

Alumni News

Ishikawa Alumni Association

January
2002
NO.3



Alumna Returning to Kanazawa

同窓会員金沢を再訪

スイスのヴェロニク・ディドゥームフさんは1999年にスイス教育財団ユーロセンター金沢の日本語研修を受けてから、毎年数回金沢を訪れています。2001年10月の再訪では、ホストファミリーとの再会や全国都市緑化いしかわフェアが開催された金沢城公園の見学などを楽しみました。

Ms. Véronique Didout-Muff studied Japanese at Eurocentre Kanazawa in 1999 and due to this relationship visits Kanazawa several times a year. During her October visit in 2001, she met with her host family and had a great time doing various things such as attending the National Municipal Greenery Fair held in Kanazawa Castle Park.

The autumn sun was still giving you the impression that the summer was not totally over in Kanazawa. What a wonderful surprise to be welcomed by so many flowers exhibited in the Greenery Fair. It seemed that everybody in town knew how to honor nature. The visit to Kanazawa Castle Park was ultimately interesting, and the Japanese and other flower compositions were carefully set. But the most amazing was the Castle itself. The restored part had been extremely, faithfully reproduced. It was a real pleasure to be able to admire the carpenter's work. One felt like adopting the Castle as a new residence, as it looked so cozy. The windows offered a nice view over the city and its surroundings. Charming surprise! Kanazawa, blooming city.

Véronique Didout-Muff



- ホストファミリーの西田潤子さんと金沢城公園を訪れたヴェロニク・ディドゥームフさん (右)
- Ms. Didout-Muff (right) visits to Kanazawa Castle Park with one of the members of the host family, Junko Nishida.

CONTENTS

Alumna Returning to Kanazawa.....	1
Personal Story.....	2~3
Ishikawa Info.....	4

A Cold Winter Morning in Ishikawa

Arvind Venkateswaran

I could see the cabbie dart quick looks at his rear-view mirror. His face seemed to mirror what he surely must have been thinking: who was this *gaikokujin* (foreigner in Japanese), and why did he want to go to the Zen Buddhist monastery at 3:30 a.m. on that freezing cold December morning? After navigating through the rain and snowbanks, his curiosity could no longer be contained. "Dochira kara" (where are you from?) came the question. I answered a non-committal "America kara" that seemed to satisfy only part of his curiosity.

My attraction with the 800 year-old monastery began in the summer of 1999 when I spent about five weeks in Ishikawa-prefecture studying Japanese and staying with a Japanese host family. The Zen temple, Daijōji is on a small hilltop just outside the city and not too far from the Saigawa or Sai river. The Saigawa is considered the masculine one of the two rivers in the city. The Asanogawa river is considered female probably due to the graceful curves it makes.

We reached the gate of the monastery just before 4 a.m. Now, the cab driver seemed quite worried and asked me more than once whether this was where he needed to let me off. Even in the darkness and contours masked by the freshly fallen snow, I remembered my bearings from my visit a year and



● Daijōji

a half ago. I began walking to the main gate with a slight feeling of trepidation in the eerie early morning stillness and brought my jacket collar closer to my neck to keep the freezing cold out. As in most Buddhist temples, the gates to the monastery were guarded by two very fierce-looking gatekeepers. One of the gargoyle faces was almost startling with its green emerald eyes and look of sheer malevolence. I hurried inside and was greeted by a swishing sound followed by a heavy thud. The first of many such sounds that I heard during my few hours in the monastery that morning. Later on, I realized that it was the sound of falling snow loosened by the rain, from the sharp but gracefully inclined pagoda like roofs of the buildings within the monastery.

I walked through a large open courtyard, beside a temple with a big Buddha statue towards the temple's prayer room and monks quarters. Upon finally reaching the prayer room area, there was no sign of life even at 4 a.m. The temptation to ring a bell (probably used to announce visitors) and announce my presence was high, but I preferred to start learning what I thought would be a first lesson in Zen—patience. The western ways of

"making things happen," and "not standing around," seemed superfluous especially since I knew that the monks were sticklers for punctuality. This was one way of getting a bit of that very important ingredient that makes life less stressful—patience. Things would happen when they needed to happen. A couple of monks walked by a few minutes later. We exchanged bows but not a word was spoken. A loud "ohayo gozaimasu" (good morning) from me was pointedly ignored by the monk that it was directed to. Their behavior reminded me a lot of my karate instructor in California—very polite, aloof, and very, very punctual.

It was getting closer to the zazen (Zen meditation) start time of 4:20 a.m. and my impatience was beginning to grow as no one paid any heed to me. Finally I cornered a monk and told him in Japanese that I was there for the 4:20 a.m. session and whether it was on for that morning. He smilingly mentioned that yes, it was on, as always, and yes, it was at 4:20 a.m. as always, and someone would usher me in when it was time to do so.

It was almost 4:20 a.m. when the bells chimed, and the monks began filing to the prayer room in their long flowing grey and black robes. One of them suddenly stopped and beckoned me to follow, then turned back

and asked: "Do you speak English?" Startled, I realized that the monk was a woman, as all the monks in their similar colored robes and shaven heads looked uniform. I mentioned that indeed, I spoke English, and began following her to the prayer room.

Zazen

The nun led me to the prayer room where the other monks of the monastery had already gathered. I saw another "civilian" like me, who had just joined the congregation. There was a non-Japanese monk, and from his accent I gathered that he was British. The basic rules for doing zazen with the monks was simple: remove one's footwear before climbing on to the elevated table, make one's cushion fluffy before sitting on it, and during the process of sitting rotate the cushion so that the writing on its center faces outward. All of us faced the wall. The "full lotus" position (*padmasana* in Sanskrit) was the desired position while doing zazen, but a half lotus was acceptable too. I quickly discovered that neither of these positions was conducive to my physical well being for the next hour. Hence, I simply sat on the cushion with my legs ►

“There is something about the early morning stillness and cold that makes one look at the entire day, and maybe at life in general, in a different and positive kind of way. Maybe it is because the stillness is calming and makes thoughts easier to collect and reflect upon.”

◀ folded on their sides.

The gong sounded, and it was off to the races, so to speak. Within ten minutes my left leg went totally dead, and I began wiggling my toes in a futile attempt to persuade the circulation to resume from the ankle downwards. I also began shooting furtive glances at my watch, and discovered with chagrin that only ten minutes had elapsed, even though it seemed a lot longer. I tried to settle down and concentrate and succeeded in doing so for a while. The stillness in the room was calming, and the only sounds that registered were the occasional swish and thud of snow falling from the temple's sloping roofs and the swishing sound of the robe worn by the staff wielding monk walking the meditation hall.

The freezing cold in the unheated room made me thankful that I had a few layers of clothes on including a sweater. There is something about the early morning stillness and cold that makes one look at the entire day, and maybe at life in general, in a different and positive kind of way. Maybe it is because the stillness is calming and makes thoughts easier to collect and reflect upon. The minutes kept ticking by. In spite of trying to concentrate on the path of enlightenment, the lack of circulation in my folded left leg was getting a lot of attention from my mind. Gruesome thoughts of amputation raced through my mind, but I pushed them aside after feeling very silly. This was not the first time that I was doing zazen, and it certainly was not the first time that my legs went dead during the process.

Perhaps it was all the wiggling of my toes and the movement, but I heard the distinct swish of the robes of the bamboo stick-carrying monk uncomfortably close to me. I did not want to have the ignominy of having the monk take a whack at my right shoulder with the bamboo stick. The stick carrying monk's main job is to whack people who are not able to sit still and ponder ponderous thoughts, as well as to give a wake-up call to people who actually fall asleep during zazen. Personally, I could see both the scenarios applying to me. So, I sat very still whenever the monk came close to me, and began

wiggling my toes and shift the weight on my legs furtively when I presumed that he was at the far end of the room.

Aftermath

The gong sounded after 5:30 a.m. signaling the end of the zazen session. Amazingly, the circulation to my leg resumed a few minutes before the end, putting an end to my fears of standing up after zazen and immediately collapsing on the floor. After zazen, I followed the monks to another open prayer room to witness the morning service. The low hum and pitch of the prayers have a mesmeric effect, and the rows upon rows of black robed monks chanting with the moisture from their breathing were almost surreal in the morning. The monk that I talked to had been in the U.S. for over fifteen years and spent winters in that monastery and the rest of the year in a Zen retreat in southern California. She had been ordained as a Zen monk the year before. We chatted a bit and exchanged email addresses and promised to visit the Zen center in Southern California sometime in the new year.

I hung around the monastery after the monks had disappeared off to their rigorous daily morning chores. I saw monks cleaning the baths, and other monks shoveling snow off the walkways, sweeping the corridors, and quietly going about various chores. Obviously, it was a rigorous schedule for these monks every day of the year, but even more rigorous

now due to the harsh winter.

Slowly, almost unwillingly, I began walking towards the main entrance at the foot of the hill in the pouring rain and by the snow covered gravestones on the side, hoping to find a waiting taxi to take me back to my hotel in the city center a few miles away. ■

Arvind Venkateswaran lives in the San Francisco bay area, and his position as a technology marketing executive causes him to travel extensively, including frequent trips to Japan. He has also visited various Buddhist monasteries in the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan. He can be reached at arvind@sloan.mit.edu

Alumni are encouraged to submit ideas, letters, personal stories, commentaries, and other materials for publication. Please e-mail, send, or fax word processed materials to the Ishikawa Alumni Association Secretariat Office. IAA reserves the right to edit or reject any submission.

Ishikawa Info

The NHK TV Drama "Toshiie and Matsu: The Tale of Kaga Hyakumangoku" Broadcast to the World NHK大河ドラマ「利家とまつ～加賀百万石物語」世界的に放送

Popular Actors Nanako Matsushima and Noriko Sakai Make up the Gorgeous Cast 松嶋菜々子や酒井法子など人気俳優による豪華なキャスティング

現在の金沢市の基盤となった加賀藩の藩祖前田利家とその正室まつ^{はらねむらう}の戦国時代に生きた波瀾万丈の人生を描くNHK大河ドラマ「利家とまつ」が2002年1月から1年間、日本全国に加え、香港と韓国を除く世界のほぼ全域に衛星放送されます。日本に滞在してなくてもNHKの海外放送を放送している放送局かケーブル局に加入している場合、あるいは「NHKワールド・プレミアム」を契約している会社、事業所、公共機関、ホテルなどで、石川の誇る歴史のドラマをお楽しみいただくことができます。

前田利家には唐沢寿明、まつ役には松嶋菜々子。酒井法子、竹野内豊、反町隆史などが共演します。

「NHKワールド・プレミアム」についての問い合わせは、NHK Joho Network Incorporated. NHK World TV Customer Center,
email: premium@nhk-jn.co.jp,
http://www.nhk-jn.co.jp/

The NHK drama which depicts the life of the warring states period Lord, Toshiie Maeda, founder of the Kaga domain which forms the base for today's Kanazawa city, and his wife Matsu, will be broadcast throughout Japan from January 2002 for a year. In addition to the Japanese TV broadcast, the program will be broadcast to the rest of the world via satellite with the exception of Hong Kong and South Korea.

Even if you are not living in Japan, you can subscribe to a cable or broadcasting company that carries NHK's overseas programs or a company that has a contract with "NHK World Premium." Places such as businesses, public institutions, hotels can enjoy this drama about Ishikawa's proud history.

The role of Toshiie Maeda will be played by Toshiaki Karasawa, Nanako Matsushima will play the role of Matsu. Noriko Sakai, Yukata Takenouchi, Takashi Sorimachi among others will make up the rest of the cast.

If you have any questions regarding "NHK World Premium," please contact: NHK Joho Network Incorporated. NHK World TV Customer Center, email: premium@nhk-jn.co.jp, http://www.nhk-jn.co.jp/



Missing Any Issues?

いしかわ同窓会ニュースレター「Alumni News」とメールニュース「e-ishikawa@」が届いていない方や住所、メールアドレスに変更のある方は、住所やメールアドレスをメール、ファックス、郵便でお知らせください。メールによる情報は2001年7月より月1回配信しています。メールニュース「e-ishikawa@」のバックナンバーをご希望の方はお知らせください。

バックナンバー

- * 同窓会員（オーストラリア）チャールズ・アディソンさん
石川での日本語研修をホームページで紹介－7月
- * 国連軍縮石川・金沢会議、金沢市で開催－8月
- * 全国都市緑化いしかわフェア－9月
- * 石川県立音楽堂オープン－9月
- * NHK大河ドラマ「利家とまつ」世界的に放送－11月

If you do not receive issues of Ishikawa Alumni Association's newsletter, *Alumni News* and email news, *e-ishikawa@* or your address changed, please let us know your mailing address and email address by email, fax, or regular mail. Email news, *e-ishikawa@* has distributed monthly since July, 2001. If you would like to receive back issues of email news, please feel free to contact us.

Back Issues:

- * Share Addison's Ishikawa Experience on the Web Site, July
- * United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues in Ishikawa-Kanazawa, August
- * 18th National Municipal Greenery Fair in Ishikawa, September
- * Ishikawa Ongakudo Opens, September
- * The NHK TV Drama "Toshiie and Matsu: The Tale of Kaga Hyakumangoku" Broadcast to the World, November



The Secretariat of the Ishikawa Alumni Association
Ishikawa Foundation for International Exchange
Rifare 3F, 1-5-3, Hon-machi, Kanazawa, 920-0853, Japan
TEL: (+81)-76-262-5931, FAX: (+81)-76-263-5931
URL: <http://www.ifie.or.jp/>, EMAIL: doso@ifie.or.jp
© 2002 Ishikawa Alumni Association