classes, and I participated in these follies this spring. A young woman being sent down has no voice in the decision, but a decision to be promoted may be a different thing, upon which teachers are divided. Many wish to take any shred of consent from the students, and make it entirely a faculty decision; others like to make it a shared decision, and I am one of the latter. I was astounded that the two groups of professors were not also defined culturally, as well, i.e., western teachers were consent-oriented, while eastern ones were more interested in maintaining the system, as well as the professorial prerogatives. Another lesson in the dangers of stereotyping, and one which I am destined not to have learned, I fear.

One of the curious conditions of the three levels of English classes (Super A, Regular A, and B) is that each class takes the same material, uses the same text and tape, but must be graded

on a different scale of numbers. The Super A classes must end up each semester with a class average of 87, the Regular A with 82, and B with 73. In addition, **no** student in a B class is permitted to receive a grade higher than 89, no matter how she may have excelled. My interpretation of these rules, and I am not alone in it, is that the system must be protected, and that the numbers must show that the system has correctly predicted performance by requiring that “performance” reports exactly mirror the predictions of the system. Cute, but people get crunched by the system, not just numbers. Last year, Nari Tsuda was a student in a B class I shared with a part-timer, Mac Decker. Since these particular first-year courses meet twice a week, Mac and I each had one period a week with them. We both wanted to put her course grade in the 90's, but if we had, it would have been changed by officials anyway, and we would have been seen as troublemakers. Well, actually, Mac **is** a troublemaker, and let me be the first to say it here publicly. Nari got an 89 from us, and it was a shame, since her English was significantly better than several students in my Regular A class who got about the same grade as a result of having to pump up averages in order to get to an 82 for the whole class.

When I suggested that a few of my students be “promoted” at the beginning of this semester, I encouraged them to accept the offer, not just because they were going to improve their English at a greater pace in a faster class, but that their grade, for the same amount of achievement, would be considerably higher in a higher-ranked class. That was a tough sell, mainly because their English was not yet at a level to understand that little complexity of life at Shoin (and for all I know, at every university in Japan). I nominated five for promotion, and **received** two demotees. Of the five I wanted to send up, two rejected it outright, one said she

would go up, but only to a class I was teaching (what a dear, perceptive child!), which was an impossibility, since the hours were in conflict. One jumped at the offer and I haven't seen her again, which is probably good news. And one, Etsuko Katayama, opted to go up, but then wanted to come back after two or three weeks. We worked it out with the other teachers, and she's again my best B student, and apparently very happy in this class.

So my companions for this day were B students, as well, but none of them could masquerade in a Regular A class for very long, I fear. However, it was summer, and none of us concerned ourselves over such trivialities. We laughed a lot, ate a lot (curry and Tandoori Chicken at an Indian restaurant), took maddenedly posed pictures in front of signs, fountains, and what few protuberances could pass for landmarks on that manufactured island. By the end of the afternoon, I had to go, and Miho had a part-time job to endure that night, so we traded addresses and promised to get together again before the summer ended.

Sunday, August 11, 1996 - Kobe

I know it's the same day as the previous entry. Whaddaya gonna do about it? A few things happened in the last few weeks that didn't seem worth sitting down and writing about at the time, and this assorted entry will probably bear out those first intuitions. Another shouting incident occurred on Monday, August 5, when I was out walking with Shoko. We had just stopped at Kobe Grocers, the primary foreign food emporium in town, to get a few staples, like root beer and pretzels, and as we waited at an intersection for the light to change, a man behind us and to the left about 15 feet began shouting at the top of his lungs, and apparently in our direction. There were three or four other people waiting at the crosswalk with us, but they were

well-distanced from us, though not by design (we were the last to arrive). They all turned around to look in his direction, but I didn't, and neither did Shoko. In a few seconds, he was just at our right, and began shouting again. Mercifully, the light changed, and we bounded across the four-lane blacktop in spite of the 90+ degree heat. He didn't follow, and didn't appear to continue his diatribe, and I asked Shoko what he was saying. She claimed not to understand his words, and maybe that's true.

Earlier today I mentioned another trip to Kyoto, normally a chapter in itself on these pages. I had asked Shoko if she would like to go to Kyoto sometime, since we are casting about this summer for interesting things to do together which will also prompt a few hours of English conversation for her edification. She said she almost never goes there, since it's too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. Hades could not be too hot for a walk on the *Tetsugaku-nomichi*, and many fine religious people would probably affirm that the Pit of Brimstone is overcrowded with philosophers, anyway. We'll probably go to Nara some day instead. This particular Kyoto trip was a direct result of my previously mentioned end-of-class request for company during summer. Four students from my Regular-A English I class volunteered, and we set a date: Monday, July 29. When the date and time arrived, two backed out for plausible, though inexcusable, reasons, so Mata and I went with Miki Morotomi and Ryoko Yamawaki. Ryoko was leaving Thursday for a summer in Australia for English language immersion, so we had to accommodate her departure date. Miki was the unnamed student mentioned earlier who was offered a step up to the Super-A level class, but turned it down because I wasn't teaching it. Of course, she has already stockpiled enough brownie points with me to earn Charlie Manson the

Miss Congeniality Award in the 1997 Miss America Pageant. So this trip was overkill, if that was the purpose.

When we planned the outing over lunch at the end of the semester, I had told them I had never been to the *Kinkaku-ji* Temple (with the famed Gold Pavilion), which is on the northwest side of the city, and wanted to see it. I told them that my favorite place was the *Ginkaku-ji*, preceded by a stroll with the philosophers. None of them had been to either place, and most of them, though having lived in Japan all their 18 or 19 years -- some a half-hour train ride away -- had visited Kyoto less often in their lives than I had in less than a year. We made a deal: they would do their homework and be prepared to transport me to the first-mentioned temple, and I would introduce them to the second. They also volunteered to bring *bentos* for all. Even though we only visited two temples and one path along a canal, the day seemed rushed and un-Kyoto-like. We started with a cab ride to the *Tetsugaku-no-michi*, but the driver deposited us about three-quarters of the way up the walk, and before we could even get into the mood of the place, we were at the *Ginkaku-ji*, and had to switch moods. The two are similar, but not the same, and the road connecting them is lined with a gauntlet of fast food and souvenir stands that would make the Jersey Shore look like Point Lobos. The fact that it was a Monday had thinned out the crowds, and it **was** pretty much the peak of the summer heat, but that wasn't it, exactly. I felt hurried by my companions, who seemed more interested in having their ticket punched at the Silver Pavilion ("Been there; done that."), than trying to find a part of their soul that purred happily in its proximity. That takes a little quiet time, at least for me, and it was not going to happen today. I would lag behind all the way, both on the Path, as well as the Temple, but that's

just being obstructive, when done to excess. I joined the party as we left the *Ginkaku-ji*, and searched for a cool spot to devour our lunch. It was both tasty and bountiful, and I drank and entire liter and a half of water before we proceeded to the next sight.

The *Kinkaku-ji* is more famous outside Japan than the Silver counterpart, has larger grounds, but I disliked it on sight. Not the entire grounds, but the garish Gold-leaf plated Pavilion, looking like something featuring Siegfried and Roy. On the path as one approaches sight of it, the first thing one sees is the pond on which it sits, a pond which could only be described as septic in its splendor. Every time a toilet in Kyoto flushes, a slight ripple is seen spreading from one edge of the lake. The pictures I took of it are in ghastly living color, and remind me of some Japanese attempt at a Green Bay Packers mascot: the Green and Gold. There are apparently some lovely statues in the Gold Pavilion, and a famous mural on the ceiling, but it was off limits on that day, though the myriad card shops, souvenir stands, and food vendors weren't. And they're on the temple grounds themselves, which might account for the lower admission charge there. The place left a bad taste in my mouth, and I hadn't even drunk the water.

What I suppose will be the final entry today concerns having found a dentist who speaks passable English. He has the improbable name of Dr. Kitano -- improbable because the part of Kobe where his office is located is called Kitano-cho. It's like a dentist at 6th Avenue and 31th Street in New York calling himself Dr. Manhattan. Sure, pal; just step away from that drill for a moment and let me see some ID. I'm wondering whether "Dr. Kitano" is in the Japanese version of the witness protection program, and the guy who'll be chopping away at my incisors went by

the mob name of Akira the Thumb. Another thing: when I went in for an appointment, the office was deserted. No patients, and the two assistants seemed surprised to see what appeared to be a paying customer walk through the door that they stood transfixed for a full five seconds, before excitedly summoning "Dr. Kitano." No one was in either of the two chairs, though one of them, in fairness, seemed to have a lot of electrodes attached to it, and probably was connected to his old profession of persuasion and enforcement. Perhaps it was a souvenir he couldn't part with for sentimental reasons. A couple of Shoin students, Naomi and Maki, work as assistants for a dentist closer to the campus, and they told me that I needed to plan well ahead to get an appointment with their Dr. Takahashi. Kitano looked ready to pry me open and start work then and there. We chatted very briefly, but all I wanted to know was whether he could communicate in English passably, which he could. His calendar seemed wide open, and I could make an appointment for any time I wished. I chose next Friday at 10:00 for the *dies irae*. You'll probably hear about it here first, unless my screams travel faster.

Friday, August 16, 1996 - Kobe

My desire to lose weight, mentioned earlier, has taken the form of a plan, as many things must, if I am to accomplish them at all. Or so I believe. The goals I have set are modest, but will not achieve themselves: 2 kilos a month for four months, with official weigh-ins every second Sunday, where a one-kilo reduction should be registered. In the first 2 weeks I went from 91 to 87, and have stayed there for the past month. The next weigh-in is in two days, and it looks like I will have gone down one more kilo, but I am beginning to suspect that having tooth extractions is a very desperate weight loss tactic.

That, of course, is my long-winded and tiresome way of saying that I actually kept my appointment with Dr. Kitano, even arriving early. Several things were different this time. On his wall was a yellowing picture of the 1936 graduating class from the Northwestern University School of Dentistry, and one “N. Kitano” shown on the fourth row. It looked much like a younger version of the man I had talked to earlier, but my arithmetic figured that, even if he had graduated at the age of 10, his shaking hands would now be 70, which seemed a very high estimate for the Dr. Kitano currently behind the mask. On my first visit, everything looked old and decrepit, too, from the woodwork to the floors, and I feared that a closer inspection on my second visit would reveal drills operated by foot-powered treadles, and cheap brandy as an anesthetic. My first impression was that this was the dental counterpart of Dr. Nick Riviera from “The Simpsons” (“Any operation, \$129.95!”), a physician whose time spent talking to the medical examiner exceeded that spent talking to his patients, at least the ones still limber. My normal dread of dentists, pathological in its most benign form, was fed by the UPH into something truly magnificent to behold. And Dr. Nick saw it in my eyes the way Mike Tyson could see it in the eyes of most of his opponents when he was champion. The “give me one valid reason why a sane person would go through with this” look.

But things **were** different in his office this time. There were patients! One was being worked on, one was just finishing up, and one was in the waiting room, and her look was not at all like mine; stoical, perhaps, but not stricken. And the receptionist who met me spoke excellent English, and was very kind and calming. Dr. Kitano (I’d better stop calling him “Dr. Nick”, for now at least) came out and guided me to a chair. I explained things, he had a peek, and did some

x-rays. As I looked around the office, most of the equipment appeared to be very modern, and there was another dentist working at another chair. The prognosis for my big front teeth, prominent features of my face since when I was a boy, was terminal, as I suspected, and Dr. Kitano suggested a partial denture as replacement for them, and other previously eliminated choppers. When do you want to start, he wanted to know. I figured that I was there, an accomplishment in itself, why not do it now? We did, more painlessly than I had expected, and **much** less so than I had feared. Plus, Dr. Kitano was solicitous to the point of suspicion. Had he taken out more than he had intended, like my tongue and tonsils? Now, as the novocaine has worn off and the Tylenol kicked in, I realize what a jackass I was for waiting this long.

Sunday, August 18, 1996 - Kobe

When I was single, I dated several public school teachers, and all of them were fond of relating the standard riddle, "What are the three best things about teaching school?" The answer, of course, is "June, July, and August." I used to laugh sympathetically, but now I can't imagine what they were talking about. Being without my students is agony. Like Caitlin Thomas's autobiography, *Leftover Life to Kill*, that's what I have until late September. Of course, I **do** know what they were talking about. It was the American public school, and the role of teacher as everything parents and society have decided was too much trouble to do with their children. I'm now living in a society in which, generally, parents discipline their children and the culture gives them a set of norms it expects them to follow. And that makes me skip to work everyday, rather than think of ways to skip work.

Saturday, August 24, 1996 - Kobe

Reason #418 to Lead you to Believe you are no longer a Teenager: the *Playboy* (or *Playgirl*) on the nightstand has been replaced with a glassful of your teeth. Dr. Nick had a little surprise for my follow-up appointment yesterday: both an upper and lower partial sitting in a glass by the chair as I settled in for some perfunctory poking on his part, and grunting on mine. The teeth rested there like frail old specimens brought out every semester to eager young dental students. However, when he shoved them in my mouth, I knew an important, carefree part of my life was forever over. And when he attempted to extricate them for what he termed “a minor adjustment” I sensed he may have learned his chairside manner with Mr. Goodwrench. The crowbar was finally not brought to bear upon them, but the final bill certainly was brought to bear upon me, though only in a vaguely suggestive manner. His English-speaking assistant, who also turns out to be Mrs. Kitano, merely showed it to me, with the grand total of 300,000 yen featured prominently, much in the manner of the Italian Inquisition, where Cardinal Bellarmine would simply have to show the instruments of torture to some poor wretch, and penitent capitulation would ensue. It’s nice to put myself in the company of Galileo, since I am sure no one else would think of doing it.

After 24 hours with them in my mouth, minus a few minutes downtime for cleaning and attempted removal of the Mitsubishi logo on outer surface of the left upper incisor, I am falling into a depression over this seeming monumental change in my life. Dinner last night was quite alarming. I can chew more, and taste less, which is not a good trade-off in my book. The plate covering my palate when the upper partial is in place completely blocks whatever flavor nuances could be gathered there. Tasting wine is a complete waste of time. Luckily, I had a nearly

tasteless 1995 Frascati in the fridge -- my prize in the monthly *Kansai Time Out* wine quiz -- and I didn't notice any difference. But when I poured a glass of the 1985 Chateau Leoville-Barton I had opened the night before, this magnificent claret had a hole in its flavor profile which nearly brought me to tears. After two attempted sips, I poured the remaining wine back into the bottle, an act I can scarcely remember doing once in the past five years. I've traded the most intense sensations of taste for a smile, and a rather grotesque, ill-practiced one at that.

The textures of food are missing, too, since they are often discerned in the interplay between the tongue and the palate, and part of the fabric of texture is the practical information of when enough chewing has been done to permit safe swallowing. I began to wonder if Mama Cass had an upper lip like mine, and am I destined to follow her into the ignominy of a humorous obituary? I have also had to re-learn speaking the English language, something my students have every right to expect me to exhibit excellence in by the beginning of the next semester.

Tuesday, August 27, 1996 - Kobe

Sunday night, just before eleven, I received a telephone call from Shoko, one of the few Shoin students confident enough to hazard her English ability on a voice-only medium of communication. It sounded like she was giggling uncontrollably, and I asked her why she was laughing. What she told me, barely comprehensibly, was that she was **crying**, and as I listened again, she sounded distraught and inconsolable. How could I have been so wrong? Of course, I apologized for the mistake, but Shoko wanted to see me desperately. My God, what could it be? A death in the family? An unexpected pregnancy in the family? And how did it involve me, being biologically incapable of impregnation, and morally incapable of murder (I like to think)?

We agreed, through sobs, that the next day at 1:00 would be all right. It was a very unsettling event, coming just before bed, and the sleep which would be elusive that night.

We were both early the next day, and Shoko was calm and composed. We walked to Meriken Park, and sat on a bench under a tree. With a year and a half until graduation, she and her father had a falling-out (**her** exact phrase, I am pleased to note) over her post-graduation plans. She and I have talked about them often, and she has been fairly consistent and focused when talking about them. She wants to work in Japan for a couple of years to save money, and continue improving her English, and then go to the U.S. to work in some aspect of the entertainment industry, West Coast version. Being far from the most pragmatic person who ever drew breath, I find it a scenario with, at least, possibility. Her father found it an absurd notion, and that seemed to be the flash point between them. Not knowing the dynamics of a Japanese family, I am loath to do anything more than offer Shoko more than encouragement and a reflection of my belief in her abilities. I did say that we would always be there for her if she made it to the U.S. in the future, providing we weren't still in Japan.

Working in Hollywood is Shoko's dream, and no matter what you might think about its remoteness, it's far worse to have no dream at all. It just seems to me that Tadaichi (her father, with whom we have a date this Thursday) wants her to abandon her dream before she gets a chance to find out whether she can achieve it. I've followed those paths my dreams dictated before, sometimes stumbling, sometimes dashing blindly, sometimes striding resolutely, and from the vantage point of experience, I wouldn't have had it any other way. I've reached this station on the line having done a lot of very different things and having found them interesting,

and I couldn't imagine how dull life would have been without dreams and desires to follow, no matter that many of them flew faster and farther out ahead of me than my pursuit could carry me. In my failures has been the richness of my life, and without them, my all too ordinary existence would have been even more prosaic.

Thursday, August 29, 1996 - Kobe

A few months ago my mother wrote to report the occasion of the death of her brother, Charles Wiltsee -- my Uncle Charlie. Such an affectionate-sounding name might lead one to believe that the source of some wonderful childhood memories was gone forever, but such is not the case. Don't get me wrong, there were no ghastly memories of cruelty and abuse either. Just nothing; a cipher. Uncle Charlie became an *unperson* in our family not long after George Orwell gave us the term, though his name was kept around to do service in the cause of intimidation and guilt. Apparently, early in my life, Charles had done the unpardonable; divorced his wife, Lavonne, and left her and my cousin, Dave. In my mother's family, in the middle-to-late 1940's, that was a capital crime, and his name suddenly disappeared from meaningful social discourse around the dinner table, or on long drives when boredom would scream that another topic was needed to keep us from flinging ourselves out the doors at 50 MPH. I remember the exact time when he became an unperson for me, or, more precisely, when I was directed to make him an unperson. Sometime in my first elementary school years, my evening bedside prayers were altered subtly. "Now I lay me down to sleep" I would mumble drowsily on my knees just before climbing in, and then follow it with a list of those deserving The Almighty's protection that night. Part of that list, from as long as I had been able to learn it, had been "Aunt Lavonne, Dave,

Uncle Charlie.” Suddenly, that last name was to be excised from the roll of the blessed, and by inference I suppose, joined the list of the damned. No longer was I directed to pray each night for the soul of Uncle Charlie.

No one I know who is currently alive could give me what I would regard as the straight scoop on the man, and a more complete picture of his life and his iniquities. Certainly my mother could give what she would regard as an authoritative recounting, but I have long since regarded her version of history as self-serving and only marginally reliable. I believe I saw Uncle Charlie once in my adult years, but I can’t recall the context or reason. He appeared a bit shriveled, like his father, and quite tame. It was hard to imagine this was a man whose influence was suspected of being so powerful that he had to be obliterated from family history.

After he became an unperson, contrary to the Orwellian version, his legend remained alive as what was intended to be a cautionary tale for those of us still being formed. I remember the harshest epithet my mother would ever use against me for misbehaving: “Oh, you’re just like your Uncle Charlie!” It reappeared in my junior high and high school years so often that it seemed like a mantra she used, hoping that its repeating sufficiently often would be enough to ward off the evil that it seemed to also be predicting. But, of course, she was right; twenty years later I was divorced after seven years of awkward, mismatched marriage.

According to the letter, he died an alcoholic, broken man, apparently without a friend in the world, but that’s just one version of events, as I said earlier. If I mourn his death, as I find it difficult to do, I suppose I mourn never finding out more about him than the totalitarian slogans brandished about him in my youth. There had to be more to him than the skewed picture painted

by a vindictive old woman still doing the bidding of her father. But I never found out about him, in part because I had been pushed away from him, and he from me, before either of us had a chance. I wonder if he ever knew what his name meant to me when I was young, and how it was being used. As I think about it, I also know that I have two nieces, Jennifer and Stephanie, with whom any contact is mediated by the Machiavellian figure of my mother, their grandmother. Have I, unwittingly, become their Uncle Charlie? Is my name the part of an incantation meant to bring a shiver of fear to their bones? I'll probably never know.

Friday, August 30, 1996 - Kobe

Mata and I, together and separately, spend a lot of time with the Hori family -- Shoko's parents and sisters. Just as Shoko and I have a weekly "date" for conversation, Mata and Kyoko get together at about the same frequency for the same purpose. Occasionally, one or another sister will join us, and once, Tadaichi took us all out to dinner. I will reciprocate next month before he goes to Germany on a business trip. Yesterday was an event to which we were invited, also hosted by Tadaichi on his home turf: business. He is the #3 man on the West Japan Electric System Company, a one-thousand employee contracting company headquartered in Osaka, and the company was holding a function for its upper management people, planned by Tadaichi. There would be a concert held in late afternoon, and then a buffet dinner to follow. Hiroko Hori, the violinist, described the musicians as a world-famous violin duo and their accompanist, and Mata and I were the only non-company people included on the short invitation list.

Hiroko's English is improving, but still pretty monosyllabic, and when she named the concert hall where the performances would occur, it was not a familiar one. Actually, concert

closet would have been nearer the mark. A ten-foot wide set of risers had been set up in a small ballroom on the third floor of a hotel near the Osaka *Shinkansen* station, with one hundred standard hotel dining room chairs arrayed in a simulated audience formation. The piano was a Yamaha upright, recently tuned. Tadaichi was scurrying about with last-minute details, so we sat on the second row and awaited the first bar. I had also been told that the three Hori maidens would be presenting bouquets to the performers, and that Kyoko, Tadaichi's wife, had hoped that I would bring my camera for the occasion. Of course, I did.

The violinists were a Viennese and his Japanese wife, and the pianist was from Kobe. Just as "hall" was an overstatement in the grandeur of the venue, "world famous" (other than for their requisite fifteen minutes) was more than their musicianship deserved. They sounded like competent orchestral musicians, professionals, with instruments inferior to their abilities. It turned out that they were both members of the Osaka Symphony, a professional organization, but that they had quit to strike out on their own in the world. Apparently, they would use Vienna as their home base, and this was a, if not *the* farewell concert they were playing in Japan. I hoped they've been able to save up a lot of money, since their acquittal of anything more taxing than a simple encore piece left a lot to be desired.

What interested me about the afternoon, however, was my belief that it was unlikely to ever take place in an American company of the same size. Glancing back over my shoulder during the playing, I noticed quite a few closed eyes, and not likely with rapture. It looked like they were riding home alone on the train after a long day in the office, and catching a few winks. This concert was somebody's idea of an activity which would uplift the executives of the

company, and not something most of them had any desire to experience. In Kansas City, the company would probably sponsor a night to see the Royals play baseball, or one on a newly-docked river boat, for gambling and drinking. The decision would most likely be made in the direction of what the people want, rather than what might improve them. In this way, at least, a Japanese corporation is much like a description from Plato's *Republic*, with a rigid stratification of people according to their perceived value, and attempts made to improve their character by group activities appropriate to their level. The populism of the U.S. is very alien here; the idea that either people know best what will improve them, or that they ought to have the right to choose what activities to engage in under the company umbrella, even if they lead to their own demise.

After the concert was over, and the bouquets came out so quickly that I could only manage one shot of three bowing Hori butts in unison presentation, we went to the next ballroom where a sumptuous buffet table was set up. It was preceded by traditional speeches featuring company notables, ending with a "*Kampai!*" The food was excellent, and after a few drinks, several company men (the only women in attendance were the Hori women, Mata, and the wife and daughter of the #4 man) approached us to try out their halting English and exchange business cards. The only worrisome time was at the end, after quite a bit of alcohol flowed freely into the systems of those in attendance, and the second set of speeches was made. One man, egged on jovially by others around him, ended his rambling dissertation with upraised hands (and he was joined in this gesture by every other man in the room but me) and the fervent shouts of ***Banzai!*** ***Banzai! Banzai!*** Jesus, I thought, are they all coming after me? The last time I saw that was in

a WW Two movie, and the guys followed it by crashing their explosive-laden Mitsubishi Zeroes into various American warships, and Chuck Heston's son got shot out of the sky. My liver had already taken a direct hit from all the "Kampai" and its aftermath of Japanese drink-pouring hospitality, but no one was looking my way, which was a relief. Perhaps, the UPH whispered, I was expected to make some sort of retaliatory speech, ending with upraised fist and the shout of "Remember Pearl Harbor!" But "Banzai" was not directed at me, or anyone else, it was just some sort of psyching up cheer, tying company performance to national pride. We do it too, at Labor Day or Memorial Day company picnics, though American companies are too cheap to lay on the kind of spread these folks did. I just hope the violinists didn't cost them too much.

Sunday, September 1, 1996 - Kobe

In the past few months, I have detected that the number of persons actively corresponding with me outside Japan has been reduced to zero. No one had the manners to formalize cessation of pleasantries, though Julian did announce that he had a job, a rarity in his life sufficient to warrant notice, and excuse him briefly. Everyone else trickled off, apparently bored with the novelty, or my understated prose. Inga contributed exactly 5 sentences of illumination last month, and Gloria hasn't written since **before** I went to Bali, in early February. My son and brothers have dropped by the wayside, as have various former students who made seeming sincere pledges of a stream of intellectual stimulation for the duration of my exile. I never knew how important this contact would be to me, though I recognized it, in a fragmentary way, with each letter which arrived. Mata is satisfied to get what she wants from books, but there's a static element to the printed word which leaves me still thirsty. I guess I want to feel that my

interaction with words can change them, or the reality behind them. Writing to a friend, and both giving and receiving comments on our lives, changes those lives in some way, and that's what human contact is about. Reading a book may change my life, but that's a one-way relationship; I want to have a chance to do the same thing, and maybe that's the message in my diminished correspondents. They want neither to change, nor be changed by, me. It sounds marginally plausible, which means there may be some other explanation worthy of my attention.

Of course, whatever I give them may not be worth the small investment they make in maintaining contact with me, and they have decided (*en masse*, the UPH would say) to make the investment somewhere else more profitable, such as in front of the tube, or behind a beer. In a way, I have always felt I had to make excessive concessions to coerce the continuation of ongoing friendships. I am not the kind of person to whom people naturally gravitate, so I have to tilt the playing field to produce some unnatural gravity. I'm not directly in the lives of people at a distance, and am unable to get my hands on the playing field to skew things in my favor. I guess the fairest playing field is the one in which people are permitted to display their uncoerced preferences, and an empty mailbox in CompuServe is the result of such fairness.

This afternoon, I go to a concert of the very amateur Akashi community orchestra in Osaka with the Hori women. I know that there is an element of bribery afoot in all our contact. Their own private English tutor/companion is what I have turned out to be, uncompensated except by their company and kindness, which is less than most language tutors charge. While I feel a great deal of fondness and affection for Shoko, and, I think, she for me, I am certainly replaceable in the lives of the others. I am a way to practice, dragging out their tattered

Japanese/English dictionaries to try out an arcane pronunciation, and have me pass on its accuracy. At least Shoko and I try to talk about real things that real people concern themselves and their inner lives with. I must remember to thank her for that today.

Friday, September 6, 1996 - Kobe

As exasperating as the bullshit of others is, I find myself most offended by the bullshit I try to tell myself. That became clear to me this morning at about 3:30, near the end of a sleepless night of my own doing. It began at 6:00 Thursday evening, when Mata and I had one of our annual "episodes." They all have the same general form, and usually last about 12-24 hours. I get violently, profanely angry at something innocuous, usually something she has done, and we go into a deep chill after a perfunctory trading of comments on our respective parentage. I never send any violence toward Mata, even indirectly, but both of us seem to have summoned from within us spectres of a distant, and distasteful, past. Hers center on her father, mine on my mother, and it is all too convenient to see in each other, at this date, our tormentor of earlier, more vulnerable years. After indulging myself in this way, I quickly begin to feel the deepest feelings of shame, guilt, and, eventually, full-fledged self-loathing and disgust. It's quite a menagerie, but I seem to be programmed to react this way, and take it all very seriously at the time.

So last night we lay on our king-size futon, miles apart in every way except our strangely similar beginnings in this world, and slept not a wink. We also spoke not a word, a pattern which has continued to this moment, 9:57 A.M. During those hours before daybreak, I began to run various scenarios through my mind as plausible courses of action for the following day.

Everything from suicide (my father's choice twenty-one years ago) to moving into my office until Mata's flight back to Kansas City departs on the 24th. There were a lot of others entertained, including motel rooms and my own rapid exit for the U.S. I suddenly brought myself up short with the realization that they were all absurd fabrications of a mind, often an extraordinarily funny mind, dear reader, which takes things too seriously. How can that be? At least, if my sense of humor deserts me during these stressful times, it would be good to have an operating rational brain to call upon. But usually, they both go over the side at the first portent of bumpy seas, and I'm left with nothing but my irrational raising, and the UPH. Now there's a pair who'll get you into trouble if you let them, and I've let them far too often. Perhaps recognizing my own bullshit for what it was last night, instead of giving it respectful consideration, is a hopeful sign. I sure need one about now.

Thursday, September 12, 1996 - Kobe

On Sunday, we accompanied Shoko and Hiroko to Nara for what was Mata's first visit. Among Kansai natives and residents, there seems to be a strong difference of opinion concerning which is the more enjoyable place to visit: Nara or Kyoto. It is almost a litmus test of cultural sensitivity, invariably administered by True Believers in one site or another, and, as usual, I find myself on the fence. Maybe I just gain some sort of pleasure from satisfying no one. Shoko likes Nara for climatological and zoological reasons, though I find only the latter compelling. Kyoto is more enchanting, more spiritually enriching, but requires more effort to appreciate and be rewarded by. Nara is more immediately appealing, more relaxing to visit, more comfortable.

The deer are a dominant part of Nara's landscape, especially if you get within a wafer's

throw of the park. I remembered them from my April visit, and suggested that we take our own supply of deer cookies, remembering also the outrageous local prices charged for treats to be quickly processed into little pellets we invariably step on later. A few weeks ago, Mata found some rejected 3-inch in diameter wafers being sold by a small bakery near our apartment, and bought a garbage bag full for 300 yen. Her intention was to munch them along with ice cream in the evening, but that was a week before we obtained our bathroom scale, changing our culinary life forever. Most of the wafers were getting stale, and Kobe's ice cream supply was remaining unsold, so I suggested we take the former with us to Nara for the deer. We subdivided the booty into six smaller shopping-size bags (anticipating Kyoko and Keiko as companions as well, though various engagements called them away at the last moment), which greatly reduced the spectacle we made on the trains we rode there.

It seems a part of human nature to desire physical contact with other animals. Other than creatures we have demonized through myth, like snakes from the Garden of Eden, we reach out to other breathing things, even at our peril. And often at theirs. It wasn't enough, on Sunday, to feed the deer, I wanted to feel their wet snouts brush my hand as a deer cookie disappeared, or rub their faces and backs. I wanted to feel connected to them in a way that culture has taken away from me forever, maybe to let them know, if I could, that in my soul, they were a part of my world. That's too much for a deer to figure out, I'm afraid, so I guess deer cookies and a pat on the rump is all I can do for them. Perhaps I could, at least, try not to think of venison in their presence.

Monday, September 16, 1996 - Kobe

I have embarked on a two-month overkill of piano concerts. I was astounded to discover, last December, the Sviatoslav Richter was playing two solo recitals and an orchestra concert in Osaka that season, though the only tickets left were 18,000 yen. At that time, I was still thinking in dollars instead of experiences, and couldn't justify spending what was then about \$170 to hear **anyone** play **any** instrument, including Gabriel. It would be a different outcome this time, but neither of them is on this winter's schedule, as far as I know. Between mid-September and mid-November, I'll go to about 16 concerts, and only one has nary a keyboard in sight. Not all the artists will be foreigners, either; more than half the performers have Japanese names, and only one I had heard of before (Mari Kumamoto). Mata will be in the states for most of this time, so I will attend alone some of the time, and some of the time I'll invite a Shoin student as a reward (or punishment) for classroom work. It will be a good opportunity for them to practice English, something most of them take few pains to accomplish.

The series started on Saturday, the 7th, with a recital by five (count 'em, **five!**) young Japanese women pianists, just beginning their professional careers. For the occasion, I bought four tickets and invited one of my students, Naomi Nakagawa and her choice of a friend. Naomi is shy and sensitive about her English ability, which is better than she thinks, a point I tried to make to her all night. She is in my English Composition class, and through the journal she keeps as a regular assignment, I have come to like and appreciate her. She also has taken piano lessons for most of her young life, and loves to listen to music in her room at home. We exchanged letters in the weeks preceding the concert, and had an enjoyable time, eating at an American hamburger joint -- Carl's Jr. -- after it was over. The pianists varied in their preparation, but all

were quite competent, and the duo-pianists who concluded the program were positively rambunctious in their enthusiastic performances of a Rachmaninoff suite.

On Saturday, the 14th, American Richard Goode, whose work was well known and greatly appreciated by me, played a solo recital at my favorite place, Izumi Hall. I had recently discovered a small cafe run by an American, Paul, located in the Tenma district of Osaka, and Mata and I went there after the concert for some pasta and pizza, both made completely from scratch. From now on, Shakey's is just for comic relief; this is the real thing!

On my first return to America, in late February, I had seen a tall, long-haired young westerner in the departure lounge at Kansai Airport waiting for the same plane I was. He was, I knew instantly, the Principal Cellist of the Century Orchestra Osaka, my favorite band hereabouts, and I was suddenly struck with the desire to thank him for all the wonderful music he and his colleagues were giving us (or selling us, to be honest, but I'm a very willing customer). How do people feel about being accosted in a public place by a loony stranger with a wacky tale to relate? You don't have to tell me, so I paused to gather my senses and sit back down. Besides, I was probably mistaken. He's certainly someone else. When I went to the counter to be certain that my frequent flyer miles were being toted up, I glanced over at him, and saw that he was carrying a cello (what were the chances now?) with a Century Orchestra sticker on it. Like an idiot, I went over to him and thanked him on behalf of music lovers everywhere for the splendid work of the orchestra. He was astonished, that was certain, but also genuinely pleased, and I just talked briefly before returning to where I had been sitting, just to let him know I wasn't an insurance salesman or a Moonie. I never told him my name, nor asked his, and that was that.

While I saw him often at Century Orchestra concerts on stage, we never exchanged another word, and I desired nothing further. However, he was at the Richard Goode recital, and during the intermission, Mata and I happened to walk out by his seat, and I smiled and nodded at him. We retired to the bar for a glass of water (poor wine selection), and in a few minutes the cellist came up to us to say hello. He said he recognized me, but didn't know the context of our acquaintance. I told him about the airport, and he remembered immediately, and with apparent joy. We introduced ourselves all around, and discovered that he was from around Chicago, and named Peter. We also expressed our admiration for what was shaping up as a stupendous evening of music-making by the artist onstage, and Peter said he was sitting with Marsha Goode, the pianist's wife, and would we like to go backstage to meet him after it was over. I have to tell you, that was the **last** thing I wanted to do, since those occasions are extremely awkward for me. If there is a God, it is like what I imagine I will feel when I first get to exchange pleasantries. What do you say? "Hey, I like what you did with the Grand Canyon." I guess it's a desire to respect the privacy of people whose work I admire, or at least recognize as being excellent. And asking for an autograph is truly beyond the pale. I know Mata harbors no such neuroses, having had them crowded out years ago by genuine psychoses, and she effectively answered for both of us with an enthusiastic "yes!" At the end of the concert, Marsha Goode found **us**, having been briefed by Peter beforehand that we were expatriates from Kansas City, a place where her husband plays regularly in the Friends of Chamber Music series. She was an extraordinarily friendly, open, delightful person, and soon we were in tow backstage. Her husband was kind, also, and I noticed that his hands were quite reddened from the rigors of the evening's labors.

Mata got her autograph, I muttered something incomprehensible, and we both thanked Peter and Marsha for their thoughtfulness. Next week, it's Awadagin Pratt, another American.

In this land of festivals, one I had heard of last semester was the Danjiri Festival in Kishiwada, a suburb of Osaka. It takes place on the weekend of the 14th and 15th of September, and we went yesterday. I like to have Shoin students accompany us, since they can usually be trusted to give a decent, English-language summary of the history and activities we'll be witnessing. When I mentioned it to Shoko (angling for a volunteer, but getting none), she said it was the most dangerous festival in Japan; one at which people are killed every year. About half of them are participants, and half spectators, so it sounded like my kind of party. It certainly would be an antidote to the sand gardens of Kyoto, or the Path of Philosophy. It was the end of summer, and I was ready for the Garden of Gore (and not Al and Tipper, either). The student who first told me about it, Yukiko Nishioka, lives in the next-door town, so I wrote to her in July about being our guide, but never heard from her until, literally, the day before. And, of course, she had something else to do. So did Noriko, also from Osaka, and I was beginning to suspect the lurid tales about it were true. The day came, and we arose early and ventured off on a rail line we had never ridden, from a terminal we had never seen, to a destination we wouldn't be able to recognize when we arrived.

Reading up on it during the train ride, I discovered it was an old harvest tradition, thanking the appropriate gods for a good harvest, if that's what it was, or trying to build up brownie points for next year, if things were pretty puny this time around. There were 32 *danjiri*, or carved wooden floats, pulled around town by hundreds of people wearing special costumes,

and they all ended up at one of the town's two shrines (Kishiwada's population is about 200,000, so it's got a life of its own, separate from that as a satellite of The Big Daikon), from whence, in the evening, a lantern procession would emanate. Pretty tame stuff, and I wondered if I was reading the wrong pages of the book. Maybe there's another death-dealing festival with a similar-sounding name. Reading on, I found that the carnage and dismemberment arose from the manner in which the floats are pulled around town. The *danjiri* are tall, heavy, painstakingly carved, and covered with people who have various tasks, most of which involve egging on the transportation teams to greater speed. Drummers and flautists are crammed in the float's hollow core, and in the rear of one, I spied two cases of Kirin beer as fuel. The book said that the floats careen around the town's many sharp corners, and the teams vie for how dangerous and precipitous they can make the journey for all concerned. A fast-moving *danjiri*, toppled by centrifugal force on a crowded corner, could produce a highly respectable Maim Index. Arnold might want to look into a *danjiri* theme for his next movie. He could even recycle some of his old lines into the new context: "I'll be back -- with more sake!"

The part of town where the action takes place is pretty small, so Mata and I were able to take a walking tour, even in the crowded conditions of the final day, and camped out at curbside at one of the places identified on an English-language map available at the train station as being a prime viewing spot. No dried bloodstains were in evidence at that location from the previous day's lap, but there **was** a *takoyaki* stand directly behind us on the sidewalk, with *yakitori* and *okonomiyaki* being hawked within a few feet of Mr. Tentacles. Cold beer was everywhere, and so much was expected to be consumed that Asahi, one of Japan's Big Three, put out a special

commemorative beer can with a drawing of a *danjiri* on the back of its standard Asahi Dry. There were claimed to be millions of patrons attending the combined two days, and I can't dispute that. We got there at 10:30, and the first float was due to begin its journey at 1:00, so I had plenty of opportunity to bag some unneeded rays. Sunscreen was again an afterthought.

Here's how it works: the floats get pulled at a moderate pace to the nearest corner, at which point they stop, get their teams in synch, and then sprint loudly around as quickly as they can. Perhaps the Kirin I spied was to feed to the people on top, encouraging their instability, since nothing else I saw conveyed the slightest impression that things would get out of control. The only people who might have died as a direct result of the festival may have been bored to death. The prime viewing spots we chose, and there were banks of people behind us, trying to look over the head of this tall American on the front row, were where the Chamber of Commerce wanted us to be, since that's where the massive crowd-control forces were concentrated. We evacuated them after the first seven or eight *danjiri* went by, in part to get out of the sun, in part to see if there were better places to experience the festival. We went down a nearby side street, lined, as every road along the route was, with food and souvenir stands (even slot machines came out of the shadows for this weekend), and there we could see everything the way the residents saw it. That was better, since we were able to see the recuperating (and in one case, bowing before the Porcelain Shinto Shrine) teams collapsed in the street, and inspect the carvings of a *danjiri* at first hand. Teams included young children, girls, and a few old men, mainly for ceremonial purposes, but the main workhorses of the festival were young men, and they looked truly bushed. We left early, and made it home in time for the final half-hour of sumo from the

Autumn Grand Tournament on the tube. Other than my pinkened face and neck, the only casualties I knew of was the young man I saw barfing into an open storm sewer between corners.

Monday, September 23, 1996 - Kobe

Four days ago I marked the first anniversary of my arrival in Japan, but marked the occasion with nothing more than a stupendous pot of chicken curry. Yesterday was the first birthday of this journal, but little of record happened, other than a trip to Osaka to hear the young American pianist, Awadagin Pratt. Coming about a week after Richard Goode may have been Mr. Pratt's undoing, in my estimation of him. He put forward the same kind of middle-of-the-road program of Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, and Brahms, but where Goode gave us his realizations of the pieces, Pratt, because he is, himself, a pianistic work in progress, gave us progress reports on what he found in the music. It was very shallow, superficial, and insecure sounding, but the audience really loved him, where they were politely respectful of Goode. Hard to figure, except that Pratt played everything too fast and wore black chinos and turtleneck. I'd pay to hear Richard Goode adjust his piano stool, but I wouldn't show up for a free pass at another Pratt recital for at least another ten years. The man needs time to let this music take root in him and grow. We also went to Paul's Park Cafe for another extraordinarily tasty meal of homemade pasta (spinach ravioli this time).

Because Mata leaves tomorrow for a six-week visit to the U.S., I spent a part of the day running around, getting things for her to take back as family presents. Jake's 30th birthday is on October 1st, and it is hard to find the kind of wise-ass card I favor over here. I settled for an across-the-miles-you-worthless-ingrate one instead. As I was walking through Sannomiya

Center-gai, a large arcade of shops in downtown Kobe, a middle-aged Japanese woman stopped me and acted like she wanted to ask me a question in English. She was nicely, but not expensively dressed, and her English was fairly good. I noticed that another Japanese woman of the same age was with her, as well as a Caucasian woman of similar description, and I quickly sized up the situation: since her English was not up to the task, she wanted me to explain or show something to the Caucasian woman. The woman asked if I was American, which I answered truthfully, though the UPH has been recently suggesting that posing as some other nationality might cut back on the frequency of shouting experiences I encounter. She then asked if I lived in Kobe, and I knew that I would soon be supplying directions to Kobe Grocers or a bar where the Chippendales perform. I said yes, and suddenly, out of her shopping bag she drew ... a copy of *The Watchtower*!! Yes, by God, a Jehovah's Witness intervention, on the streets of Kobe, the Sin City of Honshu, and by the greatest fluke, or Divine Guidance, they came across the prefecture's most notorious sinner, more in need of repentance than when he first arrived. But equally, if not more resistant to such importuning, than ever before. As always, I was polite, but slippery, and within sixty seconds they were fading fast in my rear-view mirror.

Sunday, September 29, 1996 - Kobe

Even though it was a Saturday, the English Department held a six-hour faculty meeting yesterday. It was originally announced as an informal, let-it-all-hang-out brainstorming session up in a Shoin retreat on Rokko Mountain. Somehow, those who planned it managed to transplant it to classroom at the Shoin *Kaikan*, or off-campus study center close to where I live. Proximity was a plus, since it meant I would not have to arise with the roosters on a weekend to

catch the first cable car to the frosty reaches of Kobe's Matterhorn. The informality was quickly banished, however, since we were seated at long tables arranged in a geometrically perfect square, with a numerically perfect number of attendees (16) for the geometry. We had a leader, an agenda (and several hidden ones, including mine: to get out as quickly as was seemly), and the same old atmosphere of excessive care and polity.

For the past couple of years, the department seems to have been experiencing a sort of malaise which would do Jimmy Carter proud. Enrollments in our courses have dropped, the number of English majors has likewise gone down, and the quality of entering first-year students majoring in English, as indicated by standard test scores, is getting lower all the time. Some faculty members also noted that most students have little enthusiasm for English, some people can drift through to graduation without ever being noticed: Stealth Students! My office-mate, Chris Starling, confessed in private this week that he had been asked to write a letter about a student in response to an inquiry from a prospective employer. He was told that he had been her teacher several times during her Shoin stay, graduating in 1993, but he couldn't remember her at all. Upon looking up her academic records, he discovered that she was the **top** student in English in her graduating class, but apparently graduated unknown, and forgotten before the kimono came off and the celebratory pictures came back from processing. Chris is a great guy, and the students seem to hold him in high esteem, as do I, but when he blanks out on a student who kicked academic butt less than five years ago, what about the sleepwalking old pensioners still dottering behind the podium? Can they even remember the name of the current Prime Minister?

At this meeting, it was suggested that the students are unenthusiastic about English because the teachers are unenthusiastic about the students. I began to pay more attention at this point, since it seemed as if this meeting was running the grave risk of lapsing into relevance, something no academic meeting should ever stand accused of. Akiyo Miyamoto, the most articulate, innovative, and personable of the four Japanese members of the English Department, asked if any of us had ever hugged our students. He had just returned from a month at the English Language Institute at the University of Delaware, where about sixteen Shoin students had spent an intensive month of studies. When they left their host families for the last time, as well as the Delaware teachers, all the Shoin women were given heartfelt hugs by the Americans, he reported. When he asked whether any of us had done something similar, he was greeted by harumphing and tsks: the academic version of hooting and catcalls, as much and as intensely by the Western teachers as by the Japanese. Eventually, as the discussion wound its way to an end, I was pointed out by American Richard Jambor as someone who always seemed to have students around him, both in my office and on campus, and he asked that I share my secret with the rest of them. I put 'regular bathing' at the top of my list, but declined to make it public, for fear of discouraging a few of my colleagues from ever becoming sought out by students, except those with bars of soap and bottles of water in their purses. I did make a few comments, and I truly appreciated Richard's stated belief that I was unique in the department in the respect he mentioned. It's a uniqueness I value. What was ironic was that at the end of last semester, word got back to me through the grapevine that one or more faculty members had seen a student standing with me in my office, and she had her hand on my shoulder nearest her, and her other

hand on the arm attached to that shoulder. What seemed to be alarming about that position, straight out of the Kama Sutra, was that I was not seen recoiling with horror from it, and telephoning my nearest Shinto priest to come and purify the spot on which the depravity occurred that instant. I remember the occasion exactly, and remember it was Ayako Fukai doing the good-hearted groping and fondling. And I'll do everything I can to make sure it happens again.

Tuesday, October 8, 1996 - Kobe

The piano marathon is taking its toll. I had two concerts back-to-back last week, and another last night, though one of them had the benefit of Akiko Odake's company, and two, a meal at Paul's Park Cafe. All three were solid, rather than exciting, and none gave me quite the unhappy feeling that Pratt's did. And I am beginning to realize that Richard Goode has become the benchmark for such evenings. In particular, last night's soloist, a young man named Komoriya Izumi, seemed unwilling to trust his apparently able fingers, and pedaled so much during the Chopin that I feared the concert was going to be relocated to a velodrome.

One sign of the approach of winter which pleases me is the reappearance of the most wonderful fruit on the planet, *mikan*, in the markets. They are not quite as sweet as they will be in a month or two, nor as large, but I can think of nothing more welcome in my mouth at this time, unless it's Chie Tsukuni's tongue. And on my trip to the Daiei department store's underground food market this morning, I came across a familiar face: Bill Graves, the Governor of Kansas. Duh Guv wasn't really in the store, but some sort of advertising placard in the meat market had his picture on it, and a letter or proclamation signed my him, apparently attesting to the fact that the beef in that section was genuine Kansas beef. It's an ironic part of my through-

the-looking-glass life over here that I came to Kobe from Kansas to eat Kobe beef, known the world over for tenderness, only to find that Kansas beef is being promoted in Kobe's best-known meat market as the choice of discriminating eaters. When Arkansas catfish pushes Pacific tuna aside in the sushi stands I'll know it's time to go.

Thursday, October 10, 1996 - Kobe

Today is a national holiday, Physical Culture Day, and to promote a chilling effect, I suppose, the government released figures yesterday about how soft the Japanese youth these days have become. Why does that sound familiar? It seems as if most 17 year-old girls can run slower, lift less, and bend more painfully than any generation in the past, and the same general results were present in every age group. I asked my students yesterday what they were going to do to enhance their physical culture on Physical Culture Day, and those who understood the question were pretty much evenly divided between shopping and sleeping late. I may not be setting the best example for them, but I **am** up at 6:00 A.M. giving my fingers the exercise represented by these words, and later will go to the Kyoto outskirts, Uji to visit the fabled Byodo-in, and maybe even Uji Bridge, site of a famous battle.

On Sunday, Chris Starling, the omnipresent Katrina, plus two westerners from other places and myself went to the horse races at the Kyoto track in Yodo. It turns out that Chris is quite the handicapper, and had prepared me his own tout's sheet for the day, with the names of the horses thoughtfully translated into English, as if a true horseplayer would pay attention to such aesthetic trivia. His picks were quite accurate, but paid only modestly, if regularly. Since I had been to the Xanadu of American tracks, Churchill Downs, including the 1983 Derby, I was

not a newcomer to leaving my money in the hands of strangers with no hope of ever retrieving it again. It was an impromptu trip, but he promised one with more planning and larger turnout later in the season. He also warned me about how much of a “culture shock” the experience of attending a Japanese horse race would be, and even offered to take me to the children’s playground if the press of the crowd began to send me into a panic. I’ll admit to preferring the company of no one, sitting on a log in the middle of a forest, or on a boulder overlooking a deserted beach by the ocean, but Japan hasn’t offered me these options yet (or I haven’t sought them out, to be more accurate), so I’ve made do very well with the intense urban ambiance of Kansai. Chris must have misread me a bit.

After receiving a primer on deciphering the Japanese racing form, which has **gobs** of information for those who can read it, I proceeded to handicap the races as they approached. Twice, Chris asked, very solicitously, if I wanted to go to the playground yet. Maybe **he** wanted to go, except that he was with a mate, Adrian, and seemed quite happy. What I did find out was that the portents of culture shock were false, or misread. Once I got into Horse Race Mode, I could have been anywhere horses were running, and I was betting. They did run in a disconcerting clockwise direction, and some of the races were on grass, while others were on the dirt track located concentrically inside the grass oval at Kyoto. But it was just like any very modern racetrack, with more people than seats, indifferently prepared food down in steerage, where we were, and machines to take and pay off your bets. The minimum bet was 100 yen, and the maximum was 300,000, though you could bet as many tickets as you could cram into the machine, as long as the correct amount of yen had preceded them. While there were a few

windows with people to take your bet, they were largely ignored by the players, who would rather line up ten-deep at a machine. Since the betting slips were like a standardized multiple-choice test, the people behind the windows would merely take your slip and put it through their machine. What amazed me about the experience was that, as a bettor, the day was interchangeable with a day at any track, anywhere. Once I had my racing form, betting slips, place five bodies back from the rail, and yen to bet, I felt like just another idiot being fleeced. Of course, I didn't feel that way at the time. Every horse player believes he or she knows just a little more than the next fool in line, an **exceptionally** presumptuous attitude for me to have, since I could barely read the racing form, and then only about half the information on it. We stayed through the eleventh race, and through #10 I was doing pretty well, even cashing three tickets in one race. Eleven was the featured race, and had one prohibitive favorite, offering barely 2-1 odds. I decided I would either go home a big winner or a big loser, but none of this break-even shit. I laid a large number of long-shot bets to win, and watched as the favorite finally squeezed in between two of my ticketed winners to take the race at the wire.

Friday, October 11, 1996 - Kobe

Yesterday was either "Health-Sports" or "Physical Culture" Day in Japan, depending on which translation appeals, and is a national holiday for schools. The day before, the Ministry of Health, as mentioned above, released a report showing that Japan's youth were weaker, slower, and flabbier than any generation in the past, apparently in the hope that new leaves would be turned over on Thursday among the younger set. I polled students in my classes concerning how they expected to spend the holiday, and 'sleeping in' and 'shopping' rated a solid 1-2. I tried to

shame them by telling of my anticipated trip to the town of Uji, but they have an innocence about such matter that transcends shame. They know, with greater wisdom than I will ever muster, that taxicabs were created to take them between the train station and the school, and private automobiles were made to help them with the arduous task of sorting out the deserving young men from the multitude who are destined to social oblivion.

All summer I had been trying to coerce Noriko Itsugami to do something, **anything**, with me while we had all that free time. Our schedules never meshed, but we did correspond very regularly, for people who lived less than 50 miles apart. We settled, finally, on a trip to Uji on October 10th, and she talked the ever-cooperative Maki Ueda to accompany us. Noriko told me on the train that the two of them go so many places together, and sit next to each other in many classes, that they are often called "Nori-Maki," a joke I understood without having it explained, which, for me, is a first in the Japanese language. If I had the choice of one Shoin student to be marooned on an island (other than Honshu) with, it would be Noriko. Luckily, she doesn't have the same choice to make. Neither of them had ever been to Uji, which is a small town between Kyoto and Nara, but had wanted to go for a long time. The major attraction is the temple Byodoin, which was constructed in 1053 and is still standing. It is on the 10-yen coin, the only human creation to grace any of the coins of the realm. The town is set on the Uji River, which has seen many ancient battles waged across it, a very famous one at the site of Uji Bridge. We started early, since it is a full two hours from Kobe, and a bit of a jerkwater town, from a railroad perspective.

We arrived at a little before eleven in the morning of what seemed to be a sleepy little

town, far different from any I had seen thus far in Japan. Rather than being the smaller appendage of a larger city, like many of the suburbs of Kobe and Osaka are, this was truly a small town without reference to any place other than itself. I liked it immediately. The buildings were not as tall, the people seemed less impersonal in their dealings with each other, and there seemed to be more time for the details of human contact that often get hurried in city life. Noriko had done her homework, which was far from a surprise to me, her former teacher, and had even purchased a paperback guidebook with maps and even restaurant recommendations. She outlined a path for our travels starting from the train station, and it looked like we would be on a cruel forced march at the point of General Noriko's bayonet, pillaging as many temples and shrines as possible during daylight hours. My walking shoes had already begun to show the need for immediate replacement, but size 12 was not to be found in even the largest store I visited earlier this season. The fall rainy season had already hit, and wetness from the streets and sidewalks came up through the holes in my soles. Mata will return on November 9 with a spare pair from my closet in Kansas City, but that wouldn't help my feet on this day.

Uji is probably as well known for its green tea as for its history, at least among the less studious of Japanese, and our first stop was a temple-esque building which housed a very interesting tea museum. We removed our shoes upon entering, and ambled slowly through a lot of tea-making artifacts from earlier times, and other memorabilia, but no tea was served at the end, a strange omission, it seemed. Following that, we walked the few blocks to Byodo-in, our big destination of the day, but while we were enjoying the quiet and polished wood of the tea museum, I heard my first example of excessively loud car stereo booming on the streets of Uji.

This was the first time I heard such an American-sized, window-rattling sound on the streets of this country, and we ran to the second-story window of the museum to look down on the street from which it came. I suppose I was hoping it wasn't a bunch of Americans, and it wasn't, but that's a sad sign to me. The people on the street weren't too fond of it either, from their expressions, but I'm sure that was the hoped-for reaction.

Because this was a holiday, the narrow streets were much more crowded than they are normally, I would guess, and it is towns like Uji that the collision between the approaching automotive culture and the towns built for foot travel will occur. There is no room to widen the streets, and most have no sidewalks, anyway, but the car is showing up, and in alarmingly greater numbers, and the idea of prohibiting parking in certain places or times has not yet taken hold. The tea museum must have had its effect, since we stopped for a glass of green tea before we reached Byodo-in. The temple itself is truly a wonder of the world, and very much worth a more leisurely time than we spent there, though we did not hurry through. The number of people present on that day, however, made every venue crowded, and often we would lag back, hoping to be able to experience something of the place's atmosphere as we hoped the crowd would thin out momentarily. It seldom did, but I'll be back.

Being that I was accompanied by Shoin Women, lunch was on our minds from the moment we had awakened this morning, and we found a noodle shop next to Byodo-in for our repast. Green tea, which is ground into a powder for the famous tea ceremony, is also made into a soba-like noodle of a garish, Kelly Green color. We had to try it for lunch, and it was fine, though the tea flavor, always fairly subtle even as a beverage, was nearly absent in that format.

I began to notice the cars and their occupants more as the day progressed. The people who drove to *Byodo-in* and double-parked outside, or who sped up a lovely, tree-arched unpaved path to the temple known as *Kosyo-ji* were not infirm older people in need of assistance, but the young and prosperous; the people whose children, and younger siblings were the subject of the government's hand-wringing report on physical fitness on Wednesday. I would like to think that the march of the automobile is not an inexorable one, and I would like to see Japan take a stand on it, but to do so would undermine their strongest source of international revenue. How could they be the world's greatest exporter of autos and simultaneously restrict their use severely in their home country? Of course, several Islamic countries of the Middle East are primary suppliers of the raw material for heroin, while strictly prohibiting its use on their own turf. But these thoughts all came later, on the train to Kobe.

Tuesday, October 15, 1996 - Kobe

I have had my faith restored in Japanese pianists after a weekend of keyboard overload. It didn't start off very auspiciously, however. This country seems to have such a wealth of what it considers pianistic talent that it schedules more than one soloist on the same concert just so everyone gets heard. Friday night a European string quartet, the Talich, was in town, and the bill announced two of my favorite piano quintets: Schumann and Brahms, with two different soloists to ferry the string players through the evening. As curtain time approached, one of the pianists was a no-show, and so the Brahms was replaced on the program by an all-string work. The Talich played with a great deal of heart and soul, which often makes itself heard in details of phrasing, tempo, and dynamics. When the pianist joined them, that young woman had none of

those attributes, and played like a stone. She seemed capable of presenting all the notes, but not articulating them so that they made sense, and the quartet and she seemed to struggle together. She could have been replaced by a piano roll.

The next afternoon I had tickets for a solo recital by Japanese pianist Mari Kumamoto, and a feeling of dread began to inhabit me that morning. I had purchased a CD of her playing a composer I cherish, Federico Mompou, and I truly abhorred her interpretations on the disk, every last one of them. She had studied in Spain with Mompou, so how could she get him so terribly wrong, I asked myself upon hearing it. I gave the CD to Maki Ueda upon hearing that she had been to a Kumamoto concert in Kobe a few years before. However, I was dutifully in my seat at the appointed time, sitting with Chisato Seki, a normally shy first-year Shoin student who surprisingly took my offer of a free ticket seriously. The short review is that it was an interesting and innovative concert, complete with Japanese narration about the life and music of Manuel de Falla, whose birth and death are celebrated in anniversaries this year. Kumamoto is well-known in Japan, but the ticket prices were a modest 3500 yen. She does a TV commercial in which she is playing piano in a living room, and is now a celebrity. I must admit that though she is clearly older than the ingenue photographs on her CD cover, she cuts a marvelously slinky figure striding purposefully onstage, and I hoped Chisato didn't detect my accelerated breathing rate. She played brilliantly, with everything I had longed for in other recent concerts, beginning with Pratt. She displayed both strength and tenderness, and gave evidence of bringing a wonderful musical intelligence to everything she attempted. The second half of the program was the daunting "Pictures at an Exhibition" by Moussorgsky, and she made every picture memorable in

an individual way, yet linked them together coherently. I was just vibrating after the concert and stayed that way for hours.

On the next afternoon, the sisters Hori (Shoko and Hiroko) consented to help me listen to the progress of pianist Jorg Demus, whose work I have known since the '60s. He was in town with what seems to be an organization which runs music camps for the young and talented around the world, Arcadia, and would play Mozart's 27th concerto with a student orchestra from Japan. I met Shoko and Hiroko at the train station in downtown Kobe at noon, and hadn't been with them more than a minute than an old, and scruffy-looking Japanese man confronted me, and thrust his hand aggressively toward my abdomen while saying something in a loud voice. His open mouth revealed bare gums on one side, faced by a row of brown pickets opposite it. I took his outstretched hand as a desire for a handshake, so I grasped his hand to shake it, but he quickly snatched it away from me, and then seemed to jab me with the same motion toward my privates, all the while keeping up a narration which was mere confusion to me. It apparently wasn't to Shoko, however. The look in her eyes when I glanced over for a translation was something between alarm and total panic, and she took my hand and tried to lead me away from him. I willingly followed, and asked both of them what he was saying, but Shoko was clearly shaken by the incident, and also claimed -- again -- not to know what the man was saying to me. He certainly was physically aggressive, which is a new development in what appears to be a series of potentially ugly confrontations which I did nothing to precipitate. What I need is a companion more forthcoming than Shoko to provide a more candid recitation of what is being said to me at these times.

That event was soon forgotten, as Demus played with great flair and sensitivity. The last half of the program was the Mozart Requiem, and I had forgotten how that work can sweep you along for an hour from the very first bar. There are few experiences to match it in that feeling of being taken somewhere deeply touching and returning replenished where you needed it most. And for two straight afternoons, I came outside Izumi Hall into the fading sunlight vibrating like a newly-struck gong.

Thursday, October 24, 1996 - Kobe

The slow, stately change of the seasons in Japan is again upon me, and I marvel at it, and an associated phenomenon. In autumn's orange afternoon light, the green trees are beginning to show signs of the brilliant plumage they are destined soon to wear in the shortening days ahead. The sky seems to be a deeper hue of blue, and the temperatures are now drifting into the mid and low 70s for an afternoon high. Frankly, it is an afternoon high to sit outside during such a time. Mata called yesterday morning to say that six inches of snow covered Kansas, and that Kansas City was at a standstill with a fraction of that, though it was preceded by opening acts of sleet, and freezing rain. I made certain she understood that I have yet to don a coat over here.

One day last week, when the high was predicted to reach about 75, I wore one of my Aloha shirts to school. I have always taught informally attired, so this was not a departure for me, and my students had seen it before. But for them, fall was here, and they were shivering in long-sleeved sweaters, while truly marveling that I could endure the mid-morning's brutality of 68 degrees without a parka. Meeting outside between classes, they would grab my arm to test what they assumed would be a cadaver-like feel, only to recoil from its unexpected warmth. I

saw this same thing last fall just after my arrival, and credited it to wimpish, pampered, spoiled children of the favored classes having been protected all their lives from most realities, including meteorological ones. But I would see the same thing on the trains and buses from working stiff and middle-class housewives. What was this? A **nation** of wimps? That hardly seemed accurate, either, since a kind of general stoicism seems to pervade other areas of Japanese life, such as medicine, where a little pain, and sometimes more than just a little, is thought to have some sort of therapeutic value. As a result, I have devised a theoretical hypothesis to explain it all.

The CTC, or Climatological Theory of Culture, states that typical prevailing weather conditions over millennia tend to condition certain areas of life in ways different from other cultures, with a different set of climatic conditions. Now, I'm sure this is not an original thought with me, but what may be original are the ridiculous and extreme lengths to which I am willing to apply it. The least controversial may be the Shivering Shoin Women observation. Why are they bundled up in 70 degrees like I would be for Christmas caroling? And why can I not just tolerate but feel comfortable in an Aloha shirt at the same time? The slow change of seasonal conditions which has enchanted me because of its glacial pace is the normal state of affairs for natives, and so they react more drastically to minute deviations from slow changes than I do. They aren't wimps, at least in this instance, but they actually do feel the minor temperature changes more fully than I do. I've spent nearly my last twenty years in Kansas City, and have become accustomed to changes from 80 to 30 within 24 hours, often several times a year, and accept them as a part of my inner thermostat, which is calibrated to react at much wider extremes

than theirs is.

Of course, I can't stop there. The conservatism of the climate, I would argue, has led to a culture of little change, and little toleration for change, particularly of the magnitude we in the west are used to. One of the reactions to the collisions between Japanese culture and that of America which is sweeping down upon it more intensely every day is in this predisposition to fear change which I see about me over here. The CTC has predicted it, but the Nobel Prize for Drivel has yet to be inaugurated, I fear.

Saturday, October 26, 1996 - Kobe

Is there any rational connection between the quality of a musical performance and the amount of audience acclaim following it? I'm beginning to think there is not, especially in these last two months of piano-intensive afternoons and evenings. The audiences of which I've been a part over here seem to be Encore-hogs, applauding only because they suspect their efforts may be rewarded by an extra musical morsel tossed their way at the end of a performance. Their clapping doesn't seem related to the work just presented, since these audiences are almost rudely reticent to express themselves at the end of the first half of a program, when a little lagniappe by the soloist is unlikely, even if the performance just concluded was exemplary. The Richard Goode recital comes to mind in that respect, as well as Mari Kumamoto's, where she gave an extraordinary survey of Falla's pianistic output but barely beat the final handclap into the wings before intermission. To me it was shocking.

If I could make up the universal rules for concert department, the second one, following a requirement that each concert goer provide a recent medical affidavit attesting to their upper

respiratory health, would be banning all encores, especially now that Horowitz is no longer with us. At the end of the second half of any performance, no matter how lackluster, all is forgiven by a Japanese audience if the solist can be coerced or flattered into adding a bonus. At the Pratt recital, a man behind me actually shouted "Bravo!" perhaps in relief that it was finally over, but the pianist, perhaps out of guilt or youthful exuberance, allowed himself to be recalled for four encores, though I noticed Pratt spent barely a nanosecond backstage between reappearances, not wishing to trust the spectators's memory of what had gone before, which might lead to an abrupt cessation of the modest ovation he was enjoying. And to be fair, he did a fine job with the devilishly difficult Scriabin Etude Op. 8, #12 which concluded his bonus tracks for us. But the amount of applause he received seemed disproportionate to the effectiveness of his performance, so the motivation for excess applause must be something unrelated to the musical experience presented to the audience. This is not just a random thought; last night I heard Yevgeny Kissin perform a solo recital in Osaka.

After hearing young pianists from all continents recently demonstrate, by inference, the musical wisdom of age and experience, I was starting to feel a little queasy about having spent 20,000 yen on two tickets (in the balcony!) to hear a work in progress. I shouldn't have; Kissin is the Real Thing, and he's definitely ready for Prime Time. The young man, barely three years older than my companion of the night, Sachie Mizutani from my Oral English class, has musical ideas, and knows how to communicate them. I don't agree with all of them, especially his throbbing Schubert (the D. 958 sonata), but you know where he stands on everything he plays. The second half of the program consisted of the four Chopin Ballades, and the last two were

quite good; I had become reassured again, six days after Mari Kumamoto saved me from terminal cynicism with her magic on Saturday.

I should have guessed something was up when the audience applauded for an unseemly long time just before the intermission. Of course, Kissin is young and dashing, and as his long legs stride manfully onstage the murmuring of young women -- and maybe those not-so-young -- is heard throughout the hall. There is normally a 3-1 or 4-1 women to men proportion in Japanese concert attendees, but Kissin raised it to 10-1, minimum. Sachie confessed to not being a concert devotee, but liking Chopin, and she was on the edge of her seat all night. By the end of the concert, I knew he was the genuine article, but I wondered about the applause game. How would he play it? Goode and Kumamoto, with the foresight experience brings, played one encore each, something languid and peaceful, as a signal that the evening had drawn to a restful close, and there would be no more. The audience seemed to accept this state of affairs, called them back for one more bow, and then dutifully desisted and everybody went home. Pratt played something energetic for his first encore, and the vultures in row CC took that as a sign of weakness and circled for the kill. They screamed and pounded until he relieved himself of three more.

Kissin spent a long time backstage between trips out to receive the adulation of the masses, so everyone had plenty of time to reconsider the wisdom of their feelings. But when have feelings ever been subject to the ruminations of wisdom, anyway? Okay, other than mine? For his first encore he gave us a lovely Chopin Mazurka, which seemed to indicate that we'd

make it to Paul's in plenty of time to catch the last ravioli. The audience was having none of it, and eventually he acceded to the acclaim and played something else. In most cases, the audience starts to trickle out sometime after the second encore, if there is a second, and that started happening last night, but that tends to be the ones who were only giving a perfunctory level of thanks, anyway. But their absence seems to signal something with everyone else; that we might as well pack it in soon. But the ones who remained last night after the old people dotted out were a different breed than the regular concert-goer. Dozens of young women began congregating around the stage from their seats farther back, and they were not just appreciative dowagers. I fully expected some of these women to begin pelting the returning artist with their underclothes, which would not seem out of the question, given the excess of undergarments which Japanese women appear to wear in even the hottest weather. Several of them held out pictures or programs for him to autograph each time he returned, and one of them became so demonstrative that ushers had to restrain her. Kissin was sweet and appreciative throughout, and certainly took his time backstage, to the extent that each time he returned it seemed to astonish us all that he was still around and not back at his hotel, sorting through the underwear he had accumulated that evening. After the mazurka he played several other works, some known to me, like a couple of Chopin waltzes, the Brahms rhapsody from Op. 119, and a couple more mazurkas. Once he hit six encores, I figured it was over, but fully three-quarters of the original sold-out audience remained, many on their feet. After eight, the management turned on the house lights, which the normally obedient Japanese see as some sort of metaphorical equivalent to turning loose the Dobermans on the unruly mob, but not this unruly mob. It just seemed to

annoy them. They began rhythmic clapping, and Sachie leaned over to tell me that she never expected this coming to a classical concert. She'd get a couple more chances to use that line later this night: once when the police arrest all of us for refusing to disperse, and later when I take her to the Love Hotel where I've booked a few minutes of time.

After Kissin played Encore Number Nine, the management also turned off the lights on stage and over the piano, but that seemed to enrage the young attendees, and I feared that next they'd be rhythmically breaking up the seats into projectiles to use against the impassive and implacable ushers. But Kissin kept returning, and sometime around the one-hour mark (that's one hour of solid applause from the assembled multitude) he played a Scott Joplin rag that sent the ladies into an orgasm, cheering and shouting, and as I looked around the hall, I noticed that many of the people who stayed were men, perhaps bringing the ratio of retainers to 5-1. This nonsense was finally over after fourteen (!) encores, which constituted another program half, both for Kissin's weary hands, and ours. The time we spent there after the last part of the announced program was performed was 95 minutes, and while I was exhilarated, and a little exhausted, and very hungry, since Sachie and I were planning to see what Paul had cooked up that evening following the concert. But the original question of this day's entry remains. Was Kissin's music-making so superior to Goode's or Kumamoto's that it warranted an hour and a half of applause? No, but the people who attended Goode, were they in Friday's audience, had for the most part left before the fifteen-minute mark. From a purely musical standpoint, I would rate Kissin Number Three, but a strong Three, after Goode and Kumamoto, and oceans ahead of anyone else I've heard at the keyboards of Osaka this year. But somehow he seems to inspire irrational frenzies of

adulation from an audience, and that certainly is not all bad. Maybe some of them, who came out because of the sexy poster will take a chance on some old fart like Goode the next time he comes to town. I know I'd pay money to watch Mari Kumamoto wash dishes. I'd even dry.

Sunday, October 27, 1996 - Kobe

No one could accuse me of being a quick study. After thirteen months in this country, I have finally discovered a fundamental truth about the culture, one which was evident to the more observant from the first day. Today, I decided I needed a handful of cilantro for some salsa which would accompany an impending meal, and rode the train to *Nankin-machi*, the Chinatown of Kobe. The pathways were crowded there, and also at the nearby shopping arcade, Motomachi, and it took me twice as long to accomplish what I went there to do. Every day I venture forth into the commercial areas of this country I get frustrated by how dilatory people are in places meant for business and its implicit efficiency. A hint of the answer to the question that I should have figured out months ago came as I was talking to one of my recent concert companions, the luminescent Nao Toyama. We were talking about what we do in our free time, and she assumed that I shopped for clothes in part of that excess remaining in any day. Of course, anyone familiar with my wardrobe would find reason to question that hypothesis on clear empirical grounds, and when I told her that I merely ordered what I wore from an L.L. Bean catalogue and waited for it to arrive at the end of the week, she looked at me as if I had told her that I take pleasure from pounding my bare toes with a ball-peen hammer. For her, as for most of her contemporaries, shopping for clothes, and other personal items, is something that is as regular as a necessary

biological function and more enjoyable than all but a few. It may just be window-shopping, or browsing, but it is done often, lingered over, and is not to be hurried.

When I go what might be called 'shopping,' I usually have a list, and agenda, and I know where I am going. I often plan out my route for maximum time-effectiveness, particularly if I will be visiting many places spread out over a wide area. I assume most people do this, though that assumption may be the fatal flaw in my misunderstanding. To me, shopping is a utilitarian activity, which is most rewarding when efficiency is maximized. For most Japanese, shopping is a form of social pleasure they share with each other. They dawdle in the aisles, clog up the escalators, and make shopping centers completely impassible because they're trying to do something different from what I'm trying to do. I just want to do my business and get on the train, buying the best merchandise for the least price, while expending the least amount of time and energy. They treat a department store the way I would Point Lobos; as a place to savor as completely as possible. I would resent being pushed along a trail while watching the otters by some bozo with a stopwatch and an immutable timetable, and would probably behave more crudely than they do when I try to prod them into motion in the middle of the Hankyu department store.

Of course, one solution is not to go out on a weekend, but that's not always possible when that omnipresent wild hair up your ass wants a liter of salsa and wants it now. I hope this realization makes me a little less impatient with the crowds, moving like molasses in the corridors of commerce.

Tuesday, October 29, 1996 - Kobe

While most of my social forays into the unknown over here have been with the accompaniment of my students, occasionally a brave Shoin woman, not enrolled in any of my classes, will undertake my cultural enlightenment. Such a person is 21-year old Shoko Matsushige, whom I have only met informally. She has little of the reticence around strangers which seems the norm for young women here, and her spoken English seems to improve with every syllable she speaks. She has beautiful, wide-set and exotic eyes which could easily short-circuit my pacemaker, were I sporting one, and a counterbalancing down-to-earth directness that is also a refreshing change. A few weeks ago, we talked on campus and she wanted to know which I liked better, jazz or soul music. I voted for Door Number One, but mentioned that Mata might choose the latter. She wanted to take me to a club to hear my choice, and so we decided to get together tonight for jazz, and make it a threesome (no, not **that** kind) for soul when Mata returned. After a street dinner in Chinatown, where we stopped at several outdoor stalls, bought what looked best at each place, and munched on our feet, or in a nearby gazebo erected for something like that purpose, we took a leisurely stroll to our evening's entertainment.

As we walked to the club she had selected, we stopped to buy a bouquet of flowers, since today was the pianist's birthday, and she wanted to surprise him. He was a good friend of her father's, and they both shared the same birthday, including the year (undisclosed). I also learned that Shoko was an aspiring drummer, and her teacher of that art was the regular drummer of the trio we would hear. We arrived in mid-set of some very good playing in a basement club decorated in shades of dark blue. In spite of the good spirits of the performers, the color scheme is not one which should beckon anyone prone to suggestions of depression. The club was named

“Great Blue” and had a lot of excess dolphin memorabilia on the walls and tables, as well as overpriced cute drinks colored blue. I had a yellow beer, which I did my best to nurse, remembering it was \$8 a pop. The decor was fresh and just sparse enough to stop short of kitsch, and I would guess it was redone after the earthquake. Shoko guided us to front row seats, though the place probably only has 15 tables and a modest bar to keep the musicians paid. For someone barely old enough to drink legally, it seemed amazing that everyone in the place, performers, customers, waitresses and waiters, knew her by name. It was like the entry scene from “Cheers,” where everyone shouts “Norm!” My fears that she might have been a major league juicer with the liver of a sixty-year old were put to rest, both by watching her get a little silly on one blue thing with ice, and by her confession that she used to work there a few months ago. The pianist was also the owner, his daughter waited tables, and his son sat in on guitar for “Happy Birthday.”

Everyone was friendly to me, by virtue of being with Shoko, and many of them attempted to work on their English in my presence. It really was a family club, and I began to feel nostalgic for a place like that to call my own. Not as owner, and certainly not as pianist, but as Norm. So often I make a point of trying as many different things as possible that I never take time to feel comfortable with one. Being married to Mata has shown me that the serenity of such a level of comfort is something incomparable, but I am beginning to notice its absence in other parts of my life. The sense of belonging is something that all Japanese seem to have from birth, and it is one of the things I have seldom experienced, and would like to. Wouldn't it be ironic if I discovered that very thing in a culture which very pointedly lets me know, with looks -- and sometimes,

shouts -- that I do not belong here? At Great Blue, no one looked or shouted, and I don't think it would have been that different had I come in alone. Everyone here seemed to know everyone else, and they had the stream of jazz which brought them together, and carried them somewhere together, as well. I can share that part with them, and I think I'd like to. They certainly made me feel like spending many more evenings in there. We all shared pieces of the owner's birthday cake, and after much prodding and embarrassed demurring, Shoko was even prevailed upon to give her debut performance as jazz drummer for two numbers.

Monday, November 4, 1996 - Kobe

Yesterday was the Japanese holiday known as Culture Day, and I suppose I should have bought some yoghurt, but instead, I tried to out-guess the majority of the local population, with the usual results. On the last public holiday, my students voted for sleeping in as the prime way in which they would observe it, and the rest of the country went to various cultural wonders. The train I took to Uji on that day first stopped at Kyoto, and it was jam-packed with Shriners and Templars. Monuments to what it is to be Japanese would certainly be visited by throngs, and so I would take the opportunity to sneak over to Motomachi, Kobe's old shopping arcade, to do some more detailed looking at some photo equipment the school could write off my research grant in this final semester. In addition, I was still having trouble with the slow-moving crowds in retail places over here, no matter how I might profess to understand them. My main worry, upon arriving at Motomachi station was whether the arcade itself had closed down for the holiday and sent all its employees to some place of cultural enlightenment.

However, the place was so crowded that I truly contemplated getting on the next train back to Oishi. But, of course, this was the truest expression of Japanese cultural values. Shopping slowly and looking askance at me seem to be the two things they do best in my presence, and, as the UPH quickly asserted, they had been assembled since early morning just to make certain they could do everything possible to impede my preselected path linking the three camera stores I intended to visit. They did their jobs to perfection, from the old couple that lurched in front of me just when I thought I spied an opening in front of the fruit stand, to the four (count 'em, four) women with baby carriages arrayed in a wide line perpendicular to my line of travel, chatting amiably and comparing whatever it is that mothers compare about their identical spawn. About every 100 yards a large table giving away samples of green tea was situated smack in the middle of the walkway, and was attracting free drinkers from as far away as Sri Lanka.

On the train home, I sat down next to a middle-aged woman who only remained there about 20 seconds before moving directly across from me and sitting in a place no less crowded than the one she left. Though well-dressed, her features took on a cast of undeniable hostility, and I could only allow myself to sneak the odd look in her direction. What was I doing out and about on **Her** Culture Day, her expression wanted to know, and though she would find difficulty in believing it, I was experiencing as much frustration as she was. For my first year here I let all the middle-aged women push in front of me in the lines at bus and train stops, but now I just elbow **them** aside smartly. What's the use of representing the greatest military power in the world if you can't use a little rough stuff? I sometimes wonder which will hit critical mass first;

that frustration of mine, or my ability at *Nihongo*. It's almost certain to be the former, since my tutors seem unwilling to supply me with the translation for "Look, bitch, the only communicable disease I have is being Western."

Come to think of it, that is a rapidly progressing disease, a thought I have put forward more than once on these pages. I seem to lament its virulence on the one hand, and desire it to hasten further at other times. But I can't have it both ways. Preserving culture and tradition seems to be a one-piece task. We can't just dismantle what displeases us and hope that the rest stays up sweetly. That's really the quintessential modern malady: **demanding** to have it both ways. When the logical inconsistencies play themselves out immediately, we usually can cope with it and let logic have its inexorable way. But when the final consequent doesn't become action until a time far removed from the antecedent, we try to pretend that two plus two will equal nineteen in the next century. I am thinking of the absurdly tragic American budget deficit now; our largest example of demanding to have it both ways. And the state of nature and our plundering of the environment may be the most telling global example. Of course, the generation of my sweet granddaughter, Madisen, still unknown to my eyes (though one glance into one of her diapers at this stage might show that the description 'sweet' was prematurely applied) will probably have it **no ways** as the price of her selfish grandparents, and their grandparents, trying to have it both ways. They will have to both pay for our excesses, and be able to enjoy none themselves.

On a strictly unrelated note, except as one of the conundrums of culture, I have been grading workbooks this weekend done by some of my students. The assignment called for them

to name their favorite color, but just as a filler for a sentence, in which the two fictional people from the workbook's exercises, Julie and Jordan, named theirs (orange and blue, in that order). Should I make you guess what their votes were? If you've read Dave Barry's book (I've finally forgiven him what he did with Mata on the battlefield of Miami; Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is something I can be big enough to overlook) you are certain to be able to infer the correct answer. Of the 37 young women, aged 20, with designer eyelashes and Donna Karon belly-button lint, for whom fashion is the one consuming (and I do mean consuming) thought of their active lives, more than half -- 20 -- chose either **black** or **white**! Yellow, orange, red, pink, brown, green, and purple garnered a total of 10 votes altogether. Black or white. I had always thought neither of them to **be** a color, strictly speaking, with white containing all the hues of the spectrum, and black the total inability of a surface to reflect any color. So their favorite colors are *no colors*! If I were to ask what their favorite fruit was they'd probably say Honolulu.

Tuesday, November 5, 1996 - Kobe

Another dispatch from the Symphony Hall Encore Wars. Tonight, pianist Izumi Tateno, a Japanese who has lived most of his performing life in Finland, was celebrating his sixtieth birthday year with an Osaka concert. When I bought the tickets this summer, I had never heard of him, but wanted to hear the Brahms F minor sonata he was playing, and parted with an *ichiman* for two seats on that basis alone. A later foray in Tower Records Kobe store showed that he had an impressive discography, most on the Finlandia label. He seems to champion Twentieth Century Scandinavian composers, so I bought a sampler disk to fill in yet another gap of my musical education. The concert was not a good effort. He got lost about three-quarters of

the way through the short Intermezzo which passes for the 4th movement of the Brahms sonata, and pretty much improvised his way until beginning the next movement. Apparently, the local Steinway people haven't outfitted the hall with the latest transponder-equipped concert grand which is all the rage in the west. Stumble a bit in the recital, and a signal is automatically sent out to a computer in which all the keyboard works in the western world are stored, and your hands are quickly guided to the proper keys before the audience can read the panic in your eyes. In the Mozart variations which followed, his left hand became indecisive at the beginning of Variation Six, but he recovered from it. Since the program had no English hints, and my companion, Yukiko Jikuya, was letting me twist slowly in the wind, I believe he next performed a Granados Goyesca, which was followed by the thunderous sound of one hand clapping. He didn't even need to get off the stool to see if we were still awake, but launched into a very fine reading of the suite from Falla's "El Amor Brujo," which was the program's conclusion.

Polite applause followed that, and after he received his traditional bouquet, he lurched toward the piano for an unrequested encore. Perhaps he wanted to indicate that he could play something other than Falla, and all four of his encores were interesting, and to me, unknown works from this century. The applause following each remained nothing more than polite, however, unless he ventured to approach the piano, at which time it suddenly became Horowitzian in its fervor. I heard Vladimir Horowitz play; Horowitz was a hero of mine. And just as surely as Dan Quayle is no John Kennedy, Izumi Tateno is no Vladimir Horowitz. But once the sharks smell blood, they'll feed until the bones sink to the bottom. All Tateno had to do was take a step over some invisible line on the stage that everyone but me recognized, and the

ovation would swell grotesquely, and another freebie would fill our ears. But once he signaled, before launching into Encore Number Four, that this was the final one, they could hardly be bothered to clap sufficiently long to let him make a dignified exit. At least we were able to have some excellent pasta and pizza at Paul's afterward.

Friday, November 8, 1996 - Kobe

Tomorrow Mata returns from the U.S. after a six-week visit to put out financial brush fires set by her worthless brother Russell, and to visit our new granddaughter, Madisen. She also wanted to be on hand to personally usher that political dinosaur, Bob Dole, into retirement. To bad Strom and Jesse couldn't be in that same contingent. If her absence has been seldom noted in these pages, it is not because she is not missed, and desired. We e-mail and call regularly, and I am very happy I have both this following Monday and Tuesday off following her arrival. What seems to have changed is my attitude toward her. This is not to say that I have welcomed being alone more than I did in the past, or that any feelings I have for her have dropped below simmer, but merely that I am more comfortable with our relationship. I don't worry about its status when she's gone, and magnify every real or imagined dubious word or act of hers into a potential crisis for our marriage to weather. This Japan trip was the first time in over eleven years we had been apart for more than a week and a half, and we were not ready for it. Okay; I was not ready for it. I won't drone on in detail about this, but there was not a frantic moment for me in these past six weeks, and I hope that means I'm maturing a bit in my approach to this relationship. It is certainly the only one of its kind I've ever had, and the learning process is both interesting and poignant. I am currently reading the late, and lamented (by me, at least) Michael Harrington's

book, *Socialism: Past and Future*, and it is interesting, too, but in a different way. I fear his wishes for the future are not likely to come about, so though what he writes and the way he thinks is quite interesting to me, I doubt that I will ever have to act upon what he says, nor will it reach into my personal being very deeply. But thinking about Mata and me, and observing the changes occurring within and about me is interesting in a more immediate way. I'm destined to live out the ramifications of this thought, so its interest is more than passing.

Tuesday, November 12, 1996 - Kobe

Last night was the dinner cruise which signaled the end of this year's Shoin Festival. Last year's version was held on the *Sylphide*, and was rewarding in many ways. The food was fabulous, and I was awarded a prize, by vote of those present, for the eating exhibition I put on that evening. This year, the price and quality went in opposite directions, and, unfortunately, the anticipated ones. Apparently, the *Sylphide* was unavailable last night, or at least, not at a price which enabled the university to skim its layer of largesse from the top. The price rose from 4000 to 6500 yen, and this year I only saw one other colleague from the teaching ranks in attendance. Had he not been there, I might have been pressed into service to lead the corps in the opening *Kampai!* toast, and I shudder to think of what kind of insulting imprecation my fractured *Nihongo* might have yielded. The vessel chosen for the cruise this year was encouragingly named *Perle de la Mer*, though once on board, *Faux Zirconium d'Egout* seemed more appropriate for that scow. The food was second-rate, and the buffet table actually contained silver platters of cheese spread sandwiches on white bread, and copious quantities of them, I might add, along with an excess of insultingly ordinary spaghetti and meat sauce. Several

washtubs full of both these items were left for the crew at the end of the evening, while the few frail strands of salmon sushi made available fell under the first forks wielded after *Kampai!* had barely ceased to echo from the quarterdeck. I was not among those wielders, but watched helplessly as those lovely orange morsels slid down the equally lovely necks of Shoin women, whose festival, after all, I was crashing.

Saturday, November 16, 1996 - Kobe

What do you think of when you think of 'happiness?' Not the dictionary definition, but what kinds of experiences do you associate with that word? I can think of meeting Mata at the airport last week as one of those experiences, or a particularly delicious meal I have prepared and am consuming, or the feeling I anticipate having when I first hold my new grandchild, Madisen. When I was a child, in Spring Lake, we had a Labrador Retriever, Lady, and at night she stayed cooped up in the kitchen, prevented from spreading her bottomless capacity for affection to the bedrooms of the house, which sorely needed it. The house was not especially large, and the kitchen also contained the washing machine, and every morning, when someone first stirred upstairs, and footsteps could be heard in the hall or bathroom, a rhythmic thumping began in the kitchen below. It was Lady's tail, pounding the washing machine as she stood, expectantly, by the gate to receive us. Once someone started down the stairs, the tempo of the canine tympani increased dramatically, and each footstep closer cranked up the Bolero-meter one more increment, until one of us would turn the corner and see her radiant, shining black face, barely able to remain stationary because of all the activity going on behind it. Lady, it seems to me, expressed pure happiness on those mornings, and the sound of the washing machine being

drummed stays with me as a audio cue to those feelings. Just thinking about those times with her, running on the beach in the cold of winter, looking for driftwood to burn, colorfully, that night in the fireplace, makes me realize how much more happiness my life would contain with a dog to have a place in it. Even now, when I go to sleep at night, I purposefully construct fantasies of a future a few years down the road -- as a very effective sleep aid -- and many of those fantasies involve having a dog or two as a part of my family.

Whenever 'happiness,' either as a concept or an experience, comes to mind, it always presents a set of experiences in my mind. Sometimes those are experiences I have never had, but desire; perhaps they are selected from my past as examples of what has made me happy. Yesterday, I gave one of my classes, Speaking Practice, an assignment aimed at making conversations between partners in class easy to initiate. I had been sent a text from a publisher, and a few of the exercises in it looked promising, so I decided to try them out in this class-without-a-text I have been stuck with this year. This particular exercise provided the students with ten incomplete sentences, which they were to complete individually, and then talk with a partner about the similarity or disparity of their answers, and the reasons for them. The questions were quite straightforward; "I get angry when..." "My parents think I'm..." There was also one which began "I'm happiest when..." That's a no-brainer for me, but then perhaps 'no-brainer' might be a good description of me, as well. I would say, "...when I'm being licked in the face by a big dog that I truly loved, and which loved me." If that's too complex, then, any damn dog in the street will do. I recognize how dangerous an admission that is to make in public, since Mata has informed me several times that if she sees a dog lick my face, she will never kiss me until I

wash up. That threat has power now, since I have, at most, only canine acquaintances, not loves. But if and when I am ever permitted a dog, the call would be a tough one, and I'm sure she senses that. There were 12 students in class yesterday, and 6 of them, **half** the class, I add, redundantly, completed the sentence beginning with "I'm happiest when..." with some version of "...when I'm asleep." What the hell kind of an answer is that? I wish I knew. Does their world of experiences offer them so little that they find the best life of all is a life devoid of any experiences whatever? That sounds like what a person bent on suicide might say, but that hardly seems likely for any of these young women, and female suicide in this country is very low, I believe. But the data, meager as it is, remains, and not even a person of my temerity has yet dared to build a general theory of human behavior upon it. Yet.

Wednesday, November 20, 1996 - Kobe

To conclude my whirlwind keyboard tour, I took Mata to a concert in recital which was truly offensive. The pianist, Cyprian Katsaris, has an international reputation, but I am beginning to wonder: for what? I had bought a CD of his a few years ago, and admired his fleet, skillful fingers, so when I saw a recital advertised this summer, I plunked down the requisite yen. After the less than arousing piano work I have heard this fall, hearing a true artist of undeniable world stature sounded like a satisfying way to finish the survey. Unlike most concert flyers and posters over here, however, the Katsaris one was not bilingual, and so I had no idea what the program would be, but the appearance of a 'BWV' at least assured me that Bach would be represented.

First the good news, and it is quite good, indeed. He **does** have profound technical ability at the piano, and did not seem in the least taxed by even the most difficult work he presented, a

part of the second year of Liszt's *Annees de Pelerinage*. He played a large number of restrained pieces, and displayed a lovely *pianissimo* like a delicate meringue. So many of the pianists, even the outstanding ones like Goode and Kissin, could not match Katsaris in light-as-a-breath sounds from the piano. It seems more a matter of will or judgment than ability. Others calculate, or believe, that a truly soft note will not be heard in the back of the auditorium, and the effort to produce one will be lost. They are greatly mistaken. As a resident of Row EE last night, I can attest to both the audibility and enchantment of the *pp* and *ppp* I was treated to.

It hardly seems like I have anything to complain about, but bitch I must, though not about the execution, on the whole, but the construction and content of what we heard. Well, there **was** something about his 'behavior' from the bench which seemed out of place anywhere but a Las Vegas lounge act: he kept looking at the audience as he played. It must have occurred at least 40 or 50 times, and when it first happened, I thought he was reproofing someone whose gum-chewing was audible, or whose eyelashes opened and shut with more sound than he was accustomed to. There was a fair amount of coughing that night, and one person, just as Katsaris had launched the second of the Mendelssohn *Songs without Words*, hacked a couple of times, causing the pianist to stop playing, look at the offender, and gesture with the unmistakable message, "Okay, get it all out and into your hankie, and then I'll begin again." That seemed a display of bush-league petulance on his part, but subsequent looks out into the half-filled Symphony Hall were into worshipful silence, and I guess it's just one of an affectation-encumbered set of mannerisms Katsaris has developed over the years.

The program was musically insubstantial and gimmicky. It was a group of encores,

strung together by what someone thought was a cute idea: a tribute to Venice, or perhaps Italy in general. I couldn't read it, as I hope you recall. An unconscionable number of operatic paraphrases and arias arranged for piano cluttered the second half, and no complete work was longer than about eight minutes. When musical fluff was combined with a performance which contained more strange body language than a Michael J. Pollard cinema portrayal, the pianist I was most reminded of was Chico Marx. The same exact thought occurred to Mata during the first half, and we shared our mutual conclusion, with much hilarity, at the break. We had expected him to play with his hands upside-down, or with only one finger of his right hand doing all the work, as in so many Marx Brothers movies, but there was still another hour of playing left, and, I am appalled to say, we would not be disappointed in one of our hopes. I suppose what was so irritating about Katsaris, finally, was not his physically histrionic performance onstage, but the squandering of all that ability for a two-handed Ferrante and Teicher concert. His discography contains plenty of the Right Stuff, and the ones I have heard were done competently, so he is no stranger to them. All autumn I had heard pianists of lesser gifts, or abilities more incompletely developed, struggle with the great works for the instrument, and no matter how I may have criticized what came out of the piano at their hands, I admired the fact that they got on a platform and played what everyone must play to be considered a musical artist. Katsaris cheated us, and I'm pissed off at him. He's John Tesh masquerading as Rudolf Serkin.

When the concert came to an end, I couldn't imagine what would be suitable as an encore, or whether there were any left in the repertoire. Of course the audience applauded as if they wanted one, and he obliged. After the first four bass notes, I couldn't believe my ears: the theme

from the movie "The Pink Panther," by that paragon of western civilization, Henry Mancini. Now I was insulted, and luckily, Mata does not know how close I was to shouting my feelings at the stage. Since the UPH has an artsy-craftsy wing, up and running for the occasion, it felt that the entire concert was an experience in cultural arrogance and condescension by Katsaris, calculated to demonstrate, to those who understood, how unworthy they were to receive the Sacraments of the West. Throw these primitive swine some garbage and they'll be grateful, which only proves what swine they are, and how much they deserve nothing more. In fact, that conclusion seems too plausible to have come from the UPH. The second encore was ostensibly by Mozart, and contained little one and two octave *glissandi* in the right hand, and during the brief melodic segments of that work, he displayed his awesome Marxian One-Finger technique, perhaps proving that his next career should be in the area of proctology.

Sunday, November 24, 1996 - Kobe

Most Buddhist temples close at sunset, so when my student, Kayoko Dewa, asked if she could take me to Kiyomizu-dera one evening this month, my mind raced ahead to sneaking over a wall and engaging in surreptitious nuzzling under the reddening maples. I began to redden after those thoughts, as well I should. She also mentioned that she wanted to bring her boyfriend, if that was all right, and my heart sank as I summoned up images of standing guard outside a sanctified trysting place, fending off the outraged priests with my Pentax. As with all the previous excursions with Shoin students, the overt purpose is the improvement of their English in a technique roughly equivalent to teaching swimming by tossing some poor soul into the ocean a mile or two off the shore of Cape Hatteras and suggesting the next lesson will be discussed

later on the beach. Few of the students have ever been forced to speak only English with their companion for more than a few minutes, so four or five hours taxes even the most fluent of them.

While Kayoko would not qualify for that level of expertise, she had spunk and grace, which takes a person far up my list. Her boyfriend bailed out after considering the circumstances, and she, instead, rounded up two lovely friends, Yoko Nakajima and Nakako Nishihata, and Mata and I joined them this past Thursday, the 21st, after school.

The place was truly enchanting. While I have not seen even a substantial fraction of Kyoto's wonders, every one I have latched onto has given me something special, even *Kinkaku-ji*. We arrived at 6:30, just as the last light of the day had become a darkening indigo, and lights in the temple had been turned on. This only happens for two weeks in the year, and I am forever in Kayoko's debt for thinking of me during this time. Apparently, the evening hours were far from a well-kept secret, as we had to stand in line for everything, from tickets to a drink of water, or hand-washing from the waterfall. *Kiyomizu* means 'pure water' in *Nihongo*, and there's a set of legends about the temple, and the powers of the water which comes from its waterfall, in which many people seem to place a lot of stock. Its main therapeutic uses seem to be to ensure an easy childbirth, but since I had been suffering from a bit of constipation, that seemed to be more or less in the ballpark, and I drank.

The temple is arrayed in various vertical levels on a hill in southeast Kyoto, and offers an addictive view of the city from its highest point. I couldn't take myself away from it, even though I knew there was more to see and visit. Like most others that evening, I just stood there

and gazed, zombie-like, at the lights below. I had seen a similar view of Osaka a year ago with Akiko Odake from the observation deck of a skyscraper, and the effect was nothing like that of Kiyomizu. I don't suppose I had realized until that time that a vista which penetrates the memory depends as much on the standpoint as the target. Kiyomizu and the picture of Kyoto below seemed to belong together, and Kyoto was impossible to see -- really see -- unless one saw it from Kiyomizu. Your picture of the city, and your experience of being there would be incomplete without that sight locked in. And to have seen it at night, surrounded by others experiencing the same thing, was something special. Of course, I **wasn't** experiencing what others were experiencing; they were, for the most part, Japanese, and were experiencing something more intimately connected with their personal identity than I was. The difference would be my visiting the Lincoln Memorial along with some Japanese tourists; we'd all experience the same sensory input, but I would bring a lot more to the experience that comes from my personal identity. Of course, I have to remember that Japan is a country which commemorates **everything**! Last month there was a Quarreling Festival in Himeji, but I've got no argument with that; and a recent TV show compared men with the longest nipple hairs, and eventually had a tug-of-war between pairs of individuals, using their nipple hairs as the ropes, tied together. Japanese will get in line to watch anything, and set up a green tea and octopus stand on the side. But Kiyomizu at night is nothing so innocuous. It's one of the genuine places of magic in this magical kingdom.

Sunday, December 1, 1996 - Kobe

For some reason, I'm still ruminating on the elections over here and in the states. The

system over here seems much preferable to the American one in one important way. All politics is compromise. Even the thugs running Burma (or Myanmar) can't disembowel Aung Sang Suu Kyi and impale her head on a post in downtown Rangoon as a deterrence to others of a similar inclination, which I assume would be their preferred way of dealing with any person or movement which suggested that they should have to answer to the citizens for their performance in governing them. They have to rein in their natural impulses for fear that they will be penalized by the outside world for expressing them fully. What seems important in representative forms of politics is to make certain that, given the necessity of compromise, the citizens in their support of their choice of candidates do not have to compromise their beliefs about the way their country should proceed. The American two-party arrangement is barely better than the old Soviet one-party system in this respect. In Japan, there are several parties with elected representatives, from far right to far left, and it is difficult for a voter to be left without a candidate which truly appeals to his or her specific beliefs. I happen to like what I can understand of the Communist Party of Japan, and it has placed several people in the Diet. Unlike in the U.S., the Communist Party hasn't been thoroughly demonized by demagogues, both in politics and journalism, and generally is treated as just another political party with specific stands on current issues. It seems to favor benefiting citizens directly by government action, when such action is needed, and not trust to some arcane form of economic/political hoodwinking to benefit those at the top, in the empty claim that those benefits will fall eventually to the bottom, richly magnified.

American politics has chugged along on two cylinders for most of its history, and we have been told it's the best system available, perhaps using longevity as a fallacious argument in

support of that proposal. Of course, to allege quality and give quantity as evidence is a tactic which should be thrown out of any reputable arena of discussion, but politics and media have long since relinquished any claim to reputation other than shabby. The difficulty of Ross Perot getting his effort taken seriously in 1992, and again in 1996, even though millions of voters worked for and supported him, seems indicative of the way the system, set up and maintained by the elected representatives of two parties, excludes strangers. One of the many negative consequences for our country, both in the long and short term, is the destruction of the political idealism of the American citizen. In Japan, voters can go into the booths and vote their ideals, since there is likely to be a candidate on the ballot representing those ideals, no matter how outside what is perceived to be the “mainstream” they may be. Of course, that term in quotes is an exceptionally corrupted one in our country, as its serious use by politicians and pundits will clearly indicate. But a voter over here doesn’t have to compromise his or her political ideals in that most important of all places to be able to express them: the voting booth. When the elected representatives meet and have to get on with the business of running the country, **they** will have to compromise, which is the nature of their calling. But it is a short cut to electoral cynicism and disillusionment to force the voters to betray their ideals. That is why I am hopeful of Mr. Perot’s success in solidifying another political party in this country, and not just at the heady presidential level, even though I find his own propositions simplistic buffoonery, and no less demagogic than those of the other parties. He may be an ignorant son-of-a-bitch, but he’s the only son-of-a-bitch we’ve got, and I now realize I should have voted for him instead of Clinton.

Last Wednesday was my 56th birthday, and I was amazed to discover how many Shoin

students remembered it, and brought me cards, notes, and presents. Mata may have been responsible for some of that, as I caught her more than once whispering the relevant data to a young lady behind my back. And of course, I have compiled a list of their birthdays since my arrival here, gleaned from casual mentions in a journal or glances at their student ID cards during final exams, and have sent off many cards and greetings, so what goes around, as they say. But it also fills me with the deepest dread for my eventual departure. There will be eight classes in which I will have to confront a final day, and words of goodbye for those I love which will be mangled and made grotesque by tears and longing. It will be like saying farewell to daughters I know I will never see again, and already I am beginning to feel inconsolable. A few groups of three or four have requested that I select some little day trip we can take together before I leave, one where I have never been before, but that we can make our own -- **our** temple, **our** mountain, **our** little rock by the seashore. How can I endure such heartbreak? My eyes are moist now as I type these thoughts; what will happen when the time comes, and I see us all together in a special place for the last time? Then there will be two graduation parties, one for the College and one for the University, plus commencement itself to dehydrate me further. Is it wrong to try to find a way to spare myself this pain? I've already noted, but only to myself, how easy it would be to slip in front of the onrushing Rapid Express at Hanshin Railroad's Oishi Station platform, but that's not what I'm talking about, at least not for now. Perhaps like the summer's dental work, the anticipation is far worse than the execution, an unfortunate term to use, I now see. The analogy is not good, however. My dread of dental work was based on ignorance, on trips to the chair too long deferred. The dread of parting is based on knowing with excess clarity exactly

what I will feel like, and how those feeling will shake out, or, more accurately, pour out.

For my birthday, Mata brought back a book written by our mutual acquaintance, Charlie Gusewelle. Since he never seems to recall me when we infrequently meet, perhaps I should refrain from the intimacy of "Charlie," but he once tried to dragoon me into a business venture of his, mistaking my possession of momentary notoriety with the possession of excess funds for investment, so I believe I can extract a permanent debt of false familiarity from him. He's a hell of a wonderful writer, however, probably substantially undercompensated by the *Kansas City Star*, and can be forgiven the occasional half-hearted hustle. The book she gave me, *Another Autumn*, is about the life of his beloved dog, Rufus, now deceased. The reader knows that last fact from the outset, and must steel oneself for the inevitable. I leapt into the first chapters like a pup, devouring all that lay in front of me as if it were a new rattan chair. One-third of the 200+ pages fell before me in the first morning with coffee, the second third between classes at Shoin. Then I began to dawdle. Gusewelle's cranky grace was still on every sentence, but the years had hit double digits, and Rufus, I knew from the introduction, had been buried in his 13th. While I couldn't postpone the dog's death, I could postpone my confrontation with it. I love dogs more than any other non-dog-owner I have ever met, and just reading about the death or suffering of one tightens my throat and makes my eyes blink like a tic-beset neurotic. That dread has a family resemblance to the dread of my leaving Japan. I know it's coming, and I know its effect on me will be powerful and beyond my capacity to control. I can probably put the book down and never read the last 40 pages, but the month of March, like the march of months, is relentless.

We went to Uji on Tuesday, my regular day off, for Mata's introduction and my return to

see the change of autumn colors. Since this was an ordinary weekday, the sights were much less crowded and we could stretch out and truly enjoy the day, rather than see it as a cultural necessity. At least, that was my approach. We spent nearly an hour and a half at *Byodo-in*, which is little more than one truly fabulous building, and never felt bored, or needing to move on and use our time more wisely. The maples were intoxicating in their palette, finches flitted busily on berry-laden branches of other trees, and consented to a large number of pictures, as well. The temple bell, interesting though plain seven weeks ago in the monotonous green of late summer, was transformed into something warmer and hypnotic. At the bottom of the two-dozen stone steps which led up to it, a glance was all it took to draw me up, through the yellows and oranges that it now wore like a stunning new kimono for its coming-of-age ceremony. I lingered, taking the same photograph far too often, but in a sort of pictorial trance. All that day in Uji, I was out of the linguistic mode of thought, and seeing in shapes and colors rather than metaphors. I'm sure I was lousy company, but Mata is usually too kind to bring it up. We followed four hours there with a quick return to *Kiyomizu*, this time in (fading) daylight. It made me realize one reason for Uji's enchantment.

Kiyomizu is in Kyoto which, for all its glories, is still a modern city of several million. The temples and other soul-filling attractions of Kyoto are oases of enrichment, but to get to them you still have to drag your weary ass through the urban desert. At Uji, even the train station is subdued, though trains leave and arrive every three minutes. We traveled on one of the many privately-owned lines in Japan, this one the Keihan, which has super express trains between Osaka and Kyoto, though the Uji spur has a real mom-and-pop feel to it. There's always a seat,

and some of the stops are literally within walking distance of each other. Once we crossed the main highway at the same edge of the town as the Keihan station, Uji was the apotheosis of tranquillity. After our morning at *Byodo-in*, we decided to stroll over to the river and see the city park which is set on an island in the river. On the way over, a lunch of green tea soba and tempura in a very flavorful broth successfully beckoned. What is wonderful about Uji is that the spell of *Byodo-in* is not broken by the town, it's prolonged. True, there were far, **far** fewer cars than on Health Sports Day, an incongruity which still keeps the chuckles coming. But the walk to the river is lovely, as is the amble across to the other side, and the approach to *Kosyo-ji* Temple at the opposite end of town. Nothing breaks the continuity of contemplativeness, if that's what you're about. So, in the end, it seemed like I had a four-hour visit to *Byodo-in*, even though less than half that time was actually spent inside the temple grounds.

The second trip to *Kiyomizu*, on the other hand, meant over a kilometer of dealing with either the overcrowded Kyoto bus system, which I have now begun to believe purchased, in a misplaced burst of artistic largesse, a number of Duane Hanson statues and placed them on all the seats in the buses, thus making certain that everyone must stand. Of course, the UPH is quick to point out that many coaches I have no interest in taking speed by nearly empty, thus making it certain the Duane Hanson purchase was restricted only to those routes I am likely to take during my time here. Whatever the explanation, Kyoto buses are spell-breaking, like rancid breath preceding a much-awaited first kiss. Walking is the option we took, which means trying to ignore the gauntlet of overpriced schlock leading to every attraction of merit. In such a well-regulated society as this, why are Buddha-encrusted Zippo lighters permitted to be sold openly?

In Uji, the most garish thing being hawked was green tea soft ice cream, and then it was difficult, on a bright Tuesday afternoon, to find the salesperson to take our 200 yen.

Wednesday, December 11, 1996 - Kobe

I seem to have blundered into an upward spiral of gift-giving with the Hori family. Like so many situations of unaccountable horror, it started with the pure innocence of good intentions. In fact, I don't quite know where it started. At least, I can't trace my current sleepless nights to one unique, identifiable event. I've always shown special kindness and attention to Shoko, and remembered her birthday this past Spring with a present of Pepperidge Farms cookies. I cooked dinner for her and Hiroko, and Mata and Kyoko have spent a lot of social time together, both to improve the latter's English and to acquaint Mata with more of the daily life of the Japanese housewife. When we finally met Tadaichi, it was at a pub/restaurant where he treated us all to dinner. Yes! Now I know! When I reciprocated, as I was counseled I must, I took him and the Hori women to an Italian restaurant, Tavetorina, which seriously upped the ante in this game. It was clearly more expensive and upscale than the place he took us, and he recognized it instantly, and said on that evening that he wanted to treat us sometime when he returned from his upcoming trip to Germany. I suppose the chronology is fairly important here, since I actually didn't cook for Shoko and Hiroko until after his rejoinder of a dinner at a lobster restaurant, where we had a private room and more food, in an endless parade of courses, than I have ever had set in front of me. When I did set out a meal for the Hori sisters, I included wine of their birth years, 1972 and 1974 which I had especially brought from my cellar in Kansas City that spring for such an occasion. It's something I do all the time, since my little wine collection is

something which brings me great pleasure, and sharing it in that particular way is something I enjoy. I don't expect an act like that to lead to some need by others to match my perceived largesse, and it never has in the past, in America. Perhaps I had become too accustomed to the ungrateful louts of my native country.

After I sent Shoko and Hiroko home with the dregs of the '72 and '74 wines I had served at their dinner following the Jorg Demus concert, wine became one of the preferred media of exchange between our families, with the unfortunate side effect that their wines could never match mine in the appearance of expenditure, and they were forced to supplement them with other goodies, as well. So, when Hiroko spent a few days in Hong Kong, she brought back a bottle of a gamay-based house wine from the hotel where she stayed; Tadaichi presented us a "Bordeaux" rose and some Cote d'Or chocolates from his European sojourn. Then, when he and Kyoko went to Singapore for their 26th wedding anniversary, we were treated to gifts upon their return. True, I had Mata stash a bottle of 1970 Torres Black Label cabernet in her return luggage for that anniversary, and she added some Russell Stover chocolates from Kansas City for good measure. The whole family remembered my birthday two weeks ago, and Tadaichi and Kyoko, in particular, outdid themselves with a pair of exquisite wine glasses.

Christmas and New Year's are coming, and I am tapped out. Hiroko's birthday is also just around the corner, and I couldn't afford to give her a hankie. The sudden cost of paying for the maintenance of two households -- one in Kansas City, and the other, where I sit -- is taking its toll, but that cost wasn't something I expected to shoulder when this business began with the Horis. Mata seems to expect a real vacation when school ends in February, one to Thailand, or

Bali, and I'll try to accommodate her if the semester's bonus is plentiful enough, but it will be one in which we stay in places rejected by impoverished backpackers and the local homeless.

Thailand is my choice, since I hit Bali the same time last year, but that means we'll have to spend a few nights sleeping on a bus in order to bring back sapphires and Thai Silk for the Hori family.

Where did I go wrong? Chris Starling, married to a Japanese woman, says that this is serious business, especially for Japanese men, who don't want to lose face in the gift-giving game, and who will raise the stakes if they believe the same thing has happened to them. Am I doing this, too? Tadaichi is far more affluent than I, and can drive me out of the game, whether that's his aim or not. I'm sure it isn't, but after the avalanche of packages for my birthday, I tremble, and not with unalloyed joy, at the approach of these next holidays.

Monday, December 23, 1996 (The Emperor's Birthday) - Kobe

The next few pages will contain excessive mention of bodily functions, so those of you offended by such things, especially between the covers of a book, might do well to skip ahead, as well as toss your copies of Chaucer and Shakespeare into the fireplace. In my daily strolls in the Oishi neighborhood, I have begun to notice the frequency with which men urinate in public. It has become one of those phenomena which, first observed idly, has become more vivid in my mind with each repetition. No matter the time of day, if I walk about for more than a half-hour, I am certain to encounter a man taking a leak in a public gutter or curbside. These are not the homeless or unemployed, it would seem, nor does it only occur outside bars as the evening progresses. Yesterday, I was out testing my recently acquired Fuji GS690 camera, and just trying to find a variety of subjects, focusing distances, and lighting conditions, to put it through its

paces. It was late morning, and there, across from a bakery and adjacent sushi shop was a man dribbling away on the street. There was no sidewalk in this area, so he just whipped it out at the edge of the roadway, one which is quite actively frequented, and did his business. The day before, on the way home from shopping in Kobe, I spied a man doing it in a storm sewer just outside a group of apartments. Then he went inside to one of the apartments! I have yet to see a woman squat in the same manner, and all men, while walking their dogs, are careful to bring back the Fido feces for proper disposal. Of course, I haven't seen a man take a dump in the open over here, so the dog analogy may not hold.

Spitting is another form of excretion done incessantly in public by men in Japan, and it is but a slight exaggeration to say that my path to the bus stop each winter morning is easily marked by the spots of steaming spittle left earlier, like Hansel and Gretel's bread crumbs, to mark the way. Again, only men seem to be permitted to engage in this sport as well. Don't get me wrong. This is not a plea for equal opportunity. If anything, it is a plea for **no** opportunity. Perhaps Prime Minister Hashimoto could be spoken to by his wife to include a public expectoration plank in his next platform of national goals.

This next subject is indirectly allied to the previous one. After literally months of comparing our calendars and finding a suitable day and time, I finally was able to schedule Noriko Itsugami for dinner at our apartment, along with Maki Ueda and Yukiko Jikuya. When the Friday came, Maki informed me that Noriko had a cold and wouldn't show up. Well, I was pretty peeved, at least briefly, since she had used the same excuse to bail out of a restaurant dinner we had this summer in Kobe. I know Noriko well enough to know that she's a very

healthy tomboy, and a little cold should have no effect on her social abilities. Upon reflection, I began to realize that a lot of the Shoin women use the “cold” excuse to miss a variety of functions that I would have attended even with an untreated fracture. Sachie used a cold to be an unannounced no-show for a Kyoto trip, and it is the excuse of choice for missing an exam at school. Are all these young women prevaricating malingerers? I’m beginning to think not, but more victims of their society’s view of women, just as the men pissing in the street are a consequence of how men are expected -- or permitted -- to behave in this culture.

It’s the beginning of winter, and the sneezing in the trains and buses has begun to intensify. Last year, I only noticed **that** it was happening; this year, I’m noticing **who** is doing it. Primarily, the sneezers are men. While women are at least 40% of the riders on these conveyances, few if any of them sneeze as they ride. It is not that women are healthier than men, though that may be a fact in itself. Women are perceived as frail, vulnerable creatures, susceptible to all kinds of physical and mental ailments. At the first sign of one, even the merest wisp of a hint of a murmur of a ghost of an ailment, they confine themselves to a bed to preserve what remains of their fragile constitutions while the ravages of a sinus headache take its awful toll. Women are weak, or so the party line goes, and cannot be allowed to expose themselves to the dangers that men are expected to face without a thought. Men are expected to “play hurt.” If you have a cold, flu, double hernia, you suit up and hit the line waiting to board the Limited Express for Osaka. Once on board, you sneeze, spray, cough up phlegm balls the size of Casaba Melons, because that’s what you have to do to stay in the game. You never, **ever** take yourself out because of injury, since you are a man, and it’s your job to keep the empire strong and your

family solvent.

The widespread employment of women in the workplace, at least in jobs that are not traditionally relegated to females, is a recent phenomenon over here, and I wonder how this dual standard will play out in the corporate stadium. Which view of women will prevail? Will they be allowed more sick days than men in the same position, or will they have to cope with the expectation that they become more “male” in their willingness to work while ill? If history is any guide, they’ll be expected to be both women, and invulnerable. That is to say, they will be required to be subservient tea-servers who are never absent.

And on an unrelated note, last night, by special messenger, we received our Christmas gifts from Tadaichi and Kyoko (as well as Hiroko and Shoko) Hori: a gift box of two expensive bottles of Suntory whiskey to answer our pathetic salvo of a marked-down muffler from the bargain floor of Daimaru department store, and a Carpenters Christmas CD, delivered by hand during Shoko’s normal Wednesday session. I’m now beginning to wonder how much it would cost to have my vasectomy reversed. If this goes any farther, they are bound to expect our first-born as reasonable parity for what they have presented us.

We also hit the Luminarie light show in downtown Kobe this year. We learned our lesson from 1995’s Christmas Eve debacle and went on the 21st this year. Actually, I went on the 17th, as well, since I wanted to check out all possible vantage points for photography, being displeased with last year’s pictorial efforts on my part. Two Shoin students, Naoko Hotta and Yukie Yamamura, had wanted to go with me for what seem to be rather complex reasons. Christmas in Japan is the **real** Valentine’s Day. February 14 is just the *pro forma* Valentine’s

Day, and is likely to be ignored by true sweethearts, as long as Christmas did not go by unmarked. The Kobe light show is the quintessential couples thing, I now discover, and to be forced to see it with your family, especially at the age of nineteen or twenty, is a public admission of your inability to snag a squeeze, and the certainty of eventual spinsterhood. It's only marginally better to go with a gang of girls, since the public statement that makes is identical, though the commiseration later may take a little of the edge off its poignancy. I guess, for Naoko and Yukie, going with me was one step above that. At least I was male, and they made certain it was clear they were with me, though nothing even innocently untoward, like hand-holding or nose-rubbing, transpired. It was quite crowded on the 17th, even though the entire afternoon and evening produced a driving rainstorm. It became a Kobe umbrella show, compounded by the quagmire which Merikan Park had become by 7:00 P.M., and my opinion of the lights is unchanged. There are more of them this year, with only a modest increase in variety, and people are truly apeshit over them.

Mata had wanted to see them again, so we went on the 21st, which, I belatedly noted, was Saturday. We took the train to Motomachi station, which was a big transportation improvement over last year's #2 bus, and then walked to within three blocks of where the lights were supposed to be. It was 5:30 P.M., and the switch was scheduled to be tripped at 6:00, and remain on until 10:30, but at that three-block distance, we were in an immovable mass of people heading in that direction, and slowly. By the time we squeezed our way the three blocks, it was show time, and the lights were on in all their monotonous splendor. A major five or six block traffic thoroughfare had been blocked off, as well as the arteries perpendicular to it for two blocks on

either side, and the lights arched over the street for the entire length, about two or three arches per block. Each was identical to the other, and yet thousands of people stood in the middle of the street, transfixed by the sight. We stayed at the edges, on the sidewalk, where forward motion seemed possible, at least in principle. On the roadway was a literal bodyjam. We traveled one city block, and the pushing and shoving of the individuals behind us had begun to take its toll. It was just like waiting for the most popular train in Japan, with everyone wanting to get a seat before the person in front of them. At the end of the one block, there seemed to be a nearly imperceptibly frantic edge to those around us, desiring too much to get to the next set of lights, and I decided to bail out to the right. Mata had long since been separated from me, but I spotted her red beret in the crowd, and she saw that I was wimping out, and, with great difficulty, joined me. Fifty feet away from the Boulevard of Bulbs and we were on just another urban street on a Saturday night. We took a parallel street to the one with the Luminarie, and cut back in to it for the last block. People seem to have calmed down by this time, and we jostled our way to the circular display of a slightly different pattern set up like a Megawatt Stonehenge in Merikan Park. Then, another, more modest arch of lights down a path in the park and we were out of there.

Wednesday, December 25, 1996 - Kobe

It occurs to me that I haven't mentioned the Bach Collegium Japan sufficiently often in these pages, or at least in proportion to their importance to my life over here. In one sense, hearing them perform has become such a commonplace event at the Shoin Chapel for me, augmented by the CDs they have recorded, and I have purchased, that there's little remarkable or

out of the ordinary in hearing them. Perhaps, that's a measure of how enriched my life has become over here.

Last night, the Bach Collegium performed Handel's *Messiah* at Shoin, and from the array of microphones seen in the aisles, I will apparently be adding yet another CD set to my collection in the near future. Their founder and leader, Masaaki Suzuki, teaches the occasional course in Religion and Music at Shoin, and performs, both as soloist, and with the Bach Collegium, in a series of concerts at Shoin Chapel. Last night's Christmas Eve performance of *Messiah* was memorable, and made me grateful again to be placed in proximity to such a remarkable musician. Suzuki seems to envision the work as one long sermon, sung by the soloists, with the chorus interjecting its ideas, and reiterating and expounding on points made earlier. There's an element of the function of a Greek chorus in his realization of their function, but Handel's wonderful choral writing adds another facet to their role. While the Bach Collegium attempts to replicate period performance practices and uses instruments faithful to the type played at the time, this was far from a dry, correct, academic performance. It pulsed with life, and no extremes of drama and dynamics, if called for by the text and Suzuki's vision of the work, were left mute last evening. In November, we attended a performance of Bach's *Mass in B Minor*, conducted by John Eliot Gardiner, and it, too, sounded like a fresh and vital new work, conceived in love and respect for what went before. But, like a profound piece of woodwork whose beauties had been long hidden by layers of well-meaning additions applied over the years, it most needed being stripped to the fundament, and seen for the work of joy that it was created to be.

Thursday, December 26, 1996 - Kobe

We were invited for Christmas dinner to the house of Ron and Yoshie Mason, and their daughter, Jennifer. Ron teaches one day a week at Shoin, but is full-time at another university between Osaka and Kyoto. Yoshie is an artist who just completed a mural on a wall in downtown Kobe, commissioned by the city. Also invited were Shoin colleague Robin Eve and his Japanese wife, Takami, and a Japanese family with an older teenaged daughter, Masako, who spoke excellent English, and a younger one, Lisa, who was born in the U.S. but spoke not a syllable. Yoshie had roasted a sixteen-pound turkey, and Robin, an Englishman, brought a proper steamed Christmas pudding which was subjected to a pressure cooker with good results. I was dependably counted on for excellent wine and an excess of picture-taking, and did not disappoint. A young Frenchwoman, Nathalie, was also in attendance, and the entire gathering could have passed for a "Can't we all just get along?" poster.

Conversation was quite lively, generally in English, and even the teenagers joined in. Occasionally, clarifications of meaning required *Nihongo* sidebars, and it was during those times that I reflected that, fifteen months after arriving in Japan, I am still forcing this culture to come to my terms. Nearly all my communication is done in English, and were it not for the education system over here, and the kindness of strangers that might cause others to blanch, I would be permanently incommunicado. A foreigner in America without even rudimentary English skills deals himself out of nearly every hand. In 1980's sociobabble, one is "marginalized" by being unable to understand words that everyone else does. What I have done, through sloth or other priorities, is marginalized myself. I recognized it again this afternoon as I took some film in to

be processed and contact sheets made. The woman at the Fuji store down the block, who speaks no English, tried to explain to me in slow, patient *Nihongo*, was that my film might not be ready until January 5, since everything shuts down in this country for the first three days of the year. While I knew that latter fact, I didn't understand her explanation of it -- not even one word. In many ways, I am footloose in Japan; I can ride the trains with confidence, go to the ATM when I need more cash, and buy all the provisions I require. I can see everything, do everything, go everywhere, and understand nothing. Well, maybe not **nothing**, but I am willingly held hostage to what people want me to understand, rather than being able to tune into what's being said and make my own judgment about its worth or veracity.

There was something nice about yesterday's dinner, other than the superbly prepared victuals. Yoshie is an artist. Earlier today I went to the Motomachi district to check out her mural, and it was wonderful: pulsing with color and energy, just like I imagine the artist herself is, after having only seen her twice. Robin is a composer, and recently attended a premiere of one of his works in Kyushu, returning on the night train to begin teaching at Shoin without so much as a second of time in his own bed. And I'm a writer, my plays having been performed in Kansas City earlier this year giving me a ticket of admittance to that label. It was great fun to talk about art and ideas again, something that hadn't happened in a long time. Academic life in general, and departments of philosophy in particular, where my greatest acquaintance is, seem to attract some narrow-interested, stultifying dullards, and dinner parties with academic philosophers are less stimulating than those with outboard motor repairmen. Even aestheticians seem only peripherally taken by art, which to me seems as preposterous as a cook who really

doesn't enjoy eating. Maybe if I were acquainted with a world-class philosophical mind, like Richard Rorty, I might be surprised, but the only ones I know are the drones of academia, and they do not impress. The intellectually and spiritually omnivorous seem to be an endangered species, and it was nice to find a few hardy specimens thriving yesterday around the dinner table.

Sunday, January 5, 1997 - Kobe

I spied note of a sake tasting in this month's *Kansai Time Out*. It was scheduled for the first four days of the new year at a room in the Osaka Westin, and promised 64 different examples of the brewer's art from the artisans of my hometown, Kobe, some from just down the street in Nada-ku. In my one year plus over here, I've drunk sake upon only a few occasions, and never with much attention to the experience, since so much else of a social nature was going on about me which demanded my attention. Short of throwing myself on the mercy of a sake-drinking Japanese friend and begging for a comprehensive drinking survey, not quite my style, I had no idea how I could assemble the elements of such a task alone. Even if I went alone to a bar which served sake, I wouldn't know how to ask for what I wanted, especially since what I wanted was **everything**. So the Westin saved my bacon, and for a mere 500 yen per mouth, so Mata and I hit the rails for Osaka on Friday. A little past half-way there, I realized we had partaken of nothing solid all day (the tasting ended at 5:00 P.M.), and detoured to a place guaranteed to grease up our innards properly for the ordeal awaiting: McDonald's! It was only the second time I have eaten at Mac's place since arriving, and they must have seen me coming. They had an indecipherable special for 500 yen, which I ordered, knowing that McDonald's is McDonald's the world around. This must have been the Regional Cuisine McDonald's in the basement of the

Hanshin Department Store's Umeda Station shop, since what I finally bit into was a deep-fried puffball sandwich, which I laboriously translated from the menu as a "gratin special." 'Gratin' is a term used loosely over here to refer to anything that may have had some sort of cheese near it at some time during its construction. Japanese cooking seems to be incorporating more cheese in it all the time, with the only stipulation being that no cheese flavor must ever be detected in any cheese dish. So this deep-fried gratin special tasted of a flour-and-oil roux, with a hint of *omochi*, the pounded rice paste traditional at this time of year. Luckily, it was plenty greasy, and a large order of fries brought the dipstick up to 'full.'

Having been to (probably) hundreds of winetastings in the U.S., and knowing the popularity of sake in Japan, I expected two things: first, that it would be crowded -- especially for that price --, and second, that portion control would be scrupulously exercised by the Pouring Police. Wrong on both counts. The Westin had set aside a nice dining room with an L-shaped arrangement of tables along two walls displaying the bottles of 29 brewers, most with more than one brand represented. In the center of the room was a picture and hardware exhibit of brewing techniques traditional and modern, and a quick glance around toted up more Westin employees in attendance than tasters, and none of them was trying to restrict the amounts we poured for ourselves. Often the wine trade in America will hold one of these public-relations tastings, but each company will have its own representative at a table, stingily ladling out the wine for us freeloaders, and never offering the top of the line products. A later review in the Daimaru Department Store sake department revealed that some of the bottles made available to us Friday were quite pricey in the world of fermented rice juice. We stayed as long as we dared, and I

doubt that the crowd ever swelled to beyond a dozen. Stacks of little plastic shot-and-a-half size glasses were provided at each set of bottles, but I had no idea what quantity would constitute an infringement on the hospitality offered, so I checked out the levels being taken by a few of the Japanese patrons around the tables, and none of them was particularly shy about making the bottles go 'glug-glug.' After the first two shots hit us we decided to barely dribble a sheen of sake into the bottom of the glass for each one we tried, and even at that, we hit the wall after about 15 or 20 samples. We had systematically gone through something from every bottle, starting at the one closest the door, and attempted to work our way around the L. We made it two-thirds of the way through one leg before our palates gave out and our heads started to play tricks on us. After that, we just drank from the cute bottles and the ones which appeared to be expensive.

One thing which surprised me was the extent to which floral aromas are prevalent in sake, perhaps by design. Some of the bottles even have flowers printed on them, perhaps to entice (or warn) the consumer concerning the contents. To me, a little of that goes a long way, and some of the samples were aggressively, even offensively flowery. One bottle had gardenias painted on the label, and one whiff of a glass of the stuff reminded me, unpleasantly, of a perfume popular with young ladies of my acquaintance in high school. It had the name "Jungle Gardenia," and was so asphyxiatingly powerful in its stench that it could be counted on, in serious enough quantities around the neck and shoulders, to so thoroughly scramble the neurons of a male adolescent that one's sexual urges would wilt in deference to an even more powerful one: the desire to breathe fresh air. It may have preserved more tender virginity than all the moralistic

lectures of Sunday School classes combined. It was no more enticing in a bottle of hootch than in my sixteen-year-old nostrils around Diane Kinkle's nape, though Diane Kinkle's nape was greatly to be prized, especially devoid of artificial encumberments.

The sake samples which appealed to me were ones which exhibited a fruitiness similar to that of a Columbard, both in nose and taste, and with a lingering finish which hints of the rice upon which it is based, but doesn't immediately send me for some red beans to accompany it.

Wednesday, January 8, 1997 - Kobe

Nineteen must be the best year of a person's life in Japan. A preponderance of my students is that age, and I met with five of them on Monday for *hatsumode*, or first visit of the new year to a shrine for prayers. The ringleader of this plan, made during the class Christmas party on December 19, was Yuki Yoshizawa, a bright, exuberant bottle of Champagne in her first year at Shoin, and of seemingly inexhaustible good spirits and enthusiasm. She enlisted five of her classmates to join us that day, and only one canceled because of a cold, a remarkably low mortality rate for a winter excursion.

Yuki's class, Oral English I, is the only one I meet twice a week, and so it is the group of young women with whom I have closer and more incessant contact than any other. While I teach two other Oral English I classes, I share the teaching duties with someone else, me on one day, he or she on another, for reasons that seem to make no sense, and which have never been offered when I inquired. While it is good to give the students a broad spectrum of teaching styles, that's something they are getting anyway with a minimum of six to eight different classes a week. Often the person a class is shared with is a part-time instructor, and having been that benighted

species before, I would guess that the institutional motivation for the policy is purely financial, since part-time college instructors are the lowest form of animate life in academia's economic world. No one is paid less, and given less respect by those above them, than those poor bastards. Upon my return to the U.S., I am quite likely to return to their ranks.

On Monday's schedule, we were to meet at noon in Osaka, grab a quick lunch, and hit the trail to Kyoto in pursuit of blessings and companionship. I told Mata I'd be back in time for bilingual news at 6:00 P.M. Three of us made the noon deadline, and the rest straggled in by 12:30. Sonomi, who was coming from Himeji -- 75 miles to the west -- was the last to arrive. This was the next-to-last day of the two-week winter break, but they greeted each other like returning POWs, screaming, giggling, and hugging. Of course, they had to hear the latest news, and none of it had to do with the elections in Serbia, I was shocked to discover. Those formalities completed, and a genuflect performed in my direction, of course, they proceeded to take me on what seemed like a maniacally circuitous route to a building called The Loft. Inside were many shops and eateries favored by the young, and their aim was taken on an Italian one of their liking. It was 1:00 P.M., and a line of more than 20 people stood patiently outside the entrance, which I took to be an encouraging sign. Large plain wooden tables held as many patrons as possible, and large bowls and platters of invariably red, lumpy things were placed in their midst. This I was able to spy through the windows while waiting our turn at the trough. Everyone was provided with an empty plate and utensils, and only the bashful went away hungry. Or those with some taste. The food was terrible. Everything was presented with a huge red oil slick atop, and I once explored beneath it to look for the remains of the Exxon Valdez, which I

know didn't sink, at least as far as my hopes after tasting this mess. Everyone else loved it, however, and cries of "*oishii!*" (*Nihongo* for 'delicious') followed the sliding of each morsel down a Japanese gullet. It was at precisely that moment that I knew never again to trust that word coming from their mouths. My memory flashed back to those same sounds coming from people who had eaten my cooking recently. Was what I presented them as ghastly as this, or are they unable to recognize good food when it comes their way? Perhaps their renowned politeness requires that they call everything laudable, whether it is or isn't. Whatever the explanation, I found it hard to think that I traded an hour in Kyoto for an equal amount of time waiting in line for this garbage.

We finally hit the rails at 3:00, and everyone was in high spirits. To be honest, I didn't share my culinary criticism with them, except to discuss the quantity of oil briefly with Yuko Kita, who agreed it was excessive, but that was ancient history, something only those without coronary concerns can say. There was a difference of opinion about where in Kyoto we would spend our time. Kaoru wanted to go to *Kiyomizu*, an admirable choice. Since I was the titular reason for the excursion, I said that I wanted to go to a temple I had not visited before, which is not a difficult task in a city with more than 2000 of them. The ones on my mind at that time were two Zen places of some renown: *Myoshin-ji*, and *Ryoan-ji*. The latter has a rock and sand garden which is said to be the finest of its kind in the world. They asked if I had been to Arashiyama, a western 'burb of the burg, which I hadn't, and off we went.

Previously, I had commented on how the **city** of Kyoto interferes with the **spirit** of Kyoto, and I am finding this is true only in the central part of the city. Arashiyama, snuggled into

the western hills, hugging a nice, lethargic river, is an antidote to modernity within view of contemporary Kyoto. We walked to another Zen temple, *Tenryu-ji*, but my companions were impatient (surely not a Zen quality) and wanted to leave quickly before seeing the main hall, or more likely, before having to pay admission to it. They were looking for a particular shrine set back in some adjacent bamboo woods, and set off for it. Upon arriving, they announced this was a shrine where you should pray for a good love life, and was where they had been wanting to end up all along. So five 19-year olds and one 56-year old stood in front of an altar and whispered something silent into the growing darkness. They probably asked for someone like Hideo Nomo to pop into their lives for the duration; I merely requested that I be allowed to return to this same spot, with these same women, next year. I fear they will have better luck dredging up Nomo for their beds than I will a way to remain in Japan for another year.

Wednesday, January 15, 1997 - Kobe

Today is the national holiday called Coming of Age Day, at which time those who became twenty years old in the previous year are officially declared adults. A little under two million Japanese will reach that point this year, and more men than women. Many of my students are having parties to mark this day, but it's mainly a time to celebrate with peers, so I am free to do what I want. Of course, I secretly wished to be invited to one of the parties, but I can make do in Nara today. Yesterday, however, was a fertility/virility festival in Osaka, and sounded like something with a fair amount of action in it. Perhaps sitting in a lotus position sniffing incense all day is losing its charm. A notice about the festival appeared in *Kansai Time Out*, and described teams of nearly naked young men vying for a sacred amulet at the *Shitenno-ji*

temple. That was enough for Mata. In fact, teams of nearly naked young men was enough for her. They could be vying for a new library card as far as she was concerned. I figured the place would be swarming with young women ogling the young men, and that made me a willing accomplice. We arrived early, as is my wont, to stroll around and check the place out, but already a small crowd had gathered behind some ropes near the entrance of the main hall. Tripods for about five TV cameras were set up on a platform across from the entrance, so we appeared to be in the right place. As I looked at the other spectators, I found mostly people my age. The odd pair of curious schoolgirls lurked, giggling, at the fringes and three German tourists could be heard directly behind me, though they could have been heard had they been a kilometer behind me, but mainly it was middle-aged men, perhaps in vain pursuit of their own waning virility, and older women, living, like all of us, in a world not entirely what we would like it to be. But perhaps I'm projecting too much of a western interpretation onto a cultural event I do not understand. But it was fun to watch.

At about 2:30, strains of some kind of chant could be detected from the distant temple grounds, gradually coming closer. Apparently, there was a chant leader, with bullhorn, and then the participants would answer in unison. At first listening, it certainly **did** sound like these guys needed their virility worked on, and it may have been beyond even the efforts of the gods. But when the procession came into view, it was obvious that these piping trebles I heard were coming from pre-school children! It's none of my business, but isn't age three a little early to begin worrying about a boy's reproductive life? Not only that, but there were girls in the group, and in approximately equal numbers. At least none of these were in the well-publicized loincloths that

dislodged Mata from behind the covers of a John Grisham novel for a day, so it may have all been an innocent, and incomprehensible opening act to the Big Show. Well, the little tykes were cute and a big hit with the audience.

Before long, the kids had been ushered out in the same direction they came, and from the opposite part of the complex came two teams of jockstrapped young men, bearing banners and goosebumps, and more enthusiasm than I could have under the circumstances. But the day was a 50 degree F one, and youthful nipples barely responded, though I, inexplicably, failed to check on the schoolgirls spotted earlier. The contest was between the white loincloths and the red ones, and seemed to involve showing how much noise you could make, posturing you could do, and abuse you could handle from the organizers. Thus far, it sounded like any gathering of young males anywhere in the world. The abuse centered on many large barrels of water, with long-handled ladles available for the leaders to douse, continually, the revelers. They did, eagerly, and several young men taunted them into a greater deluge from time to time. All the while, chanting, dancing, shouting, and other culturally sanctioned means of demonstrating your manhood occurred within a very small area on and at the foot of the front steps of the temple. No participant was out of range of the cascades of water, and the barrels were refilled continuously by hose. Often, clouds of steam would rise from the massed bodies, some of which had garish paint and/or tattoo jobs prepared for the occasion. Well, it was interesting, in the same way the taste of octopus or being sneezed on in a bus is interesting. It all seeps down into some collection point of the psyche where somehow, someday, I'll try to understand what my being here has meant. Now I'll just try to do and see as much as I can and try to overload that

collection point.

Sunday, January 19, 1997 - Kobe

I need to backtrack a bit to last Sunday, the 12th. My desire to visit *Myoshin-ji* and *Ryoan-ji* temples in Kyoto hadn't been satisfied with my excursion of the previous Monday, and it still remained. Mata had her hair in the shop for routine, though comprehensive, maintenance this Sunday, so I hopped the train for those landmarks alone. *Myoshin-ji* is a truly enormous complex of buildings, almost a walled city within the northwestern perimeter of Kyoto. Much of it seemed to be residential, and I spied a new silver Mercedes outside one homey-appearing building, which leads me to believe that Zen priests don't take a vow of poverty. Still, a Benz seems to run counter to my expectations of Zen enlightenment; it would be similar to discovering that Mother Theresa had silicone implants. As that great Zen thinker of our age, Nancy Kerrigan, asked, "Why? Why? Why? Why?"

Even though it was a rain-free Sunday, few penitents visited *Myoshin-ji*. It appears to be used by nearby residents as a surrogate park, as several people came strolling through the gates at either end, walking their dogs or playing with young children, and paying little heed to the surroundings. The temple has a sand and rock garden less celebrated than that of *Ryoan-ji*, at its *Taizo-in* Temple on the western part of the grounds. It was interesting, especially in the contrast of the shades of white and gray of the rocks, and the soothing sound of the diminutive waterfall hidden from direct view by a hedge. I nearly had the place to myself.

Ryoan-ji was about a half-mile hike north, to the foothills fringing Kyoto's northwest flank, and had a very different feel to it from the moment one walks through the gate. *Myoshin-ji*

is laid out in a very orderly, rectilinear pattern, almost purposefully mundane. *Ryoan-ji* seems to invite you to a mystery within. As I type these words, the piano music of Scriabin is playing on the boom box, and there is a kind Scriabinesque darkness and opacity to the place. It invites, but does not reveal. The grounds are physically beautiful, even in the sparse foliage of winter, but not in an obvious, post-Impressionist blaze of color and shape. It has a large, but simply shaped lake, with an accessible island to one side, and for one magical moment near sunset, the clouds to the west broke and that island did begin to glow and vibrate in the warmest yellows imaginable. It lasted no more than ninety seconds, but gave me two very different views of the same place and time.

The legendary garden is enclosed in its own small temple, and is not for strolling through with your lover in the warmth of spring. A rectangle of white sand, meticulously raked, is enclosed on all four sides, and spectators can view it from one side only, where there are mini-bleachers for sitting and contemplation. In the garden are fifteen rocks of various sizes, shades, and textures, and it is said that only the truly enlightened can see all 15 at one glance. It will come as no surprise to those who have attended the course of my own enlightenment over the years that I was able to do no better than 14, and most would probably think that a gross overestimate. I took as many pictures as I could, from as many angles as I was allowed by the guards and their Kalishnikovs and Dobermans, and yet I knew, upon leaving, that the pictures were worthless. I didn't even need to send the roll in for processing, though I would. The less storied garden of *Taizo-in* seemed easier to capture in the frame imposed by a camera, and later, I would find a few photos I took of that place that pleased me. But *Ryoan-ji* eluded me, and every

lens I had with me, from 17 mm to 300 mm, and all focal lengths in between. Next time, I will take only one lens and black-and-white film, and maybe approach it less like it is the Grand Canyon. I suppose I should add, for the record, that there are no guards, Kalishnikovs, or Dobermans at *Ryoan-ji*.

Last year, when I told my students I was going to Bali they were envious, until I told them I was going without benefit of tour package or even prior planning. Then they knew I was truly daft, and unlikely to be seen again, except with a toe tag. Japanese culture, and especially Japanese TV, tells them that the rest of the world is full of hooligans and thieves, and those ne'er-do-wells specifically target Japanese tourists for their dirty work. When the MRTA guerillas took over the Japanese embassy in Peru last month, the major slant on the story by most major media was the fact that Japanese have been singled out again in the west for rude treatment. What the MRTA had to say on its behalf was summarily dismissed as inconsequential, though much was made of the fact that Peru has a president of Japanese extraction, Alberto Fujimori. The myth of Japanese innocence and long-suffering patience in a hostile world was the bottom line in this, and most other stories with Japan in an international setting

So this year, Mata and I are taking 24 days in Thailand, Malaysia, and, if the money lasts and visas are not impossible to obtain, Vietnam. Again, we'll just arrive and do our best on our own, thanks to our library of Lonely Planet guidebooks. Again, sharing this information with my students was like telling them I had a fatal, and incurable disease. I had the feeling they all wanted to take out a quick insurance policy on me before all the insurers discovered my condition and upped the premiums obscenely. It's not just their safety abroad they want to

ensure, they want a particular kind of experience on vacation. They want to do and see and taste and smell the same things everyone else who has been there has. I noticed that when they shared their pictures of winter vacation to various venues. It was of paramount importance that they each had the same pictures, proving that they went to the same places everyone else had. So when someone took five days in Hawaii, for example, they would show their pictures to Keiko Asahi, an old Hawaii hand, and if they were the same as the ones she had taken on her visits there, then the traveler in question was satisfied that she had **really** seen Hawaii. When I go somewhere, I try to find something, occasionally, that is different from what most others see and experience, while still representative, in some way, of having been there. I'm not sure whether that's a western attitude or just a Lowden attitude, but it certainly isn't a Japanese one. This has some bearing on our activities of last Wednesday, I believe.

Wednesday, the 15th, was Coming-of-Age Day, as mentioned earlier. We went to Nara to view the torching of *Wakakusayama*, or Mt. Wakakusa, which is an annual event in town. The little hillock to the east of town was originally burned centuries ago to symbolize the end of a territorial dispute between the two big temples in town, *Tokufu-ji*, and *Todai-ji*, and that event is reenacted every year to the pleasure of many. We arrived in plenty of time to wander semi-aimlessly through the town, though I kept the hill, and its photographic perspective, in the corner of my eye most of the time. We spurned the deer all day, but not the food peddlers, succumbing to the attractions of *yakitori*, *okonomiyaki* and *yakisoba*. *KTO* had said the ignition time for the hill was set for 4:30, which still would not leave enough time to rush home to catch the last few sumo bouts of the recently begun New Year's Basho in Tokyo. About 3:15, we were cutting

across the park from the foot of Mt. Wakakusa and we came across a small pond with four photographers on the opposite shore, cameras already on tripods, facing the hill. Strolling over to check out their vantage point, I admit it did seem nice, with the pond, sporting several large, picturesque rocks, in the foreground, and it did seem to be the one spot thereabouts which had attracted a few dedicated picture-takers. I chose a point of vantage, unwound my tripod, mounted a camera, and waited for 4:30. In the one hour, plus, to the scheduled beginning of festivities, our number by the pond more than tripled, and the temperature dropped steadily. 4:30 came, and went, but no fire could be seen. The same at 5:00, and 5:30, and by then there were 25 tripods arrayed like cannons against forces of the mountain. At about quarter to six, a wonderful fireworks display began atop the hill, and I began to wonder if it was meant to be a symbolic reenactment of the fire, in the spirit of environmental conservation and safety. After all, it had been a fairly dry winter in Nara. But no, a little after six, fires were lit near the base of the mountain, and burned their ways up and across its face. In twenty minutes, most people had already seen what they wanted to see, and snapped what they hoped would be the pictures their neighbors snapped as well, and formed a pilgrimage to one of the two train stations. As did we, taking comfort in our belief that we had seen the real thing, and that our pictures would not be out of place in an album of any family in our apartment building.

Wednesday, January 22, 1997 - Kobe

When we confessed, several weeks ago, that we had never been to an *onsen*, or Japanese hot springs public bath, Robin and Takami Eve quickly volunteered to introduce us to a nearby one. We needed little goading, since it was an experience both Mata and I had wanted to have,

but our hope had been to share it together, and not with some very new friends. Not that the Eves were off-putting; quite to the contrary, they are a sociable and unique couple, and every time we have spent time with them it has been enjoyable. Part of the fun of being an other's half is sharing new experiences as they happen, rather than recounting our mutual and non-mutual observations after the fact. And while there are a few mixed-gender spas still remaining in Japan after the tradition was devastated by the meddling western missionaries, we don't know the Eves **that** well. Last Sunday was the chosen day, and we rode a scenic train to the town of Arima, on the northern side of the Rokko Mountains which shelter Kobe, and stepped into another tradition with which we were unfamiliar.

The *onsen* chosen was in a hotel, and charged 1000 yen for the use of the facilities. When the four of us, only one of whom was Japanese, entered the front door and began to approach the desk clerk, she began to jabber in what appeared to be an animated, and not entirely affable, manner. After Takami talked with her a little while, all seemed to be in order, and we proceeded to the 7th floor, where our adjacent bathing facilities were located. We could hear each other, and even converse with our mates, but only Shaq and his wife, if he has one, could have stared at each other over that wall. Takami interpreted the scene with the desk clerk for us ruefully. When the four of us were spotted approaching, the clerk quickly told her something that could be translated literally as "The water is broken." As Takami described it later, I recalled that it had probably been decades since the clerk's water had broken, so that something else must have been the gist of it. It was. Apparently, establishments such as this have had bad experiences with westerners using the facilities without behaving properly. I wondered what she meant by that;

aren't we allowed to snap our towels at strange butts in the locker room? No farting in the tub to watch the bubbles come up? No pointing at someone's privates and guffawing? What's the point of coming there in the first place? Well, it turns out that these, and many other things, are considered actionable behavior. Foremost is lathering up at tubside and then just jumping in, soaping up the water foully. I knew about that, of course, and could restrain, with a supreme act of the will, the other tendencies. Takami had to explain, lying through her sweet smile, that we knew what we were doing, and were friends of hers, and finally, the clerk relented and discovered that the water was miraculously fixed again.

Robin was a most congenial host through my maiden voyage, and it was a very enjoyable experience, without a shred of trepidation. At least, not until I actually felt the temperature of the water with my toe. I had been led to believe that the bubbling of the water in the tubs was due to it being continually piped in from underground springs, and that the heat was strictly geothermal, and not artificially induced. From my first toe's worth of a dip, I would have sworn that the bubbling was due to the management's efforts to keep it at 212 degrees, F. Robin and I were the only people indulging that day, though the tub could clearly have held a dozen or so, with no involuntary fraternizing required. We washed and rinsed at facilities a couple of meters from the tub, and then slid in the mineral water. Well, Robin slid in a hell of a lot farther than I did, claiming that it was best to get wet all over straight off, a theory with which I have always been at odds. Whether the experience is of extreme hot or cold, I have always been of the Glacial Speed school. If it's too hot for my toe, it's going to be **much** too hot for the rest of me. My toe is the equivalent of a personal canary in a coal mine; when it starts quivering and losing its vital

signs, it's time to back off and let Mata try it first. Eventually, Robin and I sat at the edge and dangled our feet in for a few minutes, and with a silent effort, I wimped in up to my chest. It wasn't all that wonderful an experience, but it wasn't unbearable, either. We chatted for a few minutes, and listened to Takami and her initiate on the other side of the wall frolicking away. There was another tub on our side, filled with more bubbling water of the most repulsive brown color you can imagine. It would be our next target. Taking a leak in **it** might actually improve its quality, but I continued my unfamiliar life of restraint. Its temperature was much more moderate, when compared with its predecessor, and was truly a pleasure to lounge about in. The color came from excess iron in one of the springs, and had reputed therapeutic value. We lay about for a half hour or more, talking about life and art, and at one point, I marveled to myself that Robin was the same age as me, 56. Yet he could easily pass for 15 years younger than that, and is an undisguised heartthrob for most of his Shoin students, though he appears impassive to their attentions, if there are any. Perhaps it's from this grody brown water I have been looking at askance all afternoon. Ponce de Leon may have been on the wrong continent.

After bathing, rinsing, drying, the four of us wandered the hilly streets of Arima, spotting several well-heads, munching on a dumpling, and meandering through the odd handicraft shop. It was a most pleasant afternoon, and the wandering seemed as much a part of the experience as the bath itself. It wouldn't have been quite as complete if we had just marched back to the train, and civilization.

Friday, January 24, 1997 - Kobe

Monday was the last day of classes this semester, and I can report that I retained my

composure throughout the farewells. This is in part because I kept those little speeches short and snappy, and avoided plunging into the emotions I knew were there, waiting. Whether I'm home free is another matter, since I still have some individual goodbyes to negotiate, as well as commencement, and two big graduation parties.

When we watched the weather report Tuesday night, a good chance of snow was in the forecast, and I told Mata that I would go to Kyoto if the snow materialized the next morning. It did, and Oishi had about 2" on the ground when I awoke. While she was lukewarm on Tuesday to the idea of accompanying me, the sight of snow the next day twanged something in Mata's Michigander genetic structure, and she suited up for an 8:00 A.M. departure. When we reached the station of the Hanshin Railway, it was total chaos. Remember, this is 2" of the stuff. A train was waiting, with most seats filled, but we got on and found a place to sit. It didn't move at its appointed time, and then some sort of incomprehensible announcement was made, followed by the evacuation of the patrons onto the windswept platform. Once we were disgorged, it closed its doors and didn't move. Several trains went by, slowly, and appeared to be full. One actually stopped at Oishi platform, but never opened its doors, and left a few seconds later, to the displeasure of the growing crowd. One train passed us completely empty, which was not a big hit, either, but eventually, a nearly full train stopped and took on as many people as could wedge themselves in. This was 45 minutes after we got there (trains are scheduled to stop at Oishi about every eight minutes during rush hour, and six times an hour at off-peak times), and it was followed in two minutes by another nearly at capacity, and we took it into Kobe, which is the opposite direction from Kyoto. Once we were there, we strolled over to the Hankyu line and

hopped right on a half-filled waiting train and it took off. It was 9:00 o'clock, and the sun had begun to part the clouds and the snow was already being reduced to a random, short-lived flurry. The street were becoming wet, rather than white, and I worried that Kyoto would be just a big urban slushball by the time we got there. I had dreams of photographing Kiyomizu draped in white, or the *Tetsugaku-nomichi* with snowy arms arching it as I walked. But I also remembered that Kyoto has a reputation for having worse weather than areas closer to Osaka Bay, and we pressed on with that hope.

By luck of the schedule, the Kyoto train waiting for us in Osaka was not one of the Limited Express ones which only makes one stop before hitting the city limits, but a plain Express, which visits about eight terminals along the way. One of them would be Katsura, which is where the train to Arashiyama is caught, and that's where I suddenly decided we'd spend the day. I can't tell you what the rest of Kyoto was like on the 22nd, but Arashiyama was a genuine wonderland, and greatly underpopulated. The city had received twice as much snow as Kobe, and it was still coming down when we finally left there, at 2:00. On the train to Arashiyama, I noticed nearly everyone had at least one camera, and many were toting tripods and big bags of equipment. It was an uneasy feeling, that my inspired brainstorm of last night was something half the prefecture had simultaneously. But we all behaved wonderfully together, smiling and speaking to each other more jovially than we probably would have minus the meteorological underpinnings. Since *yama* in *Nihongo* means 'mountain,' Arashiyama is a modest peak of about 380 meters on the south bank of a river which effectively forms the southwest flank of Greater Kyoto. The hills, of which it is the most prominent, are heavily forested and formed lovely

visual textures with the influx of a decent snowfall. The wind chugged down the *Oi Gawa* River valley with a vengeance, and nearly swept us off the *Togetsu-kyo* Bridge, but we persevered, and actually began to enjoy ourselves. Not many shops were open in those conditions, but we found a noodle shop which served enormous cauldrons of ramen for 650 yen, and even the excess saltiness of the broth hardly made a dent in our grim good cheer. We trudged westward on the banks of the *Oi Gawa* until a sign warned us of the dangers of trudging further, and then retreated toward the train station.

Sunday, January 26, 1997 - Kobe

Please, somebody: if I ever act like I contemplate attending a performance of Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion* again, shoot me quickly and put me out of my misery, which would also spare me the 3+ hours of misery that the composer planned for me. Last night Mata and I endured what for many people would have been a divine experience, and I swear it's my last time. Such a confession is certain to reveal my Philistine background, though I have no illusions about having been able to successfully conceal them up to this point. That work is one, revered by nearly every music lover, which has left me cold and uncomprehending. Dare I mention that I can't last ten minutes with Beethoven's Fifth before slipping silently from the hall in search of something less fully exposed, shall we say? The *St. Matthew* has a great first twenty minutes, a dynamite final twenty, and some great choral moments in the middle where the crowd demands freedom for Barabbas (Why hasn't anyone tried to sell "Free Barabbas!" pins and bumper stickers? Remember: you heard it here first.), but everything else is a real yawner. Boring recitative follows boring recitative for an interminable amount of time, and the story, fairly gripping the

first few hundred times you hear it, is not made fresh with each harpsichord arpeggio announcing the latest plot twist. Perhaps this is just the punishment of the damned I experience.

On top of everything else, last night's tickets were \$100 each. When they were put on sale last summer, they were bundled with the Bach Mass in B Minor conducted by John Eliot Gardiner, which was an extraordinary performance. The St. Matthew was advertised to feature tenor Peter Schreier singing the narrator's role, called "The Evangelist" by the composer, and I went for both concerts on the false hope that Schreier could bring some aesthetic coherence out of the chaos I had up to then experienced. Upon arrival at Symphony Hall, Osaka, last night, I could see a knot of people crowded around a set of signs at the entrance, and I knew from past occasions what that meant: substitutions and replacements. The only thing I could imagine worse than St. Matthew with Schreier would be an Up With People! concert, but when I got within spying distance of the sign, I saw that there was a large photocopy of what purported to be a doctor's note, attesting to the infirm and abused pipes of Mr. Schreier. It was signed, of course, by Dr. Nick Riviera ("Any medical excuse written, only \$19.95."). Somebody else was sitting in on the lead role, and my only reason for attending the concert in the first place evaporated like a summer morning's dew upon the grass. The group that performed was from Dresden, and excellent in all respects, and the *doppelganger* Evangelist did a fine job, but with a twenty-four day vacation to Thailand coming up, I knew of many better ways to squander \$200 on the beaches of Samui.

Wednesday, January 29, 1997 - Kobe

When Robin Eve and I were frolicking about in the hot spring about ten days ago, we

talked about the kinds of general things people talk about when they recognize there is a lot about the other person they don't know, even though they've permitted themselves to become naked together. Among those subjects was my future, since Robin knew that my contract was expiring in March. I had made it no secret to anyone who would listen that I would love to stay on at Shoin if a position became available, or if a person could not be dredged up to replace me, but I was not given any encouragement in my hopes by Takahashi, who is in charge of international programs, and he and others apparently in the know said that Professor Kurazowa, the Loftiest of the Lofties, likes to bring in new visiting professors regularly. This "new blood" metaphor could either be used to invigorate the perspective of the students, or added to one containing the image of sharks, but I had become old blood, it seems. Most of my inquiries to Takahashi had taken place in the first weeks of the semester, October, and from that point I knew that there would be no last-minute reprieve from the governor.

Every Monday, the *Japan Times*, an English-language daily newspaper, publishes its most complete listing of classified ads, and many of them are looking for native speakers of English to teach in various schools and academies. Some of them are quite tempting, offering nearly identical pay and conditions at Shoin, and I have faxed and mailed off letters and an academic resume (called a *Curriculum Vitae*, or C.V.) to scores of them. By the date of our bath together, I had received only one **reply**, and it was, of course, a rejection. I recounted this, to me, puzzling, tale of woe to Robin, and he offered both sympathy and an explanation. For all his erudition and skill with the subject, as well as personable manner, Eve is but a temporary employee, brought in to replace Sharon Conine, a permanent professor who took an emergency

leave of absence to care for her dying father. He said he had done the same thing I had done for years, and with the same result, until he was made to realize that these advertisements are bogus. Oh, there truly are positions available at the institutions who advertise, but they are not filled that way. The ads are strictly for appearances; to allow the school to claim that the position was open to all qualified applicants. It also seems likely that the institutions which place these ads never acknowledge applications they receive in response to them since anyone who actually thinks they'll get a job in that manner is beneath consideration of even that sort of civil kind. All jobs of any significance in Japan are filled through connections, and that includes professorial ones, as well. When I think about it, that's how I got the Shoin job in the first place. The man I replaced, whose home institution, Ohio University, was unable to propose a suitable (to Shoin) replacement for him, had heard from his brother, John, that I was interested in teaching overseas, and put in a good word for me. John was once my office-mate at Rockhurst College in Kansas City, and taught philosophy part-time (as I did) along with some substantial administrative duties which seem to assure his future there. John's word to James, and James's to Takahashi, and (presumably) Takahashi's to Kurazowa brought me on board. There are always stacks of C.V.'s from people wanting to teach at Shoin, and some had to be more attractive than mine. But I had "juice," whether I knew it or not.

Well, that juice has dried up. At least Robin can speak more than passable Japanese, which might enable him to schmooze those it is worthwhile to schmooze, but I am unlikely to ever be at that level of *Nihongo* competence. In addition, I've cast my lot with my students, for good or ill. I suppose I could have cultivated my Shoin contacts more oleaginously, spending

time in their presences, bringing them gifts back from Bali and the states, innocently asking their advice on classes I knew full well how to teach, using a textbook they had written, if that was an option. But I brought back gifts to my students, instead, and they are but temporary flickers on the institutional scope of Japan. No phosphors burn their image in permanently. They are gone, and forgotten, after a few years, and I have chosen to join them.

Friday, February 14, 1997 - Hua Hin, Thailand

Our long-awaited and excessively planned vacation finally began two days ago , but so far it has been a frustrating search for a good night's sleep. All Nations guesthouse in Hua Hin, pleasant though it may be, has not provided it, and I sit with breakfast finished and the remnants of a cup of coffee becoming unpalatable in the mug.

Our Korean Airlines connection from Osaka arrived in Bangkok at 11:45 P.M. on the 12th, and we finally stumbled to the Comfort Inn at the airport at 1:30. It is the only reservation we have for the 24 days we will be here, though my Lonely Planet guidebook should lead me through the tourist thicket smartly, as it did last year in Bali.

Hua Hin wasn't on our original itinerary, but while we were changing planes in Seoul, a Canadian named Art asked us to watch his bags while he bought something in the duty-free shop. As we rifled through his possessions, we noticed that he had a lot of glowing references to Hua Hin, so we asked him about the subject when he returned. It turns out that he is married to a Thai woman and their daughter was born in Hua Hin. When I mentioned that we had planned to spend our first night in Prachuap Khiri Khan -- 50 miles south of Hua Hin -- he had several

uncharitable things to say about the place, primarily that it was boring and there weren't any westerners there. Since Hua Hin was much more of a common transportation hub from Bangkok than Prachuap Khiri Khan, I made a last-minute destination change there.

I suppose the very thing that attracts Art to Hua Hin is what is driving us from the place after one day: westerners. It's a pleasant enough town, but overrun with middle-aged Germans, and this is not just a fluke, arranged especially for me by the UPH. Menus in local restaurants are in German, tailors display signs that attest to the promise that German is spoken therein, and the storied Thai cuisine seems to have been dumbed down for German palates. The guesthouse where we got a room is over a pub run by a New Zealander, and last night we heard every glass clink and every toast bellowed until the metal blinds were rolled down noisily at midnight. I even had my sexual interests inquired about on the stairs by an eighty-something (that's kilos, not years) white woman with streaked hair who, when I said I was with my wife, followed me to my room and peered in to make sure I was telling the truth, and was not just repelled by her. At 7:00 o'clock the blinds came up again and so did we. The pub has an energetic little monkey in residence, and given free rein over the premises, and the sidewalk and street beyond, if no one is looking. It also had a passing taste of Mata's calf as we loitered on our first (and only) day.

While I had resolved to ride the Thai trains as often as possible, I chickened out and took a bus from Bangkok to Hua Hin. It was a pretty dull thing, especially once we were able to squeeze out of Bangkok's perpetual traffic jam. One thing John Brinkerhoff Jackson mentioned has stuck with me, and the poor parts of Thailand, and Bali for that matter, illustrate its reverse. One sign of modernity, as contrasted with medieval times, is that everyday life moved out of the

streets and began to take place indoors, in private areas, away from the view of all. In most of the Bangkok we saw as the bus inched its way south was from the Middle Ages in that respect. People wash clothes outside, work, socialize, raise their families, live most of the meaningful parts of their lives outside. It's a departure from the America I know, as well as the urban Japan I have come to find myself in.

Still Friday, February 14, 1997 - Bang Saphan Yai

We took the 11:45 A.M. train out of Hua Hin, and finally we began our vacation. I wanted to locate a place called Karol L.'s Bungalows, near Bang Saphan, and the only train which stops at this station is a 3rd-class Local with hard wooden seats and open windows, the kind ordinary Thais take every day. It was fabulous! I hated to end our journey so abruptly at Bang Saphan, though it had lasted a little over three hours. Far fewer Thais speak English than the Japanese you meet in the street (or on the train) but they are infinitely more friendly and welcoming. Of course, Mata and I entering the car and finding seats became **The Show** for as long as we were on board, but it was great fun. Food sellers roamed the aisles with a strange variety of seeming edibles: from cold drinks to raw fruit and even hot rice and curry served in a "boat" of folded banana leaves. My lower tract, with a long painful memory of a year ago in Bali, begged for my abstinence and, for once, I listened.

In Japanese trains, people avoid contact with those they don't know, even of the eye variety. They sleep, or stare at a blank space sullenly. In Thai trains it's more akin to a street corner market, with talking, laughing, joking, and of course, eating and drinking. At nearly every stop, people at the station ran up to the windows of the cars to hawk edibles. The

aforementioned curry lunch went for the equivalent of 40 cents (10 baht). The train went through a heavy afternoon shower, and all hands set about to close the recalcitrant windows for a few miles. Then, once we were through it, the windows were opened again and we passed through a very dusty portion of the roadbed, and in seconds we were all coated before the windows could be belatedly shut. And so it went. Old ladies shouted and waved to us when we got off at Bang Saphan, and young children I had photographed glanced shyly my way for the last time.

Bang Saphan is no Union Station, Chicago. Lines of Yellow Cabs do not await each arriving train to disperse the passengers in air-conditioned comfort to their destinations. About two dozen young men were there on their 100 cc Hondas, and they comprised the taxi corps. Since Karol L.'s didn't have a working phone, and I had no working Thai vocabulary, there was no way of knowing whether the weekend rush had filled every bungalow. I also had no way of accurately communicating where we wanted to be taken to the Robert De Niro wannabes revving up on the street. However, when I pointed to the name in the Lonely Planet guidebook, a couple of guys recognized it -- or claimed to -- and after we established the price of 30 baht per bike, we got on and putted our way about four miles to a very primitive-looking set of bamboo huts on stilts, set in a peaceful coconut grove. The woman who greeted us spoke excellent English, and we had a place for the weekend. 100 baht a night with private attached bath. While our hut was being readied, we were directed to a bamboo-covered patio behind the main building where we were introduced to a few of the other guests, a young British couple, Andrew and Carol, and an Aussie, Fiona. Everyone was truly chilled out, and a sense of calm well-being settled upon me quickly.

Saturday, February 15, 1997 - Bang Saphan

Yesterday, a couple of hours before we left Hua Hin, I wandered the streets looking for a bank to exchange a traveler's check with Karl Malden's picture on it using a passport with Santa Claus's on it. That was easy, and the dollar-to-baht exchange rate was much better than one offered by a bank at the Osaka airport on Wednesday. On the way back to the room, I heard many children making a disorganized commotion inside a walled area with banners flying over it. I figured it was some kind of school festival and decided to join the fun. Booths and tables had been set up under tents to show off the students's progress and also to sell various handicrafts. One such booth suddenly reminded me that today was Valentine's Day, and I hadn't gotten Mata anything. A little seashell collage with the appropriate sentiment -- in English -- stared up at me from the table, and I paid my 10 baht of conscience money. They have an active English language program in this grade school, but the students were generally quite shy about displaying their knowledge. I didn't push, but it made me realize again how important children are in giving a place a sense that real life occurs there. The first time that happened in Hua Hin was late in the afternoon of the day we arrived there, the 13th. After stashing our bags, we walked around town, hitting the post office for stamps and the beach to gaze at the squid boats offshore. After buying a few postcards, and seeing what we wanted to see, we stopped by an open-air tourist bar for a couple of Singhas, the local Thai beer. It was just another quiet watering hole for the first twenty minutes, until the owner's two young daughters came home from school in their slightly wilted uniforms. They jumped up on stools, chattering away, and the place just came alive, at least for me it did. The artificiality of the tourist atmosphere was shattered, and none too soon, either.

Even the beer began to taste better.

It's going to take a supreme effort for two people to spend \$20 a day at Karol L.'s. The rooms are \$4, a day's worth of meals is \$4 each, and a couple liters of bottled water are a dollar. That means we each have to drink about four 22 ounce bottles of Singha or Carlsberg a night just to reach the magic number. Last night I could only manage one. We walked the beach yesterday afternoon and splashed about in the water. It's a less than 300-yard walk through a grove and a couple of vaguely identifiable backyards to get there, and the place was nearly deserted. There are a few other hotels and small resort operations scattered along the 15-to-20-mile long bay which is Bang Saphan, but no population density threatens the tranquillity. We walked about a kilometer and only saw six other people on this exceptionally clean beach. The Gulf of Thailand is very user-friendly: warm, shallow out to a great distance from shore, clean, waves which are non-threatening but also non-boring, and smooth, fine-grained sand underfoot. And it's ours! We were alone in the water for as far as we could look in either direction this afternoon.

This morning we awakened to an avian serenade by birds whose voices I had never heard before. It was a truly exotic orchestra; like the first time I heard music by Harry Partch, with tones and timbres unknown to me until this morning.

Sunday, February 16, 1997 - Bang Saphan

Hedonism has settled in. Not the boogie-'til-you-puke, try everything at least twice kind of hedonism, but the give-me-one-good-reason-why-I-should-get-out-of-this-chair/water/beach/sailboat brand. The peace I feel here is nearly indescribable, and is greatly enhanced by Mata's presence. I had thought we'd leave here tomorrow morning, but that was

before we arrived. Now it looks like Wednesday. The entire vacation has been subject to revision from the very first. Once we gave up on a summertime excursion on the Trans-Siberian Railroad in favor of my dental work, Plan B was always Southeast Asia in February. Three weeks sounded about right, and I figured we could take in Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam in that time. Once our airline reservations locked us into a 24-day window of gawking, it seemed like we'd have bags of time. Why not tack on Singapore too? What I hadn't really counted on was ground transportation eating up a quarter of our waking hours. That's about 6 days out of 24 spent in trains and buses. Singapore was merely an afterthought and fell to reality first. Then, Vietnam would be a budget as well as schedule buster, and had to be excised. It took a long time to give up on Malaysia, since it had two islands, one of the Perhentians, and Tioman, which sounded like mandatory pleasure zones. But in the end, only Thailand remained on the list, and that because the best air fare we could rustle up took us into Bangkok rather than Kuala Lumpur. Had we been able to fly to Malaysia cheaper, I'd be writing this from a hut on Tioman, and paying four to five times as much for the same kind of accommodations.

Monday, February 17, 1997 - Bang Saphan

This morning we got up to see the sun rise over the Gulf of Thailand. Nothing spectacular, but pleasant all the same. When we planned the trip early-on, I remembered my Bali experience and counseled Mata on packing light, as I did then, to the great relief of most of my body parts. Unfortunately, the more travel guides she read, the more "necessities" she found reason to pack for medical emergencies, like the inevitable encounter with beri-beri or the Hanta

Virus. Lonely Planet is exceptionally thorough in their books, and I would not want this to be construed as a criticism of their comprehensive coverage of a country or area, but they have listed so many potential health hazards and sanitary shortcomings of Thailand, that the prudently worried traveler can't both pack portably and prepare for the epidemics ahead. For going to Bali alone, I took sunscreen, insect repellent, Tylenol, and Band-Aids. The only other thing I would have added, in retrospect, would have been diarrhea medicine. Everything on that trip fit into one carry-on bag with a shoulder strap, with enough room left over to wedge in sarongs and other souvenirs for the return flight. Mata assigned herself the role of medical officer for this voyage, rightly observing in 12 ½ years of marriage that the concern I displayed for my own personal health was well below that of Evel Knievel. By the time we boarded the train in Hua Hin, she was carrying three bags to my one (I can promise you that chivalry is indeed dead at times like these). I personally felt that lugging the dialysis machine was well over the top, since both of us appear to be the apotheosis of renal fitness, but there were concerns about the water, as well as a critical shortage of classified-growth Bordeaux from any but lamentable years. We sleep under mosquito netting, slather on Cutter's Armageddon-strength insect cologne around the clock, burn green mosquito coils and citronella candles until the greenhouse effect markedly worsens, and still new welts and itching appear each morning. Today, on the beach at sunrise, it appeared as if all the insects in the country were massing for a pre-dawn invasion that we, and our chemical warfare, would be helpless to repel.

Having already mentioned how much I treasure the presence of children, perhaps reflecting to some extent how much I miss my own grandchildren, especially Madisen, born last

June and still unseen by me, Karol L.'s, where we are staying, is a true family enterprise. Taw and Agnes, who live here and run the place for the owner, an American originally from Texas, have three children who run about the place constantly. There are also three or four kittens, two flea-bitten but friendly dogs, three tanks of tropical fish, and two recently-acquired hamster-esque creatures. Last night around 6:30, just after we had seen off Andrew and Carol, who were on their way to the next "Full Moon Party" on the island of Ko Tao, a young Thai man in a long white robe arrived in a pickup truck and was greeted with genuine affection by Agnes and Taw. They brought him around to the patio where Mata and I were sitting, our salivary glands being turned into Niagras by the aromas of the 7:00 P.M. evening meal, green Thai curry. He introduced himself as the parish priest, Father Joseph, and he was there to pick up some of the local kids and take them to a village about 18 kilometers away where he would say mass for the entire district. Catholicism is a hard sell in Thailand. The north is mainly Buddhist, and Islam comes up from Malaysia in the south, which means that Christians are few and far between. His modest demeanor may have been a reflection of his distinctly minority status, as much as the laudable trait of personal humility. We chatted for a half-hour while the children trickled in to a final number of little more than a half-dozen, and then he shoved off down the dusty road. However, before he left he scribbled down the address of his parish school in Thap Sakae, nearly begging me to come there and teach English for a few days. There was earnestness in his eyes as he asked this, not mere politeness. If I chanced a visit, would I ever be able to tear myself away? Just as Father Joseph's invitation did not seem like an idle one, neither does my question above. For those who are keeping count, we've been here 72 hours and spent \$47 on everything, the two

of us.

There are a few things absent at Karol L.'s: television, radio, and even telephone, which has put what may prove to be a fatal crimp in their business. There are 15 huts here, and with the departure of Andrew and Carol yesterday, we have the entire place to ourselves. This, during the dry season, too. That adds a subtly palpable element of discomfort to our selfish comfort. Agnes and Taw treat you like family and you end up caring for them, and their fortunes, as you would for your own. And one bungalow rented out of fifteen does not make the place self-supporting.

Tuesday, February 18, 1997 - Bang Saphan

The frog count in our bathroom reached four last night, but they're the shy, quiet type, not given to singing "*La Marseillaise*" at odd hours, so we don't mind sharing our facilities. Four of the huts have attached bathrooms made of concrete block with poured cement floors, but still at the same level as the raised floors of the bedrooms. The shower is cold water, which is no hardship at all, and the toilet is a porcelain receptacle, common in most Asian countries, over which you squat and aim. Flushing is accomplished by pouring water from a large concrete tub situated on one side of the bathroom. A plastic soup bowl is provided for scooping and pouring, and it is in the large tub where we first saw a frog. Actually, Mata's seen all of them before I have, since she spends a disproportionate amount of her conscious life involved in some sort of sanitary/epidermal/follicle-related pursuit requiring solitude and running water. When the number of frogs reached two on Sunday, I glanced over while engaged in the morning whiz, noting their lovely coloration. However, with four, you can barely scoop in there without dispatching one down the hopper, subjecting it to a fecal fate worse than death.

For our last night here, Agnes informed us that she will whip up her third straight night of Thai curry. Sunday was a green variety, pungent with coriander, ginger, and fresh chiles. Last night's yellow curry was a full-strength, take-no-prisoners kind, and we both loved it. Tonight promises a Muslim variation, since we will be heading south into mosque country in the morning. When she heard I was the family cook, Agnes brought out a couple of English language Thai cookbooks for me to read, and suggested that I copy down any recipes that looked good. Seventeen pages later, with simultaneous cases of writer's cramp and nonstop salivation, I have begun to look forward to turning out some of them on the unsuspecting palates of Kansas City. The cookbooks were seafood-oriented, but we've had nary a fin nor shell from any of the offerings from Karol L.'s kitchen. Agnes explained that all the local seafood gets shipped to a major distribution point (and company, needless to say) in Bangkok, and then shipped back to markets barely a mile from where the catch was originally brought ashore. Of course, the price has increased unreasonably -- to \$1 a pound, which is highway robbery in Thailand -- and Agnes has been forced by economic necessity to leave it off the menu. Her evening meal is whatever she can whip up, and the guests take it or leave it. Since the price is fixed at 35 baht and the quality is uniformly good, it's always worth a gamble to chow down here, but the downside is that the list of ingredients she can include and still come out even can't include fish. She did offer to cook for free any fish we could obtain, by foul means or fair, but the latter option meant we'd have to go to town and buy it. We have no wheels, and desire none, and an eight-mile round trip walk in the tropical sun hardly appeals, since half the trip will involve toting a decomposing snapper or sea bass.

The realization that the rest of our vacation, and most likely the rest of our lives, will be spent in some vestige of civilization is not an entirely welcome one. This morning we awoke early and lay in each other's arms in that hut, listening to the birds start the day, with a faint diapason of pounding surf constantly beneath it, abetted by the counterpoint of wind through the tall palm fronds, and I can't think that we'll ever find an experience to match it.

Wednesday, February 19, 1997 - Chumphon, Thailand

You've heard of a town without pity. This is a town without postcards. Between the arrival of our morning train from Bang Saphan and the departure of our midnight one to Trang lay 13 hours, and it appeared as if it could be easily filled by the writing of postcards. Even though Chumphon is less than half the size of Hua Hin, its train station is more than twice as big, with plenty of benches and seats. After purchasing our Trang tickets, we strode off into the great unknown in search of the post office. There we would deposit the batch we wrote in Bang Saphan and buy stamps for the next few dozen. The Let's Go brand of guide, put out by some Harvard janitors and washouts, touted Chumphon as southern Thailand's next hot tourist destination, but a town without postcards is a town not yet ready for tourism. We walked until our feet were swollen, and in the process saw roosters in a back alley being prepared for a cockfight, talked to Dutch visitors resting on a bench, and came across a night market with piles of potent little "mouse shit" peppers (that's reputedly a fairly literal translation from the vernacular Thai). But we did not see a postcard, other than the one we brought along to demonstrate what our question concerned. Chumphon sees a lot of transient westerners, since it is where most people going to the island of Ko Tao catch the boat. Other than the interesting

night market it has good beer prices (45 baht for a cold 22 oz. Carlsberg), but it forces the visitor to meet the town on its own terms, which is not an altogether bad thing, don't get me wrong. I'm not looking for Colonel Sanders's leering face around every corner, or "Eat shit and die" T-shirts hanging next to the Lion King stuffed dolls. I just want some cheap color pictures of the night market, or undeveloped beach, or jungle shots that really came from Malaysia or Henri Rousseau. If nobody knows I've been here, nobody will want to come. So **that's** the idea! Clever, but too clever. One little stand of faded Kodachromes near the train station and Chumphon would have been home free, and undisturbed. But now all the international attention this journal is bound to generate by my dwelling on Chumphon's charms will bring The West beating a path to Sala Daeng Road, and the innocent past will be irretrievably gone. At least, the town can be grateful that it will be spared an onslaught of German tourists, since this book is likely to be banned in Bonn.

Friday, February 21, 1997 - Trang

This city is three times the size of Chumphon and has one known postcard purveyor. Luckily, it is just around the corner from our hotel, so our feet were saved for more important activities. The night train out of Chumphon had some vacancies in 2nd class, but no spare sleepers. The seats reclined to a decent angle, so we anticipated the eight hours of travel would contain at least a few winks. Wrong. Lights in the car were kept on all night at an interrogation level of brightness, yet no one was observed reading *Foreign Affairs* or doing the *Sunday Times* crossword with their Mont Blanc. In addition, the coach was an old wooden one with no sound dampening properties. About 80% of the Royal Thai Railway cars are of this type. We arrived

in Trang disheveled and not in a mood to be trifled with. Our destination, the Ko Teng hotel, lay four blocks from the station, and we shoved aside taxi touts and mendicant priests alike as we staggered up the slightly inclined main drag. The first thing I noticed was that it seemed to be a prosperous little city of 50,000. People were busy, shops were kept up, and they even had a modest rush hour to display. I would be more inclined to marvel after a shower and nap, however. We nearly stumbled into Ko Teng's restaurant, and hadn't penetrated ten feet inside the perimeter when the owner rushed over and asked if we needed a room. This was 8:00 in the morning, I remind you. He said, in halting English, that rooms were being made up, but one would be ready in an hour. In the meantime, he gave us a room key and bade us refresh ourselves until summoned. No deposit required, no passport demanded, just human hospitality at its most basic. It turns out that the room which just happened to be available was one they save for "short-time" uses, so the variety of diseases to which we were being exposed might be greater than at a secret lab at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. The room which we now occupy for 160 baht a night has a western style flush toilet, a very efficient multispeed ceiling fan, and centuries of wear and tear. After the preceding 24 hours it looked like the penthouse at Trump Towers.

The rest of yesterday was spent resting and exploring the city. The place is known for a dish, Chinese noodles with fish curry over, and within a block of the hotel are eight or ten streetside purveyors of it, setting up their stands around 5:00 P.M. Most have several different curries available, and at your table are placed all sorts of toppings and condiments to customize your doom. Actually, it is quite delicious, but one bowl full just gets you started. However, at 10

baht per, a three-bowl stop will be both filling and delectable.

Yesterday we also paid for a tour of the province at the office of a travel service run by a woman with very good English. She promised us an English-speaking driver/guide, but this morning she announced he had a “motorcycle accident” on the way to work. This must be the Thai version of “The dog ate my homework” and I was tempted to ask to see some scabs and X-rays. We were stuck with a hulking guy who may have been going to night mime school from his line of patter, and who spoke three words of English, or rather, three letters: “U.S.A.” He had them tattooed on his right forearm, perhaps in case of vocabulary emergency. But he seemed a good-natured fellow, and he did bring along an air-conditioned full size sedan for the day’s adventures. We scrunched our way through a cave, visited a couple of waterfalls only slightly depleted by the ongoing dry season, and watched weavers on hand looms make some interesting fabrics which were later (surprise!) made available for us to purchase. We did, of course.

We made our first stop to see a woman and young boy work sheets of latex (rubber trees are more numerous in this area than eight year-old boys in Neverland) into mats. We then went to the cave, and the boy who had been turning the crank on the machine for his mother in the previous demonstration was our tourguide, negotiating the dark interior with mountain goat tenacity, and wearing what appeared to be bedroom slippers. We left him at the old homestead when we were finished and continued a kilometer or two down the road to watch the weavers, and one of them happened to be his mother. Hmmm.

The waterfalls, and this province seems to have a whole bunch of them, are favored gathering spots for teenagers, and that lent those areas a bit of extra life nature never gave them.

It also results in lot of litter. Twentieth century waste disposal problems appear to be intensifying in this beautiful kingdom. Plastics, and other slow and non-biodegrading substances are hanging around longer than the folded banana leaves of yore. Cans and plastic bottles are far too prevalent on the grounds and streams of these lovely places, and it's not tourists who are putting them here. Most of the westerners I've met here in Trang are excessively earnest young people of the backpacker breed, and say what you will about them, **they** are seldom the ones to despoil a place, no matter their nationality.

Saturday, February 22, 1997 - Trang

Yesterday, as I was soaking my feet in a pool of the Chao Pha waterfalls, I saw a westerner and a Thai man walking over the rocks past me. The Thai, though not wanting to leave the man for whom he was a guide, asked me quickly how much we paid for our guide. I told him and he frowned, disapprovingly, as if here were two more sheep for which he was too late in preventing a thorough shearing. On the way back, a few minutes later, he sent his charge on ahead, since the path was now familiar, and tarried to talk with me about my future plans. No, he wasn't selling insurance, or trying to get me belatedly admitted to good old Trang U., he wanted to know what I wanted to do on Saturday -- today. I mentioned that a tour to the islands sounded good, since there are about five offshore islands to which the odd tourist might travel for relaxation. In addition, the Ko Teng Hotel arranged all sorts of local travel options, or to be more accurate, had information available on them, leaving it up to the individual traveler to do the arranging. The man's name was Nom, and he suggested an overnight stay on the closest and smallest of the islands, Ko Muk (also spelled Koh Mook in some places). I had wanted to hold

out for Ko Libong, which is reputed to have Thailand's biggest surf, but that wasn't an option through Nom. Also, the boats between the mainland and Ko Muk were not scheduled so as to make a six-hour day trip a possibility. He proposed an overnight in a beach bungalow at a place called Koh Mook Resort for 200 baht, and it sounded rather appealing. It certainly wouldn't be a budget-buster like that rude, noisy Comfort Inn at Bangkok airport (1800+ baht!). One night's lodging (but not rest), breakfast, and cab ride there from the airport at 1 A.M. ate up three days in Trang, or **five** at Karol L.'s.

So we are now sitting in the Ko Teng restaurant where the bus to the boat will pick us up at 11:00 A.M. We've already checked out of this hotel, but one word from Nom to the manager and we were allowed to stash our bags behind the front desk, where I trust they will be safe until we return tomorrow morning. Nom has also assured us that he called ahead to reserve a room, so we head off in a few minutes on trust and hope. We have also made another tour of the labyrinthine market, picking up an assortment of fruits for our lunch in the boat to Ko Muk.

Same day: early evening - Koh Mook

We are sitting on the porch of our hut at Koh Mook Resort. Might as well spell it the way they spell it. There seem to be about 15 huts facing east on the muddy shore. It's also peaceful here, with lush vegetation than at Bang Saphan, but less English to provide answers to questions. I shouldn't complain; it's primarily a Thai resort and the place is full this Saturday night. I was ready for more sun, sand, and surf, and so-called Farang Beach, which promised at least an acceptable level of the first two, was on the opposite side of the island. We were told there was a trail to get there if we wanted to chance it. Boats also made infrequent and

unscheduled forays there, but a stroll through the rainforest primeval seemed just the antidote for the long-tail boat's hard slat seats, and a couple of days and nights on Trang's main drag. The trail also wound through a fishing village of the Muslim persuasion, and we trod through it until our faces hurt from smiling. Midway through the five-mile hike, we encountered an obstacle set in our path to separate the truly intrepid from the wannabees. It was a long, barely nailed together wooden footbridge over a stream and swamp certain to be teeming with pythons and crocodiles, yet unseen. The bridge was in such decrepit shape that each step seemed to promise a ludicrous, and early, epitaph. It extended for at least 50 yards, and in two places showed boards which had given way and broken, and had not yet been repaired. Once we reached Farang Beach, it was clean and pleasant enough, though hemmed in north and south by outcroppings of rock, leaving a beach extent of barely 300 yards. Not wishing to run afoul of the bridge troll after dark, even with a flashlight, we spent about a half-hour splashing and looking before making the circuit.

Sunday, February 23, 1997 - Hat Yai

This may claim to be the dry season, but we've encountered three serious drenchings in the past 30 hours. It's now 6:30 P.M., and we are in what passes for the lounge of the Cathay Guest House, hearing and smelling the rain through the open third-floor windows. This guest house is known for having tons of tourist information, plus a predominantly western clientele, which permits a lot of Q and A. The house has eight or ten loose-leaf notebooks filled with written comments by travelers on the various destinations and establishments encountered, and their experiences and reactions there. One thing I've noticed in my travels, and this is also

mirrored in the comments I've read, is the near-absence of Americans (U.S. variety; Canadians are fairly frequent) traveling here. That was also true on Bali last year, as I recall. Brits and Aussies seem to predominate amongst the English-speaking varieties, and most have a bitch about something over here, such as being unable to keep up with football, and never finding a good fish and chips shop in southeast Asia. Most of the writers also seem to have gone to all the well-publicized tourist locations, such as Phuket, Samui, Phi Phi, and Chiang Mai, and then they complain simultaneously about too many tourists and not enough of the comforts they left back home. Something doesn't compute. I'm trying hard to find out how to spend a day at the little-known Khutkut Bird Sanctuary, quite a few miles to the northeast of Hat Yai, but even the Thai staff at the Cathay had never been there, and two of them had never even heard of it.

Tuesday, February 25, 1997 - Hat Yai

I started getting a creepy feeling about a guy walking behind us Sunday night as we strolled around the block after a nice Thai dinner. He stayed about fifteen feet back, but stuck with us all the time, singing some strange, jeering song. I could occasionally pick out what appeared to be an English word or phrase, but pronounced with such a throaty, gargling, guttural sound that I could scarcely credit them to my native tongue. Lonely Planet had described the *jii-khoh* phenomenon: young Thai men taunting, or being brazenly suggestive with foreign women or couples, and this was beginning to seem like it might be an example. Looking back seemed a bad idea, the fate of Lot's wife being instructive in that regard, so we kept going, right up the stairs to the apparent safety of the Cathay Guest House. At an increasing distance away, the singing man followed us, and his repertoire seemed to include improvised sea chanteys, as well.

Mata had some things to do in the room, perhaps unlocking and loosening the windows in case a leap became the best available option, so she went on ahead. I sat in the lounge to get a confirmed sighting of this creature, were he to follow us up all three flights of stairs.

He did, and my first hint as to his condition, if not inferred identity, was provided by the difficulty he encountered trekking up three levels without oxygen. He once engaged in a bellowed epithet on one of the intermediate landings, again of an indistinct language, but epithets are universally identifiable, if not translatable. When he finally hove into sight, he was clearly a westerner, completely pissed out of his rapidly disintegrating mind and body. He lurched through the lounge, paying me absolutely no mind or notice (an overactive UPH again) and nearly stumbled to his knees before exiting in the direction of the rooms. I could listen more attentively to his voice, and it seem to have come from somewhere in the United Kingdom, though the beery baritone also had shreds of Germanic/Slavic pronunciation scattered throughout. Perhaps a European who learned English from Brendan Behan or Dylan Thomas records. He never spoke (when not singing); he declaimed, rolling his "R's" like Tom Conti with a snootful, and making each statement more emphatic than the last. I was quite relieved when he reeled his way off to a room to pass out for the night. Or so I assumed.

At 150 baht a night, the room we had was no bargain, and the highly touted laundry service was five times more expensive than the same thing at Karol L.'s -- now our benchmark in many ways for vacation excellence at a bargain price. The bathroom had a urine stench that we tried to eliminate by pouring monsoons of water down the toilet fixture, and burning enough incense to raise local suspicions about what we might be smoking in there. To no avail, of

course. The sheet on the bed had a rip in it, the mattress was lumpy and had numerous jerry-rigged patches of duct tape on it, and the walls hadn't been cleaned since the reign of Rama V. This was one skaggy room, but I'd paid for two days in advance, and we decided to tough it out.

When the gods want to torment me, they don't have to rain Old Testament-type pestilence and ruination on me. They just have to mess with my sleep. At the instant we chose to flick off the light and roll over, our potted Pavarotti arose and planted himself in the lounge (our room was the one closest to that location) to begin a lecture to those assembled on his unique solutions to the conundrums of the world. He must have suspected faulty acoustics in that room of 15X20 feet, since he bellowed his ill-informed and xenophobic opinions as if he had to reach the back row in the Hollywood Bowl unamplified. He also seemed to adhere to the debating principle which states that the person who speaks loudest and longest wins. He must have been in there, holding court, until 2:00 A.M. when it closes, and not sounding more sober as the hours progressed. At that point, I began to weigh brain damage as the cause, rather than the day's alcohol intake, which meant that the hastily-conceived plans I had for him which involved using my 500 mm lens as a blunt instrument, would only worsen his condition.

The morning of the 24th came entirely too early with 6:30's street noise, and I knew we had to move out and find another place to stay. Within two blocks of the Cathay were dives even worse than this one, as well as places where room prices started at 1000 baht, or higher. Across the street and around the corner was the Laem Thong, a Chinese hotel, and when I went out at 8:30 to change some money, I slid by to ask about vacancies and to look at a room. I was given the key to 408, and getting off the elevator at the 4th floor, I met two hookers bidding an

affectionate farewell to the objects of their night's (or last hour's) labors. They (not the johns) greeted me with smiles, chatter, and questions about my immediate plans and the rapidity with which I could disrobe. But, among other things, I remembered that the 24th was Mata's birthday, and that poor taste would find a new definition were I to encourage their attentions. The room was fine. The toilet flushed and stayed flushed, the place was clean, and the firm mattress was comfy and blemish-free. All this for only 90 baht more than last night's abandonment in purgatory. This room was still less than \$10 a night, but what a difference. We moved as soon as we could throw everything in our bags at the Cathay.

I booked 2nd-class sleeper accommodations on the earliest train I could, but Monday was unavailable, so we had to settle for tonight (Tuesday) at five. Nobody I talked to, including the owner of a tour service, knew of a direct or inexpensive way to the bird sanctuary, and Hat Yai itself has little else in the way of activities other than shopping. I noticed that the people here were more urban and quite different from the other Thais we met in the hinterlands. Those latter types were fairly shy, but friendly country folk, a little reticent to offer at first, but often eager to reciprocate a smile, or a word of greeting. Hat Yai people have a confident edge to them and many women in particular dress very well, and seem prosperous and assured. There is also a tremendous ethnic blend here of Thais, Chinese, Malays, and people from the Indian subcontinent. The Islamic presence is quite prominent, and adds a nice counterpoint to the equally prominent modernity.

We have a lot of people on our gift list, and by accident we found a place which sold nice picture postcards for our last batch back to friends. Yesterday became our shopping day and we

also replenished our rapidly depleted film supply. Between us, it looks like we will shoot over fifty 36-exposure rolls while here.

Another item on my agenda was a haircut. It is a subject on which Mata and I don't always agree. She likes both my beard and hair as long as possible, but I prefer one, at least, to be of only modest length, usually my beard. I've grown it since 1972, and shaved it off only a few times since then: 1977, 1984, and 1987. This last was to obtain a summer job with the follicle-phobic Hyatt hotel chain as sommelier in Kansas City, while I was in graduate school. When I shaved them off that time (beard and mustache), Mata said I looked like Roger Ebert, since I also weighed 15-20 pounds more than I do now. That was not a physical comparison I found flattering, and I mistakenly said she looked like Moms Mabley naked. These are not the kinds of exchanges which tend to strengthen a marriage, but we survived anyhow, perhaps on faulty hearing.

The expense of haircuts in Japan (absolutely **nothing** under 3000 yen, and most of them linger around 4500-5000 for a simple trim) has kept me out of their barbershops permanently, so my last professional haircut was in late April of last year. Mata has trimmed my sides when they began to look more like two egret wings flapping for takeoff, and I've kept my beard down to sub-threshable size by a Norelco appliance made for such purposes. In the back, my hair had finally trespassed well past the collar zone, had not been repelled, and we both liked it. But the sides needed help, and I checked a haircut price on my Monday Morning reconnoiter: 150 baht. In the financial ballpark, and the women were bright-eyed and eager, though not exactly in the hooker manner encountered at the hotel. Their level of English comprehension and

communication also sounded **very** elementary, to give them more than they deserve.

Incidentally, I've discovered that Mata is also keeping a diary of the trip, which should lend a certain *Rashomon*-like dimension to our mutual recounting of it in the future. After a morning of shopping for friends in the U.S. and Japan, we returned to the fan-cooled comfort of our room. Her diary was a few days in arrears, so she wrote while I went to be shorn. The shop was right across the street from the hotel, and I anticipated a 30-minute stay, 45 tops, before returning for another baht-sapping stroll through the markets of Hat Yai.

Four beauticians were in place, with two patrons in various stages of rebeautification. One of the workers was sitting on the couch in the waiting area, doing nothing, a position in which her competence seemed unchallenged: I never saw her touch a strand of anyone's hair but her own in my entire stay there as a customer. I joined her on the couch, but briefly, since one of the hairdressers I remembered from my morning price foray gestured for me to take the last empty work chair. She quickly abandoned the person she had been serving, and the other two beauticians shifted tasks and heads (or hands, since one was doing a manicure), and sent one of the customers noisily to the couch for some unspecified infraction. I tried to gesture what I wanted in a haircut as best I could, and the woman who did most of the work -- she eventually identified herself as Arrass, which is where I had always thought Polonius hid, but a glance under her skirt might confuse the issue -- plunged in expertly. I kept a hawk's eye on her, but she seemed to be following my wishes well, and was certainly adept with the scissors. I began to relax. She had lovely long hair and a very pert way about her which was appealing. Soon, an

exchange of gibberish (to my untutored ears) prompted a sudden change of assignments, and a return to the fray of the previously penalized customer. The young woman at my head now was formerly doing the Cuticles of the Obscure, and she seemed less than assured with a head to work on. She seemed to view it as just a bigger target, and went at it with massively longer strokes. Suddenly, one side of my head looked as if a Lawn-Boy had been sent down it, and she also chopped away a portion of the cherished length in the back. I stopped her, and looked imploringly at Arrass, who strolled over from her position to assess the damage. She **did** exile Hat Yai's answer to Lizzie Borden to the shampoo basin, where the worst that could be expected of her would be the occasional drowning. Assignments changed again, as Arrass tried to do something with the lop-sided disaster my hair had become. In one sense, it reminded me of the famous shipboard barber scene in "Monkey Business," where Chico and Harpo, though stowaways, masquerade as barbers and trim an officer's mustache into near-oblivion by snipping too much on one side, and then over-compensating for it by doing the same thing on the other side. Eventually she seemed pleased with herself that it was as good as I deserved, and told me to get up and marched me over toward the shampoo area. Here, I know now, is where I committed the fatal sin of omission. I failed to ask her an English phrase she knew well: "How much?" She would have told me, I probably would have declined, since I shampoo every day anyway and had done so that morning, and I'd have been out of there with my marriage intact. But not being certain what was customarily included in the price of a haircut in Thailand, and what was an additional extra cost option, I meekly followed her to the sink, and financial ruin.

First of all, it was a great shampoo, not just a good shampoo. Not only did I get the

requisite two lathers, they also gave me a mini-massage for the head with each lathering, by two different women, each of whom had a different technique. A conditioner eventually followed, plus some sort of post-conditioner, accompanied again by a vigorous thump and rub. At some point near Conditioner Number One, Arrass asked me what I thought was whether I wanted my beard trimmed, simultaneously daubing some kind of unguent on my cheeks and under my neck - - at the perimeter of my facial hair. Sure, I could always use a little evening up, and I was also pretty blissed out from the succession of recent head jobs. I assented, and she started in with a straight razor, an instrument which inspires confidence about my personal safety in absolutely **no one's** hands. As the scraping began, I got the feeling she was removing more than was necessary for a mere trim. Suddenly, an electrical harvester came streaking down one cheek, and my hand flew up, too late to intercept it, contacting only bare stubble where a hardy beard used to flourish. I am truly fucked, I thought to myself. It's Mata's birthday, and not only have I bought her nothing special and located no secret stash of good Champagne for the occasion, I've permitted someone to rip away the one thing that distinguishes me from the mass of other fully clothed white men. How will she locate me in a throng? Will she just wander away with anyone because she is unable to identify her mate? As all these rhetorical (I hoped) questions spun their way into my always active web of paranoia, my face was being denuded faster than a Malaysian rainforest.

Resignation soon set in. Since Mata returned to K.C. two weeks before me, my belongings would be on the curb when I arrived. The International Harvester kept reaping a bumper crop as I suddenly felt one of the women playing with my fingertips. This was certainly not included in a 150 baht trim, and I came to my senses and asked the price. 100 baht for a

manicure, 100 more for a pedicure, which I vehemently rejected. At that point, they realized the gravy train had gone off the tracks, and I was quickly finished off with a blow dry and mild moussing. A glance at the mirror upon dismounting revealed that I looked like a chicken ready to be sectioned out before breading and frying. Arrass got out her pocket calculator and began punching numbers the way Ray Leonard used to punch Tony Chiavarini. Cut, shave, shampoo, facial (yes, they rubbed and plastered my face after the shave with such a series of fruit and herb-scented pastes that I felt I belonged on the buffet table at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel). The number came to 190 baht. Unbelievable! Treated like a potentate at a pauper's price. The magic fingers of Arrass, to which I had perhaps been uncharitable in these past pages, paused over the keys. They had not yet hit the "=" button, I noticed. One final knockout punch was yet to come: 500 baht, for a total of 690. Whoa! What was that 500 for, I asked. She pointed to herself and the other three women on the staff. "Service charge" she said. One of the women hadn't moved from her assigned seat on the couch the whole time, I tried to explain by pointing to the inert party and frowning ferociously. The woman looked truly insulted that I didn't consider her a full and essential participant in today's fleecing. I offered 500, and Arrass looked hurt to the quick. She re-crunched the numbers, and no reduction was noted. 690. I paid, and she patted me on the knee for one last thrill, though I feared that 20 more baht would magically appear on the display as a result. I fled to confront an even worse fate: Mata's reaction.

It was not a pretty sight, and she honestly looked for all the world as if she just barely managed to muster up enough strength to keep from crying. She stumbled back from the hotel room door, as if struck a blow. She reached backward for a chair which was not there, and

finally flung herself on the bed with the unfinished postcards and an Anne Tyler novel.

Wednesday, February 26, 1997 - Kanchanaburi

After Monday's traumas, yesterday was fixed entirely on getting out of Hat Yai with enough Baht, hair, and goodwill toward each other to make the rest of the vacation a pleasure. No problem. We began joking about it, uneasily, a few hours after the fact, and as Tuesday dawned I went out in search of blades and cream. At the very least, I needed to keep it off to reveal to my Shoin students that there was an excellent reason for growing the beard, and to show myself to my grandchildren, Mikey and Heather, aged 8 and 9, who were born a year after my last shearing.

The sleeper berths heading north were a good idea. We could only book diagonally adjacent uppers, and each of us had a fuller night's sleep than we anticipated. I only intend Kanchanaburi to be a rest stop on the way to Sangkhlaburi, near the Burmese border. But having learned the lesson of false economy, taught so well by the inmates of the asylum of Cathay, we loosened up 280 baht a night in Kanchanaburi for a riverside bungalow with a mattress which makes you yawn just looking at it, and a flush toilet which brings a gurgle of joy from a lower region. The establishment is Rick's Lodge, situated on the River Kwai. It also has a very picturesque restaurant on stilts well above, but on, the water's edge, from which a sunset, with a Singha, can sooth the most savage of sensibilities.

Thursday, February 27, 1997 - Kanchanaburi

Today we saw a **real** waterfall. This is not to denigrate those little trickles of Trang, but the Erawan Falls, in the national park of the same name, are a many-splendored, many-layered

experience. The falls are arrayed at seven levels and each level has a pool where one can pause and plunge. Climbing up to the seventh level is what many try to do, but the path becomes more difficult and treacherous the farther you go, and the route between six and seven, I can tell you first-hand, requires more than the evidence of a sedentary lifestyle to boost you up. Mata and I pooped out at six and a half, which is no mean feat itself for a team whose combined ages exceed the shelf life of a Twinkie. There is a troop of wild monkeys which is reputed to greet the successful trekker at the crest of Number Seven, and we got close enough to smell their rancid, banana breath waft down with the tumbling water. Time, which was running out on our return trip, constituted the primary enemy of our success, plus our accumulated baggage: the Compleat Pharmacopeia, without which Mata seldom feels capable of surviving a drive to the supermarket; and my decision that two Pentax SLR bodies and five (count 'em, **five!**) lenses were required to obtain pictures destined to garner the Pulitzer Prize in Compulsive Paranoia. I only used two of the five, and I am finding the 500 mm lens may only be useful if I am planning a suicide by drowning.

Rick's Lodge is nice, if rustic. The bed is especially comfortable and high off the ground. The bungalow has a porch with bamboo settee, and the people who run it are friendly and accommodating. Laundry was done marvelously by a couple down the road, and during the trip to the falls today, we could compare ratings with tourists who were staying at other guesthouses. Fifty yards south of us is the VN complex, and rooms in a new raft on the river (with shared, distant bathroom) are an astounding 40 baht. These I've got to see. Eight of us were crammed onto two benches running the length of a Mazda pickup's bed: 3 Aussies, 2 Germans, 1 Japanese,

and us 2 Yanks. While it is a little less evident in Kanchanaburi than it was in Trang and Hat Yai (and Hua Hin, for that matter), I find my amazement deepening at the sour faces westerners display over here. No smiles, no eye contact, not even a grunt of recognition; they just pass you by on the street or in a restaurant like zombies. I want to take them by the shoulders and shake them until the elastic on their undies snaps. "You're in Thailand, fool! You should be the happiest sumbitch who ever drew breath. You're eating for \$4 a day, sleeping for the same, and being warmed by the most beautiful sun and loveliest people on the earth. What is your problem?" Of course I don't, but I do smile and greet them, usually in vain. Not everyone has been standoffish. Mel and Sandi from England, with whom we have talked twice at dinner, and Stephanie, from Australia, who was on our Erawan trip today, have been personable exceptions for whom we are grateful. And, of course, Andrew and Carol from the idyllic Karol L.'s.

Last night after dinner, we sat on our private porch and burned a mosquito coil. When we retired to our room we brought it, and Mata lit another one in the middle of the night when the first had been consumed. Still I awakened with welts. Kanchanaburi mosquitos must get off on the smoke, which might be the Thai Stick of the insect world.

Friday, February 28, 1997 - Kanchanaburi

We're taking a small mini-van (okay, so what would a mammoth mini-van look like, you are asking me) to Sangkhlaburi, but when we arrived at the bus/van station, the 10:30 trip was already completely booked, and we have to wait until 11:30. Still, our 3:00 P.M. arrival time should enable us to latch onto a room at the residence of our (blind) choice, Burmese Inn.

Kanchanaburi is a largely tourist-oriented town, as was Hua Hin, only more so, and most

of that business is concentrated in one part of the city. In Kanchanaburi, that's down by the River Kwai, and in Hua Hin it was on the southern edge, where the beach seems a little nicer. There seemed little to beckon the non-Thai to northern Hua Hin, and there is likewise nearly nothing, other than the bus station, to rouse the visitor to Kanchanaburi from the sight of the river. As a result, the outsider only sees people, and only views the snippets of Thai life, necessary for tourist convenience and comfort. I suppose the very absence of this Second (tourist) World within, or alongside the real one was what I liked about Trang. There was no tourist enclave where one could go and escape everyday Thai life. No matter what hotel we might have chosen, we were plunked down in the middle of markets and merchants, and it gave more savor to the gumbo set before us than we got in Kanchanaburi or Hua Hin. I'm hoping Sangkhlaburi will be closer in feel to Trang than Kanchanaburi. No doubt you'll hear about it as soon as I do.

Same Day - Sangkhlaburi

The ride here this afternoon reminded me that we were in the dry season. It was less easy to keep that in mind surrounded by Trang's rubber tree farms, or hearing the gentle surf just past Karol L.'s palm grove. But in this western, landlocked province, most vegetation is brown. The sky is perpetually hazy these days, in part from climatic conditions, but partly too from the fires burning everywhere. Some of this burning is at least semi-controlled, but not all of it.

Saturday, March 1, 1997 - Sangkhlaburi

Burmese Inn, where we settled yesterday, is giving us our cheapest lodging of the trip at 80 baht. They have three 200 baht bungalows with attached bath, but all are filled, so we're joining the students and backpackers in small, spartan rooms with bed and mosquito netting.

Period. No fan, table, towels, or toilet paper, and the showers and crappers are a small uphill stroll. But things are clean, and the open-air restaurant, perched on the highest point of the property, is a nice place to sit around aimlessly. That last phrase reminds me of Karol L.'s, and there are other similarities between the two places. Both are three to four kilometers from any other attractions, so one tends to succumb to torpor and make the best of whatever the place offers. We have plans, though, but it looks as if international events are going to prevent our safe completion (or even undertaking) of them.

The thugs in generals's hats who run Burma have been making recent attempts, on several fronts, to eliminate elements of the Democracy movement most prominently represented by Aung San Suu Kyi. One of those elements is the Karen National Union (KNU), made up of members of the ethnic minority known as the Karen tribe, or people. The Burmese army has cleaned out a lot of rural strongholds of the KNU in eastern Burma, and many hundreds, perhaps thousands of families, have fled across the border into Thailand, and this province has been one place they have sought sanctuary. Though Thailand is a monarchy, with a King and Queen much revered by their subjects, it is, and has been for nearly all this century, run by generals. The current crop seems more subtle than the ones in Rangoon, but all generals think alike, I would argue. Thus, the difference between Burmese and Thai generals is the color of their ribbons and the size of their recent dossiers with Amnesty International. The Burmese army chases the Karens across the border, and then the Thai army chases them back to their waiting tormentors (or murderers, in some cases). The Thais may keep the women and children on this side, and send back only the men, but that's exactly what the Burmese army wants. It is severely strapped

for manpower, and has taken to conscripting teenaged boys in villages under the age of 15. It is also short of vehicles, so most of the Karen, it is reported in the *Bangkok Post*, will be pressed into service as porters, until they drop from overwork and insufficient rations. In their hearts, all generals are in league. If Gertrude Stein were here, not only would she be able to beat the shit out of any three or four of the generals you could select, she might also say, "A general is a general is a general."

The bottom line is that there is serious violence hereabouts, and many of the Karen have hidden themselves in the very large wildlife preserve just north of Sangkhlaburi, and that is where I had planned a day or two of elephant-back roughing it. The proprietors where we are staying suggest we stay around the lake, which means we are already bored. We took a canoe tour of this end of Lake Khao Laem, which had modest attractions, quickly spotted. The lake was formed by the building of a dam at its other end in 1982, submerging the then-existing town of Sangkhlaburi. A few tree ghosts stick out of the depths, and to one side can be seen the upper portions of Wat Samprasob, the Buddhist temple of the former town.

Another ethnic group from Burma, the Mon, fled their homeland quite a few years ago, and have formed a village on one shore of the lake, accessible only by boat or a very long foot-and-cycle bridge made of wood. They also have a Burmese and Thai handicraft center, where Mata and I found the best variety and best prices on our trip so far. Sarongs for each other and friends just flew into bags as baht flew out of my pocket. Burmese jade is cheap here, too, so I picked out a bracelet for my granddaughter, Heather, who is nine.

The bus we took out of Sangkhlaburi this morning was halted by a Thai Army

checkpoint. A soldier strode in the front door, wearing heavily starched fatigues with creases that could cut through underbrush. He glanced around this ship of fools, apparently looking for male Karen refugees, or an escaped machete murderer. In spite of my newly tanned features, he unaccountably did not mistake me for either, and I am at a loss to know what may have given me away, unless it had been my papier-mache legs, the large Pentax necklace I was wearing, or my Kansas Jayhawks T-shirt. Instead, the soldier went straight to a man in a slightly tattered denim jacket, plaid sarong, and flip-flops, demanding perhaps a bribe, or to see the stains on his machete. Instead of either, the man forked over a laminated ID card in black and white. After a few exchanged words, the soldier was satisfied, the man could keep his seat next to his pregnant wife, and we were allowed to proceed.

Now, at 5:30 P.M., I am sitting once again on the placid verandah of Rick's restaurant, cooling down with a Singha, and feeling touristy again. Actually, that feeling came over me this afternoon. We took the bus this morning only as far as a line of food vendors near the jerkwater town of Nam Tok, two-thirds of the way to Kanchanaburi. It is a place easily forgettable except for the spicy sausage-on-a-stick sold there for 10 baht, and the railway station, which is the end of the line into western Thailand. Between Kanchanaburi and a few miles outside Nam Tok, the train follows the roadbed cut through by hand tools in World War II. It is, and was, called the Death Railway, and the work was done by Allied POWs, as well as local people taken against their will by the Imperial Japanese Army. Over 100,000 died, POWs and civilian together, building the famous Bridge on the River Kwai, in Kanchanaburi, and also cutting through the infamous Hellfire Pass farther west. In a few places, the current train seems over dangerous

ground (or trestles) and at other spots there is a very lovely view of the river to the south of the tracks, but otherwise the trip is ordinary. It has been highly promoted by tour groups and hotels, however, and the train is packed, at least one-third of those being westerners. Many Thai tourists also book the trip, and when the three or four good parts arrive, everyone hangs out one side of the train or the other, snapping pictures wildly, often of the elbow of the person occupying the window in front of you. So you hang out farther, causing a domino effect astern. I did this for the first two points of interest until a thought hit me so solidly between the eyes that I sank back into my hard bench seat in disillusioned shock. I have become a German Tourist! I sure looked like one today: shorts too long, white socks too far up my calf, too many cameras, and some wooden beads around my neck from the Mon priest we saw yesterday. The fact that none of it was polyester is far from the point. I have become what I ridicule. Time for another Singha.

Monday, March 3, 1997 - Kanchanaburi

Rick's has a tour group booked for this evening, so all current tenants (including us) are being evicted. Fifty feet south is VN guesthouse, where near-Rick-sized rooms are available at half the Rick-sized price: 150 baht. A little more sparsely furnished, but slightly newer. Rick's has a little more atmosphere for a little more outlay, so you make your choice. In addition, an unexpected (even by the staff at Rick's) dry season thunderstorm kept us lingering over breakfast for nearly an hour longer than we expected. A brief precipitation pause permitted us to change lodgings, and now we're at VN's riverside restaurant at 11:00 A.M., ordering nothing, and watching our hopes of visiting places in town get washed away.

I must report, with some happiness, that in the past few days I have seen quite a few

Japanese college students in this town, as well as Sangkhlaburi, and all traveling independently (tour-free) in groups of two to four. It seems as if every non-Japanese I've met who has been forced to deal with the Japanese travel agent cartel is emphatic that it is nothing more than a license to steal. You have a better chance of protecting your bankroll from the razor artists at Bangkok's downtown train station wearing cellophane shorts than from these smiling predators. They seem to feed off (and encourage) the already prevalent Japanese national paranoia about traveling in foreign countries (e.g., Japanese tourists are **targeted** specifically by thieves and scam artists), and then they stick them in horrendously overpriced, boring, predictable tours where they trade, for only a marginal improvement in safety, all chance of having an interesting and unique experience abroad. I've tried to talk to all the Japanese students I see (and I have yet to encounter a Japanese over here who wasn't a student; the older tourists are in all the "safe" places like Phuket and Bangkok [!]), use my pathetic *Nihongo*, and inquire about their travel arrangements. Two young men who were staying at Burmese Inn when we were hailed from Kobe, and were astounded that we did too, after a fashion. Instead of exchanging anecdotes about our recent times in Thailand, we talked about riding the Hanshin Railway, and going to concerts in Osaka.

By noon the rain was gone, and by 2:00 the sun had turned the town into a steamy rainforest city. We did our business in town, such as exchanging sufficient traveler's checks for three days in Bangkok, and paid a visit to a bamboo-hutted "museum" to the bridge and the POWs who helped build it, 16,000 of whom died in the process. Five times that number of Thai civilians died in the same forced labor endeavor, but little is said of them. On the way back,

Mata wanted to visit the Allied Soldiers's Cemetery, her Stephan King background finding those places a little more in her daily vocabulary than I. My plans were for my feet to become bared, and up. Upon her return, she said that in the process of trying to engage the services of a rickshaw puller from the graveyard to the guesthouse, she discovered she only had 9 baht on her, a sum which could be described as in the ballpark for a ride of that brevity, but certainly not the opening price in the bargaining to precede it. When she showed that was all that was in her pockets, the driver suggested an alternative method of payment: an hour of her recumbent time. When she finally got his drift (apparently he had to draw some startling pictures in the sand with a stick), she reported having been indignant at the suggestion, though she also mentioned the unattractiveness of the driver just emphatically enough to make the UPH question what exactly **was** the primary motivation for her rejection of his offer. Eventually, he gave in, and brought her back for 9 baht.

This is, of course, a disturbing development. I was certain I married a double-digit (baht standard) woman, but the years have reduced her value on the open market to 9 baht an hour. I tried to console her by saying that she was still good for 12, maybe even 15 baht in my book, but it seemed to provide scant comfort. In fact, I'm sitting alone on the deck at the VN, nursing a beer in conspicuous solitude, while Mata writes her own recollections in our spotless room.

Tuesday, March 4, 1997 - Bangkok

We're on the last lap now, and around faces which are all too familiar. Where did all these westerners come from? We arrived on the train at 10:45 this morning, took a river ferry across to the east bank of the Chao Phraya River, and followed that with a three-wheeled "tuk-

tuk” ride to our guesthouse of choice, Peachy, in sight of the river on Phra Athit Road. A room was available, but it was even too bleak for our diminished standards, and the mattress had the texture and flexibility of an off-duty butcher’s block. We turned it down, and dragged our bags next door to the New Merry V guesthouse, where the room was an improvement, but not the price: 240 baht. For the same price, the Laem Thong in Hat Yai was a palace, and their hookers were a lot cuter. Both the places I’ve seen so far in Bangkok have a dreary, impersonal, institutional feel to them; more a filing cabinet for the wretched of the earth (western variety) than a “guesthouse.” The clientele is 100% *farang* (Thai for ‘foreigner’), predominantly under 40, and consciously sub-informal in attire, often plunging into grunge. I am the best-dressed non-Thai in this place, and while I’m not trying to be, the rest do appear to be trying very hard not to be. Those who know me will find the claim in the first half of the previous sentence incredible. It looks like cheap eats are close by. We picked up a bag full of hot spring rolls and little meatballs in a sweet and spicy sauce for 22 baht, and then went next stall down to a noodle shop where we had a bowl of noodles, dumplings, and pork, for 25 baht each, and then picked up a whole peeled pineapple for 10 baht, sectioned while we waited. That’s about \$1.60 each for a hell of a lot of lunch.

Our last meal in Kanchanaburi was very successful, too. The woman who runs VN asked where we had visited in Thailand and where we stayed. When we mentioned Burmese Inn, her eyes brightened and she said that her sister runs that establishment. That night, I decided to give her version of Burmese Curry a try, since I had eaten that dish prepared by her sister in Sangkhlaburi, and had been unimpressed with it. While it had a sufficient heat content, few

other spices and flavor components were in evidence, so there was just a big hole in the taste, at least to my palate, that needed filling. Last night's curry was rich in what I wanted, and unexpected nuances, such as a hint of allspice, made themselves known. And a healthy portion was only 25 baht.

Several days ago, I thought I noticed a disturbing perturbation in the relationship between Mata and me. It has happened often enough since then that it is worth thinking about. Our sexual desires seem to have gone in opposite directions since my beard was cut. Mata shows nearly no interest whatsoever, and her head is wedged even more firmly than ever between the pages of whatever Stephan King/John Grisham novel she can snag from a traveler's bookshelf. On the other hand, I have begun to think about sex excessively; I even gave a moment's serious thought to self-satisfaction in the shower this afternoon. In the mirror, I see an amazing likeness of my late father (who was always clean-shaven, to my knowledge), and he was a horny devil by all reports. Tropical heat also seems to wake up glands long-dormant on cold Japanese tatami mats. So, is Mata acting out a one-woman version of some latter-day "Lysistrata?" No more sex until the beard comes back? Or does she find my masculine charms, always marginal even at their most virile intensity, considerably diminished by the absence of a hirsute dimension? If it continues in Japan, I feel there will be no need to spend serious money on an electric razor and a 55-gallon drum of K-Mart's finest aftershave. The fuzz will return.

Well, the ink had barely been smudged on the paragraph above when a naked woman of my long-standing acquaintance pounced on me with lubricious intent. Yeah, I was also the one who advised you not to buy Microsoft stock when it first went public since I knew that geek

Gates was in over his head trying to manage any venture more serious than a fraternity keg party.

Wednesday, March 5, 1997 - Bangkok

So far we've four straight indifferent meals in Bangkok. The noodles reported on yesterday were competent but uninspired. What gives? Bangkok is supposed to be the anteroom to the Pearly Gates of Culinary Delight. I'm ready to go back to Trang or HatYai already. Today's agenda included the tourist biggies: the Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew, both on the same grounds, Wat Pho, next door, and, if time and inclination coincided, Wat Arun across the river. All were in walking (or ferry) distance from the New Merry V, taking a leisurely 20-25 minutes to arrive.

Thai temples are real megawatt, high-intensity presentations, when compared with the Japanese versions of ostensibly the same religion. Colors and shapes come at you incessantly, like Technicolor touts for The Great One. The eye becomes exhausted rapidly, and cameras can't make an image which seems composed (in both meanings of the word). I shot four redundant, touristy rolls all day, but was happy to depend on the Pentax 17-28 mm zoom to cram in most of what I saw. Without an extremely wide angle lens (20 mm or wider) you will have a tough time recording more than fragments of structures. While the Buddhas enclosed in the buildings seemed at repose, the wats seemed a difficult place to find the contemplative moment. The wave after wave of tourists who nearly blotted out the sun, and certainly blotted out pleasant vistas, didn't encourage peace and solace, but even in their miraculous absence, these temples stir up my nervous system unnecessarily. I was ready to go back to Kyoto by noon. By that time we had

spent two and a half hours at the Palace/Wat Phra Kaew complex, and since Wat Pho didn't sell tickets between 12:00 and 1:00, we wandered off down an alley by the river in search of good street food. Cuisine Verite. What we got was a 20 baht plate of bland curry. Even the diced hot peppers in vinegar offered as a condiment had no bite. Have the nerve ends of my palate finally been burned off by years of Cajun, Szechuan, and Mexican food? When one o'clock arrived, we got up and mosied toward Wat Pho, just south of the Grand Palace. When we got to the corner of Thai Wang and Maharat Roads, across the street from the northwest corner of the wat's grounds, a Thai man asked us if we were going to Wat Pho. I said that we were, and went to cross the street. He said we needn't bother, the wat was closed today because it was a government holiday. This claim seemed screwy on several counts. First, wats are run by the Buddhist hierarchy, not the generals. Second, we had just spent all morning at the ceremonially most important government grounds in Thailand, and it was sure open for business. And, being a former civil servant, I know that on a public holiday government employees don't hang around the workplace. The Palace was swarming with the generic drones that make up the civil services everywhere. Since the guidebook showed the Wat Pho entrance to be on the south end, as I remembered it, instead of crossing the street we stayed on the west side of Maharat Road and began walking south. A line from another Marx Brothers movie flashed in my conscious. In "Duck Soup," (and we had a pretty nice bowl of duck soup on our last afternoon in Hat Yai) Chico asked the goofily rhetorical question, "Who you gonna believe, me or your own eyes?" For information about the unscheduled closure of Wat Pho, I chose the latter. We barely made ten feet of progress before another Thai stopped us and inquired about our intended travels. Of

course, since Wat Pho was closed, we needed new plans and means to get there. He suddenly began mapping out a revised itinerary for the afternoon, to include Chinatown for shopping, something called the Thai Export Center, plus Wat Traimit. He cautioned us about getting ripped off by tuk-tuk drivers who gouge the tourists. Rent by the hour, he said, and never pay more than 40 baht an hour. Amazing though it may sound, there was a grizzled old tuk-tuk driver at the curb, and our new friend (we had already shaken hands and he told us about his brother who lives in the states) began negotiating with him for his services on our behalf. My Flee Impulse was triggered at that point, and I shook hands with him, thanked him for his help, and set off in a southerly direction. He followed for a little distance, warning us about how unwise we were in ignoring his advice. In five minutes, we arrived at the entrance to Wat Pho which was, as I was certain, open and welcoming us. The crowds were thinner there, but the density of buildings thicker. The star attraction is a reclining Buddha, 150 feet long, covered in gold, and sporting the most beatific expression you can imagine. But it seemed grotesquely incongruous on a face of such enormity, like the smile of Mona Lisa on a gigantic balloon in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

We kept our Wat Pho time down to an hour and a half, and by 2:45 we ambled over to the waterfront to glance across the river at Wat Arun, a.k.a., the Temple of Dawn, to gauge whether it was worth a ferry ride. The entire complex seemed to be in scaffolding, which took my appetite away, and Mata didn't seem to think our time would be rewarded by too many Kodak Moments if we ventured across. Our discussions were cut short by a 30-ish Thai woman, dressed

in businesslike attire, informing us that where we were standing was not a public area. She was very pleasant about it, and her English was quite good. I complimented her on it, saying that I taught English in Japan, but she demurred, saying that her French was much better and that she taught that subject at a commercial college we had spied near the wat. I replied, “Nous ne parlons pas français très bien,” but she seemed mystified by the sentence, though I can’t claim that sixteen credits in the language during graduate school, and thirty years of reading Bordeaux and Burgundy labels have made me articulate. Mata and I each dropped a word or phrase of French her way during our abbreviated encounter, but she never seemed to recognize them. The real subject, as it always seems to be in this town, quickly got around to our touring plans in the immediate future, i.e., the next two hours. She knew of a destination we had to visit today, the Royal Lapidary Factory. Mirabile Dictu! It offers what she attempted to describe as Thai-native bargain prices in gems, etc., prices that you could usually only obtain if you were a shrewd-haggling, native speaking Thai with a heart that could fit on the head of a pin and a hat with the logo “Intel Inside.” This generous offer on the part of the factory only occurs for seven days each year, and today was the **last day** this year, and it closed at 5:00 P.M. We were all walking together out from the quayside area to Maharat Road, and it was already past 3:00. How would we ever be able to find transportation to get us there? A tuk-tuk just happened to be stationed at the curb, and she indicated it. Again, when I feel I’m being stampeded into a decision, I turn on my heel and strut away. Mata acted like she was ready to climb aboard, but she followed me as the woman left us with the driver poised nearby, then crossed the street and ambled away. We walked north now, and as I explained to Mata my feelings about the situation, out of the corner of

my eye I saw the tuk-tuk shadowing us. It stayed with us for one long block, and once, when I glanced his way, our eyes locked briefly in his side-view mirror before he looked away. He gave up soon thereafter, and we walked back to our room without further attempts to reorganize our social calendar.

Thursday, March 6, 1997 - Bangkok

Last night we went to a restaurant on the river, the Wang Ngar, which is about two blocks from the guesthouse. It was mentioned in Lonely Planet as offering a “decent” meal, and that estimation was the apotheosis of understatement. We had been eating mainly street food until now, and it varied wildly in quality, from tremendous in Trang to banal in Bangkok. The proper restaurants where we dined were of two types: hotel/guesthouse appendages, and true single-purpose restaurants. The former seldom had remarkable food, and if it was capable of a delicious meal one night, it would be just as likely to follow it with a dreadful one the next. Last night we spent 440 baht for full, intense flavors, and it was worth it to get out of the 50 baht a platter rut and into what we traveled to Thailand to enjoy. Our last two dinners will be there, too.

When I compare my Bali vacation a year ago with this one, similarities abound: the sweetness of the people generally, the climate, abundance of fresh fruits, and a sort of timelessness that seems to rule life in both places. But the differences are what place each of them in sharp relief. With the exception of the games played near Wat Pho yesterday, overt and aggressive huckster assault is nearly non-existent in Thailand, and it is the major everyday living factor which gives this country the final nod over Bali. Other elements in its favor are its diversity. Bali is an island with several different zones in it, but it is so small as to only offer

minute varieties of climate and vegetation. Southern Thailand, in particular, has a savory ethnic stew, as well, and that makes it fun to observe the changing faces, and taste the remarkable spectrum of food offered from one part of a town to another. As an aside comparing the south with Bangkok, in this city I'm just another *farang*, not worth a glance. In Trang, or Bang Saphan, or Chumphon, I was **THE** *farang*, at least the first one they'd seen that day, or week, or lifetime. I was special, which made the people friendlier and more curious. Dogs sniffed me. Schoolchildren called out a bold, if giggled "Hello!" And down there, people responded to my smile, or my greeting, sometimes with startled pleasure, seldom with startled annoyance. Even the children in Bangkok, and not just The Emerald Buddha, are jaded.

Not everything weighs in favor of Thailand, however. The incessant presence of the military in every hamlet, on every public square, presents a face of ominous portent. Today we spent the whole day at Chitralada Palace, a lovely Royal enclave north of where we are staying, and close to the Dusit Zoo (for those of you with your maps of Bangkok eagerly spread in your laps). In what is showcased as a paean to projects, programs, nobility, and accomplishments of the Royal Family (who are never on the grounds), real soldiers, with real rifles, are **everywhere**, underscoring in subtle or heavy-handed fashion -- depending on your personal tolerance for the military presence in a civilian society which is reputedly at peace with itself and others -- where power **really** resides in Thai society. These were not just ceremonial Buckingham Palace guards with cute hats and routines which thrill the tourists. Bright-eyed, obedient young privates in combat fatigues and clips in their M-16s patrol otherwise placid, if not downright bucolic, grounds, and the occasional sullen glance of a sergeant may meet yours if you step on the lawn.

In Bali, it was hard to find a cop, and seldom necessary, yet I feel a little less safe here than there.

Saturday, March 8, 1997 - Bangkok Airport departure lounge

On our final day in Thailand we decided to go back to Wat Pho -- if it was open -- to indulge ourselves in a one-hour, traditional Thai massage, performed on us at the primary school for teaching such skills, there at the temple. Since we had a few extra baht left over, I decided we'd tuk-tuk our way over there and then walk back, presumably reinvigorated. Outside the guesthouse, a driver across the street saw me don my prospective sucker expression, and wheeled over in the teeth of torrential traffic to ask where we were going. When I stated it was Wat Pho, he quickly informed me that it was closed that afternoon for some unexpected Buddhist holiday. If it had been a government installation, I would have understood a shut-down, it being Friday afternoon. But the largest, oldest, and most revered temple in the kingdom? The next story I hear on the subject is certain to be that the 150-foot long reclining Buddha decided to stand up and tread, Kong-like, to another wat. One which stays open more than a few hours a month. We walked, instead, and before arriving at our destination, an extremely well-dressed Thai with a cellular phone told us (without our inquiring first) Wat Pho had closed in anticipation of a big holiday weekend. Had we allowed them, both those gentlemen would have suggested their own route for us, and our baht, to take, before separating us from it.

The massage was thorough, with a nice balance of pain and pleasure, and at \$7 an hour, I could find a way to make it a daily regimen. No funny stuff, either. Speaking of that, a review of these pages is remarkable for at least one absence -- pandering references to the beauty of Thai women, especially when what I have written here is compared with the Bali entries of a year ago.

Thai women are EXCEPTIONALLY beautiful; I have noticed. And I would recount my observations, and contrast them with those from Bali and Japan if I cared to. But Mata's companionship has reduced the seeming urgency of my always active eye. The peace I feel with her proximity has made my attention to other women a purely speculative venture. Theoretical, not applied, science.

Last night we returned for our third straight dinner to Wang Ngar, and our steady waiter, Ton. This time, after sharing a delicate noodle soup, we went, alternately, for the house specialty, about which I inquired to Ton, and Mata's choice of a whole roast duck, boned, and stuffed with chestnuts. The specialty was prawns, three good-sized ones, in an orange-colored butter sauce. It was not entirely successful. The prawns were raw inside, and the sauce had broken just prior to leaving the stove, and took on a speckled, granular appearance which reduced somewhat the effect of presentation. A high-class establishment would not have allowed something like that to be served, even to a tasteless tourist. Still, the flavor was good, if a bit one-dimensional. Mata's duck was yummy, and every bit the **whole** duck, something she failed to notice until she had nearly consumed it all. Finding a part at one end from which meat was difficult to extract, she suddenly stopped, and dropped her utensils as if struck from above. It was the head, wrinkled, withered, and brown, and she ate not a morsel more all night.

Thursday, March 13, 1997 - Kobe

We've been back less than a week, and already our parting events seem to be accelerating out of control. Mata leaves on the 18th, I follow her on the 31st, and nearly nothing has been packed yet. I wanted to take back the Casio electronic piano I bought from Robert Conine in

1995, but it's heavy, awkwardly bulky, and doesn't fit into a discarded wine box, the only containers we have accumulated ourselves. I'm sure you would rather it were discarded Gideon Bible boxes which we emptied in a pious frenzy of hotel room sanctification, but that's as likely as Kelsey Grammar getting an Emmy for Most Restrained Performance in a sitcom. I asked Takahashi to locate a suitable mover and obtain a cost estimate for shipping the piano and my guess of about 5 wine cases of dry possessions. Within a day, someone came by to measure the piano and check out our massed wealth. The cost would be 200,000 yen to get it to Chicago by slow boat. So I asked Takahashi to find out how much for the piano alone, figuring we could mail the other stuff piecemeal. 200,000 yen. It is apparently their minimum price to deign to even run some paperwork on an international shipment.

Last night, we also had my two *Nihongo* tutors, Chika and Yoko, over for dinner. I had promised myself not to host any more soirees after the vacation, but this one had been scheduled and canceled and scheduled again, and I felt obliged. It was a substandard meal, but the time was pleasant enough, though we spoke English exclusively the entire evening. Quite a tribute to my dedication as a student that I couldn't do much more than utter the traditional one-word Japanese blessing before a meal: "*Itadakimasu.*"

Wednesday, March 19, 1997 - Kobe

When I confessed an addiction to sumo at one of the meetings of the Oral English I Therapy Group and Conversation Starters, my students would ask who my favorites were. I would usually mention Asahiyutaka, a tall, good-looking young man in the middle of the top group of *rikishi*, not entirely because of his skills, which often lay, tarnishing, on the locker room

floor as he lost far too often to lesser mounds of sub-mobile flesh. But he would occasionally rise to inspired heights, like the *basho* last year where he had to beat the *yokozuna*, Akebono, **twice** in the same day, since the first victory was a close one and the referee had them replay it since he, and the assembled judges kept around for such times, apparently couldn't believe their eyes the first time. He also seemed to have a cynical, self-deprecating manner, which was greatly at odds with the reverent, serious, and humble jock mentality which seems to be cultivated by the keepers of the sport's traditions. Once he won by barely touching his opponent, the latter's clumsiness being sufficient for his own demise. When he had to stand and bow to that opponent and the referee at the bout's conclusion, he had a wry, crooked little grin which I had never seen on another fighter in a similar circumstance, and it endeared him to me.

In one Oral English class, one of my special favorites, Chisato Seki, also confessed to being his partisan, which is something you must do in private in most sumo circles. Since the Osaka basho is now in its final week, which means the final time for me to view the sport up close, I proposed to Chisato that we take a day and hunt for Asahiyutaka's training place and check him out in person. She was eager, and we met today at 7:00 A.M. to take the train to Osaka and sleuth him down. That was already done for us by the ever-helpful Katrina, who gave us street address, phone, and even description of the facilities. We arrived on the scene a little after 8:00, as an intermittent light rain was beginning to give evidence of the daylong nuisance it would become. One bonus of the trip was the presence of the ebullient young Kyokushuzan, whose meteoric rise in January's basho gave rise to premature estimations of his imminent promotion to the rank of demi-god. The Shuzer is a Mongolian, the best of his country, and a

breath of enthusiastic fresh air into sumo. When we got there, he and another *rikishi* were standing around, along with about four or five lesser members of the stable, and not a lot of practicing was going on, unless impromptu games of grab-ass are valued for toning the cheeks and strengthening the sinews in the fingers. About 10-15 spectators were present at various times throughout the session, which finally ended at 10:00, and I looked about for one who might be the head man. A man standing next to Chisato seemed a likely candidate, since he was well-dressed, and glanced at his watch every five minutes, but he left before nine, just before the boys began snapping towels at each other's privates. Well, it didn't **actually** come to that, but neither of the principals looked like a fighter who had been slapped around by has-beens recently. Kyokushuzan had made his *machikochi* -- the ignominy of being guaranteed a losing record in this *basho* -- the day before, and now stood at a dismal 2-8. Asahiyutaka was 4-6, but had fought easier opponents. He also was nowhere to be seen, apparently having been a no-show, or partaking in an abbreviated workout. He had looked listless and disinterested in the ring, and people were pushing him around like he was a Quaker. The Shuzer and the other guy were training like people in need of a wake-up call, or someone to kick their tandem asses severely.

Eventually, the boss came in, wearing bedroom slippers which, I don't care what you say, don't appear to be serious competition for hob-nailed boots in the respect-garnering division of footwear. Training did become a little more serious after his arrival, but Kyokushuzan never looked with it, and he and *rikishi* #2 would peek at each other when the chief wasn't looking and grin and giggle. Of course, these guys are not too long out of high school, and this was nothing more than high jinks in the gym for them, trying to get away with some horseplay when the

teacher didn't notice. They didn't appear to be ready to beat anyone tougher than Don Knotts. By the time we got to the sumo venue in the Namba section of Osaka, all the tickets were sold, and Chisato and I consoled ourselves at Shakey's, where I had the final slice of seaweed-pickled ginger-squid pizza in my life, I state confidently. I'm not sure about the shrimp-tuna-mayonnaise variety, which does grow on you.

Thursday, March 20, 1997 - Kobe

Every time I take a shower in Japan, which is an activity I have arranged to be congruent with the phases of the moon, I realize what a great metaphor it is for the relationship between the individual and the many forces of culture and The System over here. It starts off with every appearance of a much more rational act than showers in the States. Water isn't heated until it's needed, and then it's usually ready in copious quantities by thirty seconds. In the typical American home, a hot water heater keeps a tank of water scalding 24 hours a day, every day. Needed or not, energy is being squandered just in case. So, in Kobe you turn on the switch, spend half a minute getting your towel and stripping down, and then get in the sealed shower/tub enclosure. Start the hot water tap flowing and wait a few seconds before the hot water actually comes out. Then turn on the cold and make a mixture of hot and cold you like, switch the handle to the shower, and have a perfect, temperature-controlled splash. At least, that's the way it appears things will transpire, but the last phrase is not entirely accurate. After the water begins sprinkling you from on high, the water system will do its own temperature adjustment, based upon some arcane notions or using a Fuzzy Logic chip buried under the innocent switch. No

matter what water temperature you have chosen, it is almost certain it will be changed by the almighty system to whatever **IT** considers the proper water temperature for a shower. If you don't like its choice, you are free to make a counter-adjustment, which the system will follow with its own counter-counter-adjustment, and this game can consume a lot of water before one bubble of suds ever touches your body. Of course, what most people do is go along with the system, not because it is right but because it is inexorable. The UPH assumes the system knows whether a *gaijin* is using the water, and applies special standards to foreign hot water which are different from those for the *Nihon*-born and bred. It simply waits until you dial in your preferences and then ratchets it up to braising temperature, perhaps reflecting the ambient temperature of the typical hot springs bath, which, everyone knows, is good for you. What's good for all must be enjoyed by all, and baths are no less important, culturally, than health care or education. Of course, there are options. You can remain rank, which seems to be an alternative taken seriously by fewer Japanese than Europeans, or you can take a bath, which is what the system is nudging you toward all the time. This is not merely a speculative conclusion on my part, I've done my research. On Mata's last night here, we decided to take a romantic bath together in the deep but short tub which is a standard fixture in nearly every Japanese bathroom. We filled the tub half-full of very hot water, which had been chemically enhanced by some *onsen* minerals bought in Arima, and then took a shower in which the water temperature was pleasant and uncharacteristically stable. There's a plan to everything, and paths diverging from the plan are not closed to you, but are made sufficiently unpleasant or stigmatizing to discourage all but the fanatical, insane, or non-Japanese. A long, soaking bath is the approved way to use water on

your body in a Japanese house, and a shower is only endorsed as a pre-bath cleansing (My students who have been overseas think there is **nothing** more barbaric and disgusting than taking a bath and soaking for an extended period of time in soapy, dirty water you have just used to clean yourself. This from people who eat raw octopus willingly.). Performing the duties in the proper sequence rewards you with cooperation from the system. Choosing your own way is the road to perpetual frustration.

Friday, March 21, 1997 - Kobe

Twelve days before I leave the Kansai area of Japan, there finally opens a proper wine shop, with attached cafe. It is run by the Enoteca people in Tokyo, from whom I have ordered case lots of those wonderful Verget White Burgundies during my time here. Their store opened with the inauguration of the Herbis shopping complex in Umeda, which also has a very tempting wine bar and restaurant in the basement, with what appears to be a collection of nearly 50 wines by the glass. Enoteca's cafe, which I visited yesterday, its second day of operation, has some serious glitches for the minimal number of hours (11:00 to 2:00) when they have to pull their act together. I ordered a simple-to-prepare *Croque Monsieur*, and a glass of Chateau Haut-Brion '83 to wash it down. The wine was delivered first, and when the sandwich was set before me, more than a half-hour later, the Haut-Brion had been used to wash the subway dust and usual quotient of accumulated *Nihon* germs which had been expectorated over me in the course of my Osaka travels that day in public conveyances. I was just forced to follow my empty glass with a full one -- of Chateau Latour '79. And so goes the day of an unemployed, part-time professor.

The day also proved to be a trial run for my farewells to beautiful young ladies, since the University's graduation party was held in the late afternoon of the 20th. It became more of a comedy than a tragedy, since I was completely incognito without my beard. Even my office-mate, Chris Starling, walked by at less than a meter's distance and did not recognize me, personally. He did say later, that he saw me from the back in my Oscar de la Renta suit and thought he was at the wrong party, until he saw Alan Jackson. Chris was himself in full disheveled splendor, with a hand-done beard trim, and I secretly envied him. I believe it was Bertrand Russell who said that he always considered respectable people scoundrels, and every morning he would peer anxiously in the mirror for signs of becoming respectable. The doom of respectability awaits me unless I do something about it, and soon. In addition, none of my students knew who I was either. There were only three I knew personally, Nari, Yasue, and Masako (two of whom have the Shoin graduate's dream job awaiting: airline flight attendant. No overachieving lawyers or doctors in this crowd!), but when I waved from a distance upon first seeing them, they had a wan, puzzled look and an unenthusiastic move of the hand which could hardly be called a wave. With Masako, I made a run at another less-than-meter distance with nothing but distrustful confusion on her face. Why is this strange man acting as if he knows me? All three came up to me later, when they saw me in the context of colleagues, and greeted me warmly, and demanded to know why I had shaved. I gave them a shorter version than I have recorded here. Earlier this month, when I went to Shoin to gather all the mail which had been delivered there during the Thailand trip, I went for lunch and came across a student I knew only informally, but whom I had seen a lot of during my year and a half there. I said "Hi" to her, and

she seemed to know who I was, but couldn't quite figure out what was wrong with the picture she was getting, and I decided to be absolutely no help. After a few seconds of frowns and stammering, she finally came up with the question which was certain to clear up her confusion: "Do you have a cold?" She asked.

Tuesday, March 25, 1997 - Kobe

Hidden back in my mind or heart for several months has been a dread of the emotional effect that will finally be felt when leaving Shoin finally forces itself into my conscious. Shoko bawled her eyes out when both our families met for a final sushi dinner at OPA-ShinKobe, but I could only put my arm around her and tell her what was on the surface of my love for her. Last week presented me with three successive days -- what might have been an emotional gauntlet for me to run -- comprising the commencement and parties for both the college and university graduates, but my eyes were dry and my heart impassive throughout. Of course I brought my camera to all events, and at the college party, when one of my beloved students attempted to pose for me with the innocuous two-finger 'peace' or 'V-for-victory' sign, I threatened her with a double-digit amputation. She slunk back from the table, shocked and astounded, and I had to go to her for pacification after the fact. The curmudgeon in me is never far from the surface. I entered this country one, and I am leaving in the same condition, it would seem, though I've spent most of the intervening eighteen months as Uncle Fuzzy (**not** to be confused with Uncle Pervy).

Shoin women, individually and in groups, have said their farewells to me, and I have

remained the picture of Protestant emotional repression, which would have made my mother proud had she been able to witness it. Today, Takahashi-san gave me a bag of assorted Shoin goodies as his farewell; there were a banner, paperweight, bookmark, and Shoin videotape used to lure unsuspecting high school girls to their doom on Mt. Rokko. Tonight, I had a few boxes to pack, and decided to preview the video, since I might take it with me to show to family and friends who wondered exactly what the place where I taught was like. I put the tape in the VCR, and went to gather some clothes, dishes, and papers to distribute in the boxes while the tape was running as background. When I got back into the living room, the TV began to show the gate to the university, with incomprehensible Japanese narration, and I suddenly was overtaken by unstoppable crying. It was sobbing and shaking the likes of which I cannot remember since Mata and I parted in September, 1995, for my first trip over here, and I had to sit on the couch for support for ten minutes. It's even hard to write about it without my eyes misting again, an hour later. I guess a part of the entire feeling was my own inability to gauge what was likely to open the sluices. I hardly understood a word of the voiceover, and words are important to me. I recognized none of the students, and it was evident from the dark hair displayed by Professors Suzuki and Jackson that the tape had been made several years ago. But there it was, my sense of loss welling up unbidden at a strange and ironically funny time. Had I not been so busy sobbing I might have laughed my ass off.

Thursday, March 27, 1997 - Kobe

The piano problem seems to have found a solution. The day Mata left, I had arranged to have lunch with Asami Yoshimura. She has been a student of mine all three semesters here, and

her English, always good, has now become superlative. She was in my Speaking Practice course this last year, and I told her in the hall near the end of the semester that I believed her work was at the top of the class. Sometime during finals week she left a note in my office that she'd like to keep in touch with me, but would be going out of the country for most of the spring break. We got our date books together for a farewell lunch, and the 18th was the day. We went to Tavetorina, the Italian restaurant where I feted the Horis, and it was a fine meal and her company was relaxing. However, I had a hidden agenda which led me to choose that restaurant. It was only a three minute walk from the big Yamaha music emporium in Motomachi, and I wanted to see if I could get a box from them in which to ship my piano, and guess who was nominated to be my impromptu interpreter. Asami, one of the most gracious and mature-acting of the twenty year-olds I have met here, did not break character for this imposition. And even better, an empty box of ideal size seemed to have my name on it, and was just waiting for me to arrive and claim it. I will check the piano as excess baggage on United flight #818 and pay the 22,000 yen cost. For one-tenth the price, it travels with me instead of on a steamer with all those tramps. The dimensions and weight are just a shade under limits, but I'll have to leave the bench and legs in the apartment in Kobe for the puzzlement of the next inhabitant.

Saturday, March 29, 1997 - Kobe

In between frenzied bouts of packing too many belongings into fewer boxes than required (my initial estimate to Takahashi and the movers of 5 boxes has now reached double-digits), a farewell tour of some sorts has begun. The parties promised by some of my classes have failed to materialize, but small groups and individuals have taken me to lunch, or dinner, and bade

goodbye that way. Naoko and Yukie took me to a marine park at Suma, but put us on the wrong train, and we spent too much of an afternoon shivering on various exposed railway platforms. But their sweetness and good humor could not be chilled, nor could my delight in it. On Wednesday I had tickets to the opera "Madama Butterfly," courtesy of (who else?) Peter Mallett, and Shoko went with me. There is a moment in the work which always moves me to tears, and even the music, heard without benefit of staging, can often do it alone. It is in the last act, where Pinkerton returns, with Sharpless, and they are discovered by Suzuki. I knew that being with Shoko for the last time was a sad enough time for me, but would the music and singing put me, emotionally, over the top? My response while watching the Shoin video was fresh in my mind, and seemed to provide a cautionary lesson. Both of us were fairly quiet all night, perhaps knowing there just wasn't much to laugh about. The last act came and went, and while I was stirred, I was not shaken, and remained dry-eyed.

At the Hori family's farewell dinner for us just before Mata left, Shoko had asked me when I was leaving, including time of day. Since I have a 6:30 P.M. flight, I'll be on the 3:00 P.M. bus from Sannomiya, and Shoko said she'd meet me there. Somehow, I took that to mean she'd take the bus with me to the airport and see me off, which was a comforting thought. On the train back from the opera, I made certain we had our schedules in synch, and as we talked it became evident that Shoko only was going to meet me at the bus and see me off from there. Others had said they wanted to go to the airport and see me off, but those were just expressions of esteem, sincere at the time, but destined to be forgotten before the apparently appointed time. Now it seemed like Shoko was bailing out as well, and I'm sure my disappointment was

transparent. As we approached my station, I took her hand and held it far too tightly, seeing, out of the corner of my eyes, her own eyes glaze over with tears. We reconfirmed our three o'clock farewell, and I left to change trains.

The next day's dinner was provided by Kazuyo and Kazuko, at a comfortable little second-floor pub in Sannomiya. All such semi-important occasions must be memorialized by young Japanese women in the same way: Print Club pictures must adorn whatever pocket calendar or book always accompanies you, and you buy a disposable Fuji camera, take 24 blurry posed pictures in, or in front of, the nearest or most significant landmark available. K & K tore the cellophane off a new Fuji before the first course of deep-fried octopus had ceased wriggling on our plates, and we smiled inanely for each other as the camera was passed back and forth all evening. After the meal, we paused in front of the winking video eye of a Print Club booth, and they took me on a stroll to Merikan Park, and Kobe's harbor. The three of us walked arm in arm all evening, posed in front of the Oriental Hotel (where, I was chagrined to learn, they had neglected to reserve a room for us), and gave me a lovely gift. Each of them, at separate times, wept at my departure, and I began to feel like a cheater. I value their tears highly. They are a spontaneous (it seems to me, at least) gift of their caring for me, and the fact that I have touched their nineteen year old lives in some important way. Amidst the crockery and cloth I take home after unwrapping it from their hands, the things they have given me that mean the most are their tears. I **know** they have touched this old barnacled heart, and yet I haven't been able to give any of them something as valuable as what they have given me. I'm getting out of here cheaply, and I am beginning to resent myself for it.

Yesterday was my last visit to Kyoto. I had wanted to make another attempt to photograph the rock garden at *Ryoan-ji*, but I had no illusions about the possibility of success. However, instead of my high-tech Pentax, computing its way toward perfectly exposed triteness, I decided that *Ryoan-ji's* simplicity required a simple, manual camera, and black-and-white film. I brought the Fuji 690 I had bought used a few months before and decided to do my best. Taking the Hankyu train to Arashiyama permitted me to slide into Kyoto from its western edge, using the quaint, one-car Keifuku Railway which has a terminus in Arashiyama. As I walked down the main drag of that suburb at 9:30 in the morning, glancing at tea and bean cake shops for the last time, tears came to my eyes, and I had to swing up an alley, retrieve a handkerchief from my lens satchel, and gussy myself up to be presentable on the street. What obtains here?

A defining moment in our marriage came in the first few months, when Mata and I began to find out who we were really married to. We had known each other for six years, trading stories about our current lives, going to a picnic or ball game with our kids, even finding out the skinny on each other's romantic entanglements. Together we had no such carnal aims, but it seemed as if we knew a lot about each other when we finally decided to cast our wedded lot together. I hear you chuckling now. And, of course, you're right. So Mata and I were lying in bed, a location where it now seems as if I say most of the things I later regret, and some sort of portentous subject was being bandied about. While I can't remember the exact context which made me say this, I do remember saying it. I told Mata that ideas were more important to me than people. Well, she couldn't have reacted more unfavorably had I confessed to being The Antichrist, though we'll know for sure about that in a year or two. Seeing her horror, I attempted

to explain it away by relating it to my interest in philosophy, and the issues in the modern world. Hume's ideas will live and have continued to nourish generations of thinkers long after David Hume, the individual, was cared about for anything but a few hungry worms. And there was the case of Richard Wagner, always a crowd favorite. He may have been a disreputable scumbag, personally, but the final scene of *Die Walkyrie* seldom fails to bring me to tears. If we were to judge him primarily by his personal virtues, he would now rest in ignominious obscurity. She wasn't buying any of it. To paraphrase again a line which never grows old, who was she going to believe: me, or her own eyes? Her own eyes had seen my estrangement from my son, who was into drugs, the greaser scene, and felonious friends. My mother and brothers were distant, and I had no close friends other than women, a fact from which she took scant comfort. Of course, her eyes had deceived her before concerning me. I am susceptible to allergies and hay fever, and am not the most religious of self-medicators. When we were merely friends, I would often have a sniffing nose, reddened eyes, and when combined with my energetic, sometimes manic personality, led her to the inescapable conclusion that I was a hopeless cocaine addict. This was a conclusion she did not attempt to dispel until after we had become engaged, an extraordinary lapse for one as personally conservative as she. My disdain for human beings, in favor of intellectual abstractions, was of a higher level of certainty, since her observations were coupled with a confession, offered spontaneously, and with seeming pride.

Twelve years later I wonder whether my affective circuits are permanently scrambled. The idea of never seeing Chisato's Noodle Shop in Arashiyama moves me more completely than the presence, the personal, lovely, real and very physical presence of a genuine Chisato of my

heart. I watch the images on a video of people I had never seen before, and I mourn them and their impending absence from my life. But why should an absence not preceded by a presence have any great emotional impact? Did I mourn my unconceived children after having a vasectomy? It would have amounted to the same thing. Yet Shoko and Hiroko, with whom I had shared great music and great fellowship, drained their tear ducts in my presence while I was as outwardly impassive as a totem pole. My God, if not for Shoko, then for whom?

Kyoto had arranged to be sunny and incredibly warm for me yesterday, and I even saw one tree with a sprinkling of just-opened cherry blossoms. The *tetsugaku-no-michi*'s boughs were tightly budded, but somehow exciting in the sense of possibility, and I even was able to obtain a seat on Kyoto's overtaxed system of buses without having to resort to my blind-man-who's-lost-his-cane routine. The day was the kind of placid, magical day Kyoto can provide when all the signs are right and the spirit is receptive. When I got back, my e-mail had a message from Shoko. She had decided to go to the airport with me on the bus.

Sunday, March 30, 1997 - Kobe

Yesterday's calendar had seemed to loosen up. The Bach Collegium Japan had an Easter concert at Shoin's chapel at 3:00 P.M., and that would be my last opportunity to hear that extraordinary group perform in person. I had been told for weeks that one of my classes was planning a farewell party for me on that day, but the student in charge of arrangements, Yuki Yoshizawa, had spent the spring vacation in Australia on a Shoin-sponsored English language month of classwork and sightseeing. She had returned last week, but when I hadn't heard from

her by Friday, I mentally crossed that activity off my To-do List, and thought I'd see a final sight or two in Kobe. Saturday was a day of constant rain, and a little before 11:00 A.M. I got a phone call from Yuki. Could I be at Shoin by 1:00 for the party? Was there any doubt? Seven members of my first-year Oral English class had assembled in our old classroom, 71G, for snacks and reminiscences. All of us had met outside of class at least once and gone places together, and Ryoko had even been over for dinner. It couldn't have been sweeter, being there with them for the last time, and when I finally had to leave to attend the concert a few yards away, I went around the room and gave each of them a firm, dry-eyed hug. Mine were the only dry ones, however, and when I got to Kaoru Yamauchi, whose birthday today I had also remembered with a little present, she sobbed almost alarmingly, and clung to me as if I were the last piece of driftwood between her and a watery grave. I was truly touched, and said all the right words, I feel, but the great stone face continues to rule around those I love. The concept of a holistic person is a very attractive one, but I find myself unsatisfactorily fragmented these days. **I know** how much I care for these young ladies who bid me shaking, red-eyed farewells. I guess you could say I am on the 399th page of a tribute to them, and my feelings for them, but that knowledge hasn't been accurately translated into emotional action. Or if it has, it has taken a perverse schedule not of my choosing. The UPH may be in on this. The Hypothesis, seeming too broad and ludicrously all-inclusive to the outside observer, is actually broader than first realized. It's not just the physical world and all external agencies (in the philosophical meaning of the word) which have ganged up on me; my inner fractured self has taken sides in the battle for my life and sanity, and dispatches from the front are pretty sobering. I am getting blind-sided

by my emotional battalion, and when I prepare meticulously for a frontal attack from them, it never materializes. Victory requires strategy, or at least a colossal blunder by your foe, but I have no idea how to bring my divided self together, and absolutely no understanding of the opponent, which should seem to be a prerequisite for devising an effective set of tactics. I feel doomed, but doomed to what? To having feelings for others but never showing them, being forced to **explain** them? That's like trying to explain music without allowing it to be heard, or the taste of a noble wine in the absence of it on the palate.

Chisato called unexpectedly last night. I had figured we had said our fond but timid farewells on the 19th, after a day of sumo watching and a gorging at Shakey's trough. Once my photos came back from the processors, I selected a few good ones and mailed them off to her, inside a letter wherein I tried, of course, to explain my feelings for her. I had to do it in generalities, since too much talk of her place in my heart might lead her to an erroneous conclusion of carnal intentions on my part. But I didn't want to minimize it either, and after mailing it I felt it was as stupid a thing as I have done in some time. From the sound of her voice, and her expressed delight in receiving it and reading my sentiments, I may have been wrong. After yesterday's rain, today promises to be clear, and I wanted to search for some cherry blossoms in my last full day in Japan. A likely place is *Oji-Koen*, a park close to where Robert and I used to live, where a zoo and amusement area are located amidst many cherry trees. I asked her if she would like to go with me, and she very much did. We talked longer, and she said that she thought of me not as much as teacher but as a father to her. Now there was a time, when I was in my forties, that college women would use that line as a way of keeping me at a distance,

and I resented it. Now, hearing it from Chisato, it is the kindest compliment and most satisfying tribute I can imagine. But the sweetness of discovery is to be quickly followed by the bitterness of parting forever. And I will probably be reduced to crying in the lavatory of a 747, instead of the arms of those who have earned my tears.

Tuesday, April 1, 1997 - Kansas City

The visit to *Oji-Koen* was very nice, since the cherry trees had been effectively fooled by Friday's unseasonable warmth into opening their flowers prior to the appointed month. We walked around the zoo, took a few pictures, and then sat under a canopy of *sakura* to say our fond goodbyes. As a farewell present, I gave Chisato my Big Dogs umbrella, an instant Shoin landmark the first time I opened it on campus. Both of us were either trying to choke back tears or summon them forth artificially, since our eyes welled up to the brim, but seldom overflowed during those last few moments.

Monday, my day of departure, had to be started early, since I still had four boxes which needed mailing, and three of them hadn't actually been packed yet. When I got to the bus stop where the airport bus takes on its load, Hiroko was waiting, but not Shoko. A student, Haruna Takebayashi, had called on Sunday night wanting to know when I was leaving, and when I told her it was the next day, she promised to see me off, and was there, too. It was about 2:35, and I discovered that there was no 3:00 P.M. bus, but one at 2:40, and the next one at 3:20. Shoko was expected before the hour, but Hiroko had no idea when exactly she would arrive. The bus was loaded, and at 2:40, the driver wanted to know whether I'd be traveling with them or not. Just as I bade them leave without me, Shoko came running up, and I had to change my decision, and

quickly have them load my baggage. As a result, only quick hugs were available for Haruna and the distraught-looking Hiroko.

Shoko and I found seats away from most other people for the hour and a half ride, and I could tell from the first block that it would be a wet one. Her cheeks became stained before the driver got to third gear. The route, I knew, would take us in sight of my old apartment building, a block from Highway 43, and looking at it for the final time, holding Shoko's hand in mine, just seemed to break the dam. I put my head on her shoulder, and cried in the way people who don't cry often cry; spurts and sobs splatter out like odd punctuation, and my body seemed racked with strange vibrations, probably with all that pent-up feeling seeing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be free, trying to get out in a panic before the doors close again for another decade. That seemed to be the way the ride went, us alternately weeping and consoling each other, in an odd desperate partnership of the heart. When we got to the airport, I was already exhausted, and after the check-in formalities were dealt with, we sat together and waited for the executioner's hour to approach. I was drained, but Shoko had one truly serious, shoulder-shaking cry left in her, and I began to realize that I didn't have the physical stamina for a full emotional life. A simple hour and a half of weeping and I was ready for the showers, but Shoko was just getting warmed up, after having expended herself similarly in previous days. We stood and walked to the gate leading to Immigration, and the final ugly surprise of my stay in Japan (my visa had expired sixteen days before, and it would cost \$40 to make that problem go away), and then we held each other tightly and I kissed her temples as she sobbed out her final goodbye.

Wednesday, April 2, 1997 - Kansas City

Last night, as I lay awake, my body wondering silently why I was telling it to get some sleep at 1:00 in the afternoon (though the clock on the dresser registered an accurate 3:00 A.M.), I tried to use an old trick I have devised over the years to help me fall off to sleep. It nearly never fails, and is usually effective within a few minutes. I merely would envision some future time, place myself in a scene of happiness or contentment, and begin to describe the scene to myself in great detail and usually with another person. The details are the key to its effectiveness, I believe. Typically I will be on a sunny beach, or in the woods, or in a rural cabin I would like to own, sometimes with Mata, sometimes with another person whose company I enjoy, and seldom if ever do we embark on activities which would engage the critical attention of the bluenoses at the Christian Coalition. Neither do I place us in situations likely to garner their wholehearted approval, like prayer or cross-burning. Last night I tried that, and faces from Japan I thought about were hard to summon up. I knew the names, and so do you: Shoko, Chisato, Sachie, Kazuyo. But their faces had become blurry, indistinct, as if a curtain had been placed forever between us, or that we were racing in opposite directions and would soon be out of range. And American-style worries also intruded. I was unemployed, and with no prospects for anything other than temporary or menial work. The house needed many things done to bring it to modest livability, and a more accurate bottle count of the 1989 Bordeaux swiped and drunk by my scumbag brother-in-law this summer reached 19, all no longer available on the market. He had claimed to have appropriated only five or six. I desperately wanted to usher my mind back to Japan, to placid times, seemingly beyond the reach of such cares and trivia, but it wouldn't go.

I'm stuck where I am, and again my fragmented self won't cooperate with some sort of halfway house of the conscious to ease me into a stateside existence. I need just a few nights of a day with Shoko in the woods running my dog, or a winter's walk on a deserted beach with Chisato, talking about life and an unseen world beyond the frothing horizon, but it does not seem to be in the works. That is no longer even a fantasy possibility. How can a life which so dominated my being a week ago disappear so quickly?

[142,500 words]

Dennis Lowden

1230 S. Clark Ave.

Independence, Mo 64057-1140