

Japan

by Morley Evans © October 2000

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1. *I'm off*

At runway's end, brakes on, the Rolls Royce engines of our stretched DC-8 power up to an ear-splitting scream. Seat belts fastened, hands clenched, knuckles turning white, all faces project faux nonchalance. Brakes release. We begin to accelerate, faster and faster. Rubber rolls and clips over concrete; engines roar louder; aluminium and plastic vibrate; giant wings slowly flex, up and down. Will we ever get off?

Passengers have been asking that question now for hours:

“What’s the hold-up? We were supposed to leave three hours ago! I should never have booked CP. I always fly Japan Air Lines — best in the world.”

“I got up at five thirty this morning for this flight. You’d think Canadian Pacific could get its act together. I hate waiting in airports.”

“You got that right!”

“I’ve got a meeting tomorrow in Tokyo.”

“Someone said there’s something wrong with the plane. They’re fixing it.”

“Let’s hope they know what they’re doing.”

Guess they figured it out, for now:

With a shudder, vibrations cease and we’re aloft. The plane banks gently and hydraulics begin retracting wheels. Bump. Doors close. Engines are quieter, steady and strong. The cabin is bathed in the faint air conditioning hiss that passengers would be hearing for the next eight hours, or more.

I’m calm. Like most on board, I light a cigarette.

Looking below, I can’t see the airport we just left, but I can see Vancouver, beautiful Vancouver sprawled out over the Fraser delta. There’s Stanley Park and the Lion’s Gate Bridge, the blue fingers of the Fraser River, English Bay and Burrard Inlet. Urban development is everywhere engulfed in greenery, snow capped mountains rise to the east. What do they all *do* down there? I wonder.

Coming from wind-swept bald prairie, Vancouver has always seemed magical,

and unreal. Now I'm away to a place even more exotic. What will *that* be like?

We climb higher, ever higher. Soon the first fingerings of cloud pass my window. These become more dense and in a moment there is nothing but white. Suddenly, we're above the clouds. Climbing still higher, these become fluffy woolen batting stretched out as far as the eye can see. Peace.

I'm truly off, a new life about to begin.

Big jets are different from small planes. Defying gravity with brute force, I don't get the feeling I'm about to drop with every gust of wind and change in engine pitch. Even the rattle-trap Air Lingus jet I took from Shannon, Ireland to Montreal a few years before had instilled more confidence than the bush planes that came later in northern Canada. Nothing to do here but relax and enjoy doing nothing.

I'm twenty-two.

All lives begin anew every moment I tell myself. Having saved meagre earnings from working in the bush where there was no place to spend it, I'm off to find a Zen monastery in Japan. In my pocket is the address Randy wrote in Japanese on a scrap of paper. "You're welcome any time, Morley-san." He doesn't know I'm coming.

I met Randy in Regina a few years after high school, after I had gone to hitch-hike around Europe with three friends. It was still that curious time when the phrase "Flower Power" was new and many seemed to believe the world had somehow been transformed, or soon would be. Everything would be wonderful from now on, they said. Many believed it.

Randy, who had grown up in Cupar, Saskatchewan, had been forced to return to his "country of origin" to renew his visa, having exhausted the number of trips to the Canadian embassy in Seoul which the Japanese government permitted for that purpose.

A true independent, Randy had made his way to Japan via Europe, the Middle East, Afghanistan, India, Indochina, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Working here and there, he had mostly hitch-hiked, taking transport only when hitching a ride was infeasible. He had found a home in Shinjuku, the area of Tokyo full of expatriates of every sort, artists, writers and musicians. Randy fit right in.

He did not, however, fit into the Regina scene. "What's the matter with them?" he'd say. "They're such a bunch of snobs, these people who think they're

artists, intellectuals and free-thinkers. Just a little clique of nobodies.” I agreed but would not appreciate the reason until many years later.

For now my purpose was to get away from the lies:

Toward the end of the sixties, the counter-culture was much into eastern mysticism. Most of the people I had come to know between returning from Europe and going up north were also into tarot cards, Marx, acid rock, Ouija boards, the Peace Movement, Edgar Casey, acid, astrology, filth, the Viet Cong, marijuana, Chairman Mao, long hair, alcohol, free love, back to the earth, love, Fidel Castro and peace. Love: they only hated the middle class.

I had done my own reading about Buddhism and Zen and had decided to find out more about it — and about myself — from the source, rather than listening to more third-hand stories supposedly told by some self-styled guru in Toronto.

Finding myself fitting neither into the culture, nor into the counter-culture, nor into much else, like Randy I was leaving.

“The Captain has an announcement to make:”

“Ladies and gentlemen, some minor adjustments will require us to divert from our course and make an unscheduled stopover in Anchorage. We will be landing in twenty minutes.”

“Oh Christ! What now?”

“This is the last time I’ll ever fly Canadian Pacific. You can be sure of that!”

I don’t quite know why everyone is so upset. Guess I’m not in a hurry. Is it not more important for us to arrive safely than not to arrive? If we crash, they’d all be late, very late, for whatever seems so important to them now.

Before long, we’re making our descent. Touchdown is a slight thud, thrust reversers move into position and the engines roar again. After stopping, we taxi to the terminal and are pulled up to the dock.

“Please remain seated for your safety and comfort. We should be ready to resume our flight fairly soon.”

Well, not quite. After a couple of hours, passengers remaining seated for their safety do not really seem to be all that comfortable. They seem ready to mutiny! Stewardesses are looking decidedly nervous whenever they walk past. Finally, relief

comes.

“We will be unavoidably detained for several more hours. Passengers may leave the plane, but may not leave the security area of the terminal. You will find the backs of your seats recline to permit sleeping.”

“Shit!”

“Oh God, let’s get off this thing right now.”

“I don’t care what he says, I’m going to a hotel.”

“This is all I need. I’m going to have a drink.”

“Me too.”

I’m not all that worried about being the first off. I wonder how these people would enjoy a five-day bus trip from Regina to Montreal, with seats made of the scratchiest, itchiest material ever created by man or beast. I remain in my seat until the discontented have disembarked. I have a smoke. I watch what I can of the airport activity — which isn’t a lot since my window faces the terminal. It’s late afternoon. I too am a bit peevish, truth to tell.

2. Anchorage by night; Tokyo by day

The plane is mostly empty, the “suits” have fled to the bar to vent their indignation over drinks. Here and there sit a Japanese couple chatting quietly. A little old lady knits. The stewardesses busy themselves with small chores. The flight crew is no where to be seen since it usually helps to keep those in charge separated from their charges. It’s a general order of command. I rise from my seat, slide across two other seats to get to the aisle, and begin the long walk to the exit — these stretched DC-8s seem half a mile long! (No, I don’t know how many kilometres that would be. You’ll have to look it up.)

Nodding at a stewardess standing by the door, I step out of the plane and make my way down the dock toward the terminal door at the far end. I’m stiff from sitting, but begin to loosen up as I walk. I’m apprehensive. Strangers usually make me uncomfortable and several years more or less alone in the bush haven’t much improved the feeling. Still, I’m an adventurer, and an explorer. Self-reliantly, I press forward.

The airport at Anchorage is large and busy and full of people. There are business travellers: some oriental, most occidental; some apparently married couples, probably Japanese, possibly Korean; a few children with parents; a few old people, a few young people; and soldiers, lots and lots of soldiers — American soldiers on their way to Viet Nam.

The soldiers are moving around like shoals of fish: moving here, moving there, without any apparent purpose, just moving. Of course, not all fish swim in a school, independent of the rest, some cruise this way, others that. The soldiers are the same age as me, or younger. Here and there, I see officers going about their business. Officers are older. Most of the soldiers don’t notice me. Some who do look the other way. Others look definitely hostile, and dangerous.

I can understand. I’m wearing Bausch & Lomb aviators, but I don’t look like a pilot. I have a full beard and hair down to my shoulders. I wearing a red and yellow plaid jacket, blue jeans, and work boots. On my head, I’m wearing a red barret, recently exchanged for the baseball cap I had worn up north.

When I bought the barret in a second hand store in Regina, it had come with the metal badge of the Regina Rifles, one of the Canadian regiments to go ashore on D-Day. When I removed the badge from the “cherry barret” (I had no right to wear it) and put it on, a friend exclaimed, “You look just like Che!” Adjusting it, I had to agree there was a resemblance. No matter, looks good: it doesn’t have a

Star. Besides, people shouldn't judge by appearances.

Yet, now I'm thinking that people really do judge books by their covers, as some of these guys would certainly demonstrate if they had half a chance. This is a dangerous spot. They don't know this is my bushman outfit. To them I look like the enemy!

People believe what they want:

A couple of years ago, I found myself in a secret meeting of the "Weathermen" held in an office at Simon Fraser University. Two guys had flown in from San Francisco to join three locals to decide what to do with the defence fund they had raised to pay legal fees for some of their arrested comrades. I sat stone-faced behind my shades while they decided to keep the money for more important things. These were serious people — they had reputedly committed murder for political purposes. I only looked the part, but that was good enough for them. I looked dangerous.

A fresh faced private about my age moves closer. He seems friendly:

"How are yuh?" he asks.

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"I'd be a lot better if I wasn't here."

"On your way to Viet Nam?"

"Sure am. Where're you going?"

"Japan."

"Wish that's where I was going."

Outside the window, I've been watching planes land and take off, taxi and stop. I recognize most of the airlines, but have never seen the white jets with "Air America" in large red letters on their fuselages.

Pointing, I ask, "Who's that?"

"C.I.A. They're taking us to 'Nam."

"Oh."

“Listen, it was nice talking to you, but I’d better go before someone objects.”

“Sure. Hope you’ll be all right.”

He walks away. I hope he will be all right. I hope they will all be all right, but know some won’t.

We’re quite far north and though it’s late, the sun has just begun to set. It will set, but daybreak will come in only a few hours.

After a while, I decide to check out the bar. It has a hard unpleasant atmosphere and I decide to return to the plane without having a drink. I make my way back to my seat and soon a stewardess brings a blanket, the air conditioning creates chilliness. I tilt the seat as far back as it will go, put my feet on the footrest, and uncomfortably drift off. Well, at least it’s better than a bus...

At daybreak, the plane is finally ready to go. Groggy passengers yawn and stretch. They seem more cheerful and optimistic than yesterday. We’re airborne before breakfast is served. Coffee and food makes everyone feel better. Have a smoke and relax. There’s nothing to look at and nothing to do. I brought a book to read by D.T. Suzuki. His books on Zen I’ve been reading over the years, but I find reading in moving vehicles difficult at best and I can’t get interested today.

Hours later, we hear the captain’s voice:

“We are in a holding pattern over Tokyo. Visibility is zero all the way to the ground. If conditions do not improve in one hour, we’ll be forced to make an alternative landing in Kobe or Osaka.”

“Oh, great!”

“Will this never end?”

Then everyone is silent, silent and resigned.

Time passes. There is no way to tell where we are. Engines hum; air conditioners hiss. All is calm. Then:

“Conditions have improved over Tokyo sufficiently to permit a safe landing. We are beginning our descent.”

Looking out my window, the soup gets thicker. The plane continues downward. Now I can see only bright white fog outside. We continue downward.

Down. Down. Down. “Jesus Christ, how long can we continue down before we hit the ground?” *He* must have been listening. Instantly, we pass below the ceiling and hit the ground with a jolting thud. Spoilers and thrust reversers deploy. Engines roar. The plane slows almost to a stop and begins to taxi.

Passengers cheer!

Stopping now in our designated place, the captain’s voice is heard once more:

“On behalf of Canadian Pacific Airlines and the entire crew, I would like to thank you all for flying Canadian Pacific. We all look forward to you choosing Canadian Pacific for your next flight.”

Passengers cheer!

Smiling to themselves as they retrieve bags from the overhead compartments, all make a silent pact never to fly Canadian Pacific Airlines again.

We are in Japan! We have landed at Haneda, Tokyo’s international airport. There is no dock here for our plane. Passengers walk down steps and across Tarmac to the terminal where their bags await. As I step onto the Tarmac, my knees sag. Here in Tokyo it’s 110 degrees F (46 degrees C); the humidity is 99 percent; and the ceiling, as we found out when landing, is about forty feet.

Adjusting to the climate here will require some time. But first I have to find Randy. I have absolutely no idea where he is. Somewhere in Japan. I’m in Japan, so there should be no problem.

Inside the terminal, I retrieve my knapsack from baggage and head back into the Turkish bath that is the Japanese summer. I go to the taxi stand where uniformed drivers with white gloves stand polishing their gleaming cabs. Speaking no Japanese, I approach one and hand him the piece of paper upon which Randy printed his address. The taxi driver, speaking no English, returns it to me, pushes a button opening the trunk and drops my knapsack inside. The rear passenger’s door opens by itself. I slide in onto the seat. My white gloved liveried chauffeur climbs in behind the wheel and we’re away.

After first being impressed with taxi cabs in Japan, I next notice that everyone here drives on the left-hand side of the road, just like England. Then as we speed past miles of urban sprawl I recognize signs of familiar things: Coca-Cola, Canon, Fuji, Nikon — commercial products all. Before long, we arrive at a gigantic train station. My driver stops at a portal, gives me my baggage, takes my money, and points to a door. Inside, I am reminded of Victoria Station in London. This place is

big. I see a kiosk and approach with my little piece of paper. Inside, two uniformed train employees inspect the paper, confer, sell me a ticket and show me where to wait. They too think I'm a dangerous revolutionary. I'll ditch the hat.

Before too long a train pulls up and stops. I get in, find a seat along with hundreds of others, and wait for a conductor. Doors close and the train begins its journey. Soon a conductor comes along to punch everyone's ticket. I show him mine, along with my piece of paper with Randy's address. The conductor indicates he will tell me when it's time to get off. We make our way through Tokyo and out into the Japanese countryside, stopping periodically along the way. It will soon be supertime, and I wonder how far I'll have to go. I'm getting tired. After travelling for a couple of hours, the conductor comes along to tell me I am to get off at the next stop. I do.

There at the station, I find another taxi. It's as nice as those in Tokyo, perhaps not quite as shiny. The driver wears gloves. When I show him my piece of paper, his eyebrows raise in understanding, and we're off. Before long, he stops outside a small two story concrete apartment with an outside walkway providing access to the second floor units. He gives me my knapsack; I give him his money; he points to a door on the second floor and is gone. The sun has just set.

I walk up the stairs, down the walkway, and knock on the door. It opens.

“Morley-san!! What are YOU doing here?”

3. *Randy and Yoshimi:*

Randy appears just as I remember: over six feet tall, thin and wiry, with unkempt longish dark hair, he has a deeply lined cowboy face with a large droopy moustache under a large nose. Randy is only about twenty-five, but looks older. He is big and gregarious, confident and friendly. The things I like best about Randy are his optimism, cheerfulness, generosity, and honesty. He isn't boastful, doesn't bully people and is never on the con. He's not interested in appearances. Randy is iconoclastic and doesn't worry what others think, yet he's not interested in shocking people or "playing games with their heads."

Randy can be trusted. What you see is what you get.

"Morley-san, it's really good to see you! Take off your shoes and come in." They aren't dirty and this request seems odd. "The first thing to remember in Japan is to always take off your shoes when going into someone's house. There are never exceptions."

I begin unlacing my boots. They rise over my ankles and I can tell right away that boots are going to be a nuisance if they have to be taken off dozens of times a day. I put them in the line of footwear by the door with shoes, wooden sandals, and rubber flip-flops.

As we step inside the tiny foyer, Randy moves to one side to reveal a very pretty Japanese girl, about five foot two, with very long black hair. She's about twenty three, I'd guess.

"Morley, this is my wife, Yoshimi-san." She smiles and bows. Randy indicates I should bow and I awkwardly do so.

"Yoshimi-san, this is my friend Morley from Regina. I've told you about him."

"How do you do, Moree-san?" Yoshimi-san asks. "It's nice to meet you."

"It's nice to meet you too, Yoshimi-san."

"Morley, we're just about to have supper. Are you hungry?"

"Hungry and tired. We had a long flight."

“How did you find us? Did you have trouble?”

“Not at all. I was like a guided missile.”

“Yoshimi will finish making supper while I show you around.”

“Thanks!”

There is a short hallway to our right with two doors on the right hand side and one at the end. Behind the first door is a small storage closet where Randy puts my knapsack, behind the second is what looks like the interior of a one-hole outhouse with a frosted glass window and a basin with faucets. Behind the third door is a small room with mosaic tiles covering the walls, ceiling and floor, as well as the inside and outside of a box about three feet square and four and feet high. The box is full of water. In this room there is another frosted glass window, a drain in the floor, and taps and hose on one wall.

“Later, I’ll tell you how to use the toilet and take a bath,” Randy says. “You can wash up before we eat. Meanwhile, I’ll show you the rest of the place.”

To the left of the entry foyer is a tiny kitchen. Its counter is no more than five feet long with a sink and a window. Under the counter is a tiny refrigerator, about the size of a dishwasher in Canada. There is a small gas range. The kitchen is open to the living space.

Entry, kitchen, toilet and bathroom occupy about one third of the apartment. The other two thirds is one big open room than can be divided into a living space and a bedroom space with floor to ceiling padded sliding doors. The walls and ceiling are white; the floor is ‘tatami’; the far wall has large sliding glass doors with aluminium frames; outside these a long concrete balcony; beyond that a rice field.

A table with its surface about eighteen inches above the floor sits in the living room. Pillows are strewn here and there. In the bedroom space, a closet with floor to ceiling sliding doors covers the entire wall which separates the bedroom from the hall to the bathroom and toilet.

“This is our home! What do you think?”

“It’s wonderful!” It is. In the last couple of years, I’ve gotten used to living in tents and on the ground. What an improvement this is over the two crummy little rooms on the third floor of a downtown Regina house that Randy had shared with a boyhood friend while Randy waited six months to return to Japan. And it’s a world away from the dives I’d visited — while trying not to appear “judgmental”

— into which many children of the middle class had fled in the sixties to go to university, drop out, or somehow transform the world into a better place. This apartment is fresh and clean and orderly and sane. Splendid!

“You can stay as long as you like, Morley. Let’s eat.”

We wash up, sit on our legs with our knees under the low table and begin. Yoshimi has attractively laid out our dinner in the few minutes our tour has taken.

“So you’ve come to find a Zen temple?”

“Yep, that’s my plan.”

“Made any arrangements?”

“No. I’ll just find one that will take me. Probably in Kyoto. I don’t think they stand on ceremony. You just show up and they decide.”

“Stay with us at least a month until you learn a few things about Japan. When you begin to feel comfortable you’ll be able to find your way around.”

“Would that be all right with you, Yoshimi-chan?” Randy asks.

“Yes, that would be fine, but Moree-san will have to pay something for groceries.”

“I’d expect to, of course. Thank-you. You’re very generous.”

“You’re most welcome, Moree-san.”

Before very long, I find my legs are beginning to cramp. “You’ll get used to that, Morley. You won’t find many chairs to sit in here in Japan but soon you’ll find you don’t miss ’em.”

We finish eating and while Yoshimi clears away the table, Randy opens a large bottle of ‘biru’ (beer) and pours it into glasses.

“We have a lot of catching up to do. Tomorrow, I’ll take you to the studio where you can learn something about pots. What have you been doing since I left Regina?”

It’s sweltering in the room and the beer is cold and good. “The first thing I did was with your friend John Illingworth after he showed up from Toronto.”

“John? How is John? Haven’t seen him in years.”

“He was fine last time I saw him. Went to visit his folks on their farm near Cupar once. We promoted and showed a British film documenting the horrors of a nuclear war. It was a real downer that scared the hell out of people. We showed it in theatres in Regina and Saskatoon, and several times at their universities. Then I took it to Vancouver. After that, I worked in the bush up north. I came back to Regina once in a while between jobs. What about you?”

“When I came back, I went to Mashiko to continue my apprenticeship with Nakeno-sensei. You’ll meet him.”

“Where’s Mashiko? Where are we anyway?”

“We’re in Kasama. Japan is shaped like a boomerang that turns north just east of Tokyo. Kasama is about fifty miles from Tokyo in Ibaraki Prefecture. The nearest big city is Mito which is on the Pacific coast. Kasama is smaller than Moose Jaw, and Mashiko is smaller than that. Mashiko is a centre for traditional Japanese pottery. Bernard Leech, the English potter once lived in Mashiko. That’s where I found Nakeno-sensei. He took a shine to me and gave me a chance to study under him. Little pay, lots of hard work and long hours.”

“That sounds familiar. We seem a lot farther away from Tokyo than fifty miles.”

“Yeh, but Japan is a small place. The same distance seems greater in a small country than in a big one. Glasgow seems to be on the other side of the world from London, but it’s only as far as Winnipeg to Regina. Who knows why?”

It’s getting late and Yoshimi is signalling that it’s time to retire.

She has opened the sliding doors in the bedroom closet and has begun to remove some fluffy-looking bedding. “Randy and I sleep in here and you will sleep out there,” she says. “We close the fusuma for privacy.”

“The padded sliding doors with fabric covering are called ‘fusuma,’” Randy instructs. “Fusuma separate rooms. The doors covered with rice paper that you’re familiar with are called ‘shoji’. They permit light to enter a building. We don’t have any of them in this apartment building. Shoji are used as exterior doors. Glass works better. You’ll see shoji at your temple. Now it’s time to bathe.”

“I had a shower this morning,” I say, forgetting how long my flight took.

“Everyone must have a bath before going to bed,” Randy says. “There are never exceptions. Yoshimi has finished having hers. Come on Morley-san, you’re about to have your first bath. Furo ni hairu!”

So what’s the big deal? I wonder.

“First, I’ll explain the john.” He points into the toilet room. “You don’t sit on the toilet, called a ‘benjo’, you stand on it, then squat. It’s much more sanitary than sitting on a seat and your trunk is upright with your guts all in a nice straight line. So it works better too.”

“Well, I guess so.”

“Now for the bath. The bath is called ‘furo’ or usually ‘ofuro’. In Japan, when reverence wants to be shown, the prefix ‘o’ is used. Tea is ‘ocha’. The water in a Japanese bath is extremely hot, so you’ll understand the need for reverence once you’re in. At first you’ll think you’re being cooked, but don’t worry, you won’t be harmed. First you wash yourself thoroughly with soap and water from the hose over here. Then, when you’re clean, you step up here and lower yourself into the water. After you’ve been soaking for a while, the water won’t seem so hot anymore. Then it’s time to get out. After you’re done, you may want to douse yourself with cold water from the hose. Then, Morley-san, you will feel all the day’s cares have gone, the summer night air will no longer seem hot and humid and you’ll sleep like a baby. In winter when it’s cold, it’s even better. Yoshimi has set out this towel for you to use. See you when you’re done.”

Randy closes the door and leaves me to explore the ofuro. I take off my clothes and shower myself. Then, as instructed, I step up onto the ledge. Faint steam rises from the surface. I plunge in a foot.

“Yeow!!”

My foot instantly comes out all by itself, throbbing and red. Are they crazy? No one could get into this and live. The water must be close to boiling. There’d be steam clouds rising if the air wasn’t already so hot in here. But there is no choice. Yoshimi won’t let me stay here if I’m not clean. I know that Japanese are always suspicious of dirty ‘gaijin’. I try one big toe. I pull it out. I try again and keep it in. Then I pull it out. I seem to be getting used to the pain. I put the toe back in. Doesn’t feel too bad now. I insert the rest of my foot. Slowly. Slowly. Not bad, as long as I keep very still. The heat increases when I move. Slowly I put in my other leg. Very slowly. After a while, I’m standing in the cauldron. Getting braver, I begin to descend and then I’m squatting, immersed up to my chin. Hey, this is going pretty good! I wonder if I can hold my breath and go all the way? I do.

After a while the water still seems pretty hot, but I decide it's time to get out. I run the cold water hose over my head and body. Feels great! Very refreshing! I dry off and put my clothes back on. They feel damp and dirty. I'll have to buy a housecoat or something tomorrow.

As I open the door and return to civilization, I do feel that all the day's cares have gone, the summer air does seem cooler, and I do think I'll sleep like a baby.

“So how was THAT, Morley-san?”

“I think I could get to like it, Randy-san.”

“Yoshimi-san has laid out my futon (futon o shiku) on the tatami in the living room. She is in the bedroom and the fusuma are all but one closed.

“Oyasuminasi (goodnight), Morley-san.” Randy slides the last fusuma to separate the rooms.

“Good night! God bless.”

4. *The pottery studio:*

“Ohayo gozaimasu.” (Did I hear a cock crow?) “Welcome to your first morning in Japan, Morley.”

Randy and Yoshimi are already busy at 6:00 am. The fusuma are open and their futon has been folded and put away. When I return from the bathroom, my futon is also gone and the table is set for breakfast.

“This morning, we’re off to my studio,” Randy says.

Before long we’re on his motorcycle and away. Randy is a madman, weaving recklessly through streets and lanes that are at this early hour already full of busy people, motor scooters, small cars and miniature trucks and vans. Kasama is engulfed in subtropical greenery, bushes and trees; open spaces of tall grasses and bamboo soften the urban landscape of one storey houses and shops. This is a bustling little place! Soon we’re on a hillside somewhere on the edge of town. Below us in the courtyard of what could be a manufacturing operation, workers have assembled doing warm up exercises.

“Here we are! I built everything here myself, with my own hands. Let me show you.”

Randy’s studio is a one room building of light construction. Outside I see a pile of discarded pottery, a bench and table, various tools in a line and a barrel vault brick structure that looks like a giant caterpillar climbing up the hillside. “That’s the climbing kiln I just finished,” Randy says proudly. “I’ll be firing it for the first time in a few days. Over here is my main kiln. I’ll use it for salt glaze once I start up the other: Once a kiln is used for salt glaze, it can’t be used again for different types of firings.”

Inside, the studio is spacious. I see a wooden kick-wheel; another pottery wheel of stainless steel, driven by an electric motor; large clear plastic bags containing clay of various earthen shades; shelves of drying greenware; other shelves of bisque; more shelves with finished product; more tools neatly arranged; some large pails of muddy soup; a water spigot; more pots on the floor; a couple of chairs and a worktable; and a large electric kiln. “I use this kiln for bisque firings.” In front of us, is a wall of large windows that look over what can be seen of the town and hills beyond. We don’t seem to have any neighbours, only trees and tall grasses, bush and bamboo. Very pleasant, I think. “It looks great, Randy. I can see you are busy!”

“We can talk while I work. I’m getting some things ready for another show.” He pulls a large lump of clay (he calls it ‘mud’) from one of the bags and begins kneading it like dough.

“So tell me again, Randy, how did you come to pottery?”

“Well, when I arrived in Japan I drifted to Shinjuku, Tokyo’s Greenwich Village. Like most foreigners, I earned a living teaching English — doesn’t matter where you’re from, Germany, France, Mexico, you can get a job somewhere teaching English. I had some work in the movies! I was an American general in one, just had to look the part since all the dialog is dubbed in later. Yoshimi and I met and soon started living together — her parents were extremely displeased. I planned to become a poet, but Yoshimi said I’d never earn a living doing that. A friend suggested I go to Mashiko to find out about traditional Japanese pottery. I met Nakano-san there and went to work for him as an apprentice. Yoshimi and I moved to Kasama a couple of years ago after I returned from Canada.”

“Mashiko is near Kasama?”

“Not far from here. Mashiko is a little too artsy-fartsy for me — too many people playing at being artists — and Kasama is cheaper because it’s not. Kasama is more of a commercial ceramics centre, not so much folk pottery. Mashiko is the home of Hamada.”

“Hamada?”

“Here’s the story: Bernard Howell Leach [1887 to 1979] established ceramics and the potter-as-artist in the twentieth century. Leach studied traditional pottery technique and style in the Far East for many years. He was highly influenced by Sung dynasty ceramics. Leach made Japanese raku and stoneware familiar in the West. Early on, he met Hamada Shoji [1894-1978] a Japanese potter his own age who was also rediscovering the traditional techniques. Together they established a kiln in St. Ives, Cornwall in the 1920s. Later, Hamada established his own kiln in Mashiko, revitalizing the pottery craft that had flourished there in ancient times. Hamada was named a ‘Living National Treasure’ by the Japanese government in 1955. Nakano-senei, my teacher, began as an apprentice to Hamada.”

“I’ve heard of raku. Is that what you make?”

“No, raku is low fired. We make stoneware.”

“What’s stoneware?”

“Stoneware is fired at a very high temperature — 1,200 degrees Centigrade, 2,200 degrees Fahrenheit. Stoneware is partially vitrified — it turns almost to glass when fired — and so it needs no glaze to be impermeable. Glaze is merely decorative; it’s not functional in the sense that it’s required for a vessel to hold liquid or have strength. Function, that’s what is important.”

“Architecture.”

“Just like that! That’s why it’s important to have one’s hands directly involved in every step of the creation and why it’s important for me at this stage in my career to do everything myself, even building with my own hands the building I work in. The potter’s hands can be seen and felt in the final product when another holds and uses his pot, or bowl, or plate, or cup. Pots should be used in everyday life. They should have a function. They should not be made merely to look at. I like to do tea bowls best of all.”

“Philosophy.”

“Indeed! That’s what’s missing in modern things. There’s no apparent connection to anything in the stuff that’s drowning us. You can’t tell what it was made from, or who made it, or how it was made, or why. Some modern things are just plain ugly, garish, noisy, smelly, and vulgar. Or worse, they’re too perfect: cold and impersonal and dead. Plastic. One thing I like about Japan is that there is still much of the ancient culture to encounter and use every day, along with what’s new. You’ll see. You’ll feel it.”

“So when you built this place what did you do? Did you have to go and get plans and approvals and permits and so on?”

“Nope, I just bought this little piece of land and built what I wanted, the way I wanted it. It’s mine. In England, a person has to make sure whatever he wants to do is okay with everyone else before doing anything — and it’s usually not. But it isn’t like that here.”

“It’s like that in Canada — except up north where you can walk on land where no one else has ever set foot. You can even stake a claim there.”

Randy has finished throwing a pot. “Now I’ll show you how it becomes a tea pot,” he says. “Tea pots are my specialty, after tea bowls.” He deftly cuts an elliptical hole in one side, then, after trimming a clay cylinder on both ends — at precise angles — he dips the wider end into slip, attaches it to cover the hole, and works the clay gently together inside and out. “When it’s fired, the two pieces will fuse together, becoming one. The spout has to be made just right or it will drip.

I've never seen a western tea pot that didn't drip. They're terrible! It must be made like this. See the angle? Then when you stop pouring, the stream is cut and there are no drips — not even one drop! The lid is another problem. It must not only fit when it's green, but fit after firing. The stuff I've seen displayed by the university students at home have lids that are warped, or too small, or too big, or they shove some cork into the hole and call it a lid. Whatever they take out of the kiln is okay: if it's a misshapen mess all covered with alumina, it's 'art'. I had to throw away a thousand pots before I made one I could keep to sell."

How do you earn money? I ask.

"Periodically, I have sales, sometimes right outside. I have a wholesaler who takes some of my work, and I've had three shows in one of the big department stores in the Ginza. They were very successful and people who like traditional Japanese pottery are beginning to recognize my work, especially my tea bowls."

"Where is the Ginza?"

"The Ginza is the main shopping and fashion district in Tokyo. Like Fifth Avenue in New York, I suppose. Department stores there sell upper-end stuff, not like Eaton's. So, it's a real breakthrough for me to get into one."

"That sounds great! Are there any other foreign potters working around here?"

"Sure, there are some here in Kasama and more in and around Mashiko. One day, we'll go over to visit Nakeno-san and you'll meet Knapper."

"Who is Knapper?"

"Oh he's a young German guy. Gurd Knapper. He's a bit of a pain in the ass sometimes, as many Germans I've met tend to be — over-compensating for starting and losing two world wars, I suppose. Maybe they've always been like that: Czechs and Hungarians call them 'square heads'. He's okay, I guess. You just have to be tolerant."

"I'll do my best. Does he do the same type of work as you?"

"No the work he does is decorative, not functional. The British and Japanese pottery tradition is more conservative than the Continent's where there has always been an abstract tradition. Knapper's doing well here, however. There is a good market for what he does; he's becoming quite successful."

“What do the Japanese think of us? What is their war memory?”

“Never comes up. The Japanese have put it all behind them. Right now they’re gung ho for anything American: Periodically throughout their history, the Japanese have opened the door to foreign influences, assimilated them, then shut the door, refining what they adopted and making it their own. They might do that again. For now, we’re part of a club they want to join — they make no distinction between us and Americans; they don’t even know what a Canadian is. The Japanese aren’t so kind to members of clubs they don’t want to join, however: Koreans, Chinese, Philipinos, and they are definitely unkind to the children of mixed marriages, especially to girls whose fathers were black American servicemen. But they love it when favoured foreigners genuinely like them and love their culture. In other words, the Japanese are just like everybody. If you like them, they’ll treat you well.”

“What about your children, yours and Yoshimi’s?”

“We have thought about that. While children of mixed marriages have trouble growing up in Japan, if they come to Japan once they’re grown they enjoy an advantage from already being half Japanese. Some of the most popular rock stars today have that background: they are part of the group, but they are exotic too. We might have to leave Japan someday, then come back. Did I tell you Yoshimi is pregnant?”

“She is? When is she due?”

“In about four months.”

“Doesn’t show.”

“Not yet.”

“Congratulations!”

“Thanks. But don’t say anything. It is impolite for me to tell you. She will when, and if, she thinks it’s your business.”

“Fine with me.”

We’ve talked and talked for hours and hours as Randy has made pots: there are a lot more pots now than there were when we arrived. It’s almost as if they made themselves. The morning has past, lunch has been eaten, the afternoon is gone.

“Shall we see what Yoshimi has ready for supper?”

“Sounds good to me, Randy-san. Let’s go.”

“Ikimasho ka?” (Shall we go?)

“Hai!” (Yes!)

5. *The Go-ban:*

It's afternoon.

On this sunny hot beautiful early summer day, I'm riding in an air-conditioned bus motoring through the countryside from Kasama to Mashiko: Upon learning of my newly discovered interest in Go, Nakeno-san has extended an invitation through Randy and Yoshimi to visit him at his home where we will play his favourite game.

"He's an expert," Randy had warned.

I first met Nakeno-san, Randy's sensei (teacher), when he had driven to Kasama to join a few friends and potters for the inaugural firing of Randy's new climbing kiln. Nakeno-san was a small Japanese man in his mid fifties, traditionally attired in a man's summer kimono, obi (a wide cloth sash wrapped around the hips), and white socks (kutsushita) with separate pockets for each big toe to accommodate the straps of his wooden platform shoes (geita). (I had already noticed that even work boots sometimes had separated big toes in Japan! Very odd indeed, don't you think?) Nakeno-san — the exact opposite of his outgoing student, Randy — was quiet and reserved and had spoken to Randy that afternoon exclusively in Japanese. Nakeno-san's face, like most Japanese I'd met so far, somehow looked more western than oriental — in fact, I had seen few people who looked "typically Japanese".

Now on the bus, we wind through luxuriant rolling greenery interspersed with terraced rice fields and farm houses of traditional Japanese style with white stucco walls and thatched or ceramic tile roofs. The highway has two lanes paved with asphalt with a white line down its centre. Traffic is not too heavy, not too light — it's just right. We pass a farm house in the distance. It has a wasps' nest hanging under the eaves of a gable. They must be very tolerant people, these Japanese, I think. The wasps must have been living there a long time — their nest is as big as a Toyota! Ah, live and let live. At home we'd call the exterminator at their first sign. I would. Here and there, I see farmers with large upside-down-bowl-like straw hats working their fields. The bus is not too crowded, and not too empty — it's just right. The other passengers are all Japanese. Most are wearing western style clothing: grey or brown slacks or skirts, short sleeved white shirts or blouses, neat black hair. A few women wear kimonos and traditional accessories. Younger women and girls have longer hair. Unlike me, I reflect, the Japanese don't seem concerned about their appearance. I wonder whether one day they will want to express their individuality by adopting bizarre fashions. I hope not! They seem

happy. Though I look very different from them with my long hair, beard, checked shirt and Levis, no one gives me a suspicious, or even a curious, look. As we roll along, everything inside and outside the bus seems neat and tidy, respectable and comfortable. Nothing seems confining. Everything is just right.

Before too long, we arrive in a town and after a few more stops the driver waves to notify me that it's my turn to get off. I do. This must be Mashiko I think, and then, armed with Nakeno's address and the directions of strangers who speak no English, I'm on my way. A short walk takes me to an affluent-looking neighbourhood. The houses here have no space between them. Some are two storeyed, others are one. Each house is different from its neighbours, yet the varied materials and shapes harmonize to create an appealing streetscape. The houses are set back at varied short distances from the sidewalk and somehow in the few steps it would take to reach a front door, an illusion is created of travelling a long way through a mysterious forest or an enchanted garden. I knock on the front door of what I hope is the correct house. After a moment it opens and Nakeno-san smiles and bows. I bow in reply, then present the small gift Yoshimi has given me to take for the occasion. I remove my boots (*kutso o nugu*) and step inside.

Nakeno-san speaks little English, but I feel we will get by for he speaks some. It's supertime. He directs me into a room where a large low table (*teburu*) has been set for the evening meal. Nakeno-san is wearing a dark rich-looking kimono over his white under-kimono, an obi, and white socks. In a moment a Japanese matron enters wearing a beautiful light yellow brocade kimono over her white under-kimono, a luxurious obi, and white socks. This is Nakeno-san, Nakeno-san's wife. (Could be confusing, *n'est pas?*) She smiles and bows. I smile and bow. "It's very nice to meet you, Moree-san," she says. "It's a pleasure to meet you too," I reply. Then enters a girl whom I guess to be thirteen years old. She is also wearing traditional kimono, obi, and white socks. "This is our daughter," says my host. She smiles, blushes and bows. I smile and bow. Each of us takes our designated place at the table. We bow and lower ourselves onto our legs. After only a few weeks in Japan, I am already finding this posture has begun to feel quite natural, but it does require effort; it makes slouching impossible, along with other slovenly habits of body and mind. Could it be that furniture itself injures the spirit because it subtly cultivates sloth?

Our repast looks splendid! All the food is on the table, so no one needs to rise to get anything. All four of us take the small steaming towel (*taoru*) at his or her place and wash our faces and hands. Then we begin. Conversation is sparse, a result of the fact that we don't speak each other's language and of politeness: it would be rude for the three of them to carry on a conversation in Japanese, making their guest feel abandoned or paranoid. (I've realized it's common to feel others are talking about me when they are carrying on a conversation in a different language.

Almost certainly, they are not.) I have grown to like Japanese cooking very much and have even begun to adequately use ohashi (chopsticks). When we have finished, I thank my hostess with, “Oishii, desu nei?” (delicious, was it not?). “Hai! so desu,” (Yes! So it was) Nakeno-san replies. With our towels, now cold, all wash hands and faces, then rise from the table. Nakeno-san directs me to another room while, I assume, his wife and daughter clear the table, wash the dishes, and do assorted chores.

Nakeno’s house seems spacious and well appointed with high quality materials and items. Everything has the patina that objects can only acquire after years of skilful, loving care. The tatami floors are evidently a better quality than those in Randy and Yoshimi’s apartment. I conclude that Nakeno-san has prospered; his reward for years of hard work and careful management of personal and business affairs. Nakeno-san and his family have patina.

We bow and sit before the Go-Ban which is placed in the middle of the room on its own low table. On either side sits a one quart wooden pot with a matching wooden lid turned upside down beside it. One pot contains white “stones”; the other pot contains black “stones”. I am about to play with a Go master!

I was introduced to Go by Barry Musgrave, the Englishman living with his English wife, Sandra, in an apartment on the main floor of Randy and Yoshimi’s building. Barry and Sandra had come to Japan travelling east from England on motorcycle. Although owning their own conveyance insured more certain progress than Randy had experienced, their trip had not been without mishap: “We had to flee for our lives when one morning a tribesman in Afghanistan found the Koran in a bag with our shoes,” Barry had recounted. I imagined bullets fired by enraged Muslims had wizzed past their ears as Barry gunned the motorcycle to speed away. How adventuresome we are when we are young!

“Go is a board game that was invented in China about three thousand years ago,” Barry explained. “It was brought to Japan through Korea maybe thirteen hundred years ago and over the centuries the Japanese have made it their own. Go is a game two people play on a board the Japanese call a ‘ban’. The board has nineteen lines across it. These are intersected at right angles by nineteen other lines. That creates three hundred sixty one intersections on the board plus another seventy-six on the edges for a total of four hundred and thirty seven places. The board is empty when the game begins. Then, players alternately take turns placing their stones one by one on the intersections, or the ends of the lines. Stones can be placed anywhere; black goes first, by custom. There is really only one rule: a stone must have at least one ‘breathing space’ or liberty (jiryu) to ‘live’.”

“What does that mean? Barry,” I queried.

“When you put a stone on an intersection, there are four lines leading from it to the next four intersections. It has four jiyu. If a stone is on an intersection on a side, then there are only three lines leading from it to three adjacent intersections. It has three jiyu. If a stone is on a corner intersection, there are only two lines leading from it to two adjacent intersections. It has two jiyu.”

“So how do you play?”

“The objective in Go is to control territory, or ‘ji’. If my black stone is surrounded by your white stones on the intersections adjacent to it, my black stone ‘dies’ and you remove it. You keep it in a pile with other captured black stones. I can’t put another black stone on the now vacant intersection, because it would also die, but you could put a white stone there because it would be connected to your other white stones which have ‘jiyu’ (liberty). You could have fifty stones all connected to only one ‘jiyu’. That would be okay. But of course if I could put one of my black stones on their ‘jiyu’, all fifty white stones would die and their territory would become my ‘ji’.

“Well, that sounds simple enough to me,” I said. “Even I can do that. Let’s play.”

“It is very simple, Morley, but like life itself, Go soon gets very complicated. And remember, it’s customary to say ‘Atari’ (success) when you are about to take your opponent’s stone or stones.”

Barry and I had played quite a few games, but not so many, of course, as some Japanese whom I learned devote their entire lives to its pursuit. I liked the simplicity of Go with its one rule to remember and its complexity blossoming from that one condition. I had been doing quite well, so far as I had gone:

Now, Nakeno-san is about to give me a whuppin: Good thing there’s no money riding on this.

The Go-Ban has nine spots, one in the centre, four that are six intersections from it, and four at the corners, six intersections from those. These are ‘okigo’, the handicap sometimes given to one of the players who can be ‘spotted’ one or more stones before the game starts. Nakeno-san asks me if I would like a handicap.

Unsure of myself, I answer, “Sure,” and Naneno-sensei covers the nine spots with black stones, making the board look pretty full already. (I haven’t played with a handicap before.) He places his first white stone and then it’s my turn. Nakeno-sensei has been playing Go all his life. He has studied dozens of books on Go, puzzled over and implemented various strategies, learned the strengths and

weaknesses of different ‘moku’ (formations), played in tournaments. On the other hand, I don’t know anything except the one rule, and I sometimes forget that. During ‘fuseki’, the opening game before anyone is attacked, I am just plopping my black stones down without a plan, while I’m sure Nakeno-sensei knows what he is doing and is already visualizing the end of the game. ‘Chuban’ or middle game begins when I challenge one of his moku. He escapes, taking my stone in a couple of moves. As more stones are placed and the board begins to fill, we each capture and remove some of the other’s stones; patterns begin to emerge; and the game moves into ‘shuban’ or end game. A point comes when it is clear that no more moves can be made and ‘yose’ or tidying up begins: stone by stone, corners are filled and the borders between our two empires are finalized. Next ‘shukyoku’ begins: Nakeno-sensei takes the black stones he has captured and places them inside my territory (ji), considerably reducing the number of open intersections it contains. I take the white stones I have captured and fill in some of his open intersections (jiyu). Then we count the open intersections inside his territory and inside mine. To my amazement, I have a few more than Nakeno-sensei. I win!

“Congratulations, Moree-san. You have won.”

“Beginners luck, I’m sure,” say I.

“You have a very unconventional way of playing,” says Nakeno-sensei. “Shall we play again?”

We do. We play two more games. In the second game, I have a three stone handicap only: Nakeno-sensei easily beats me. Before we play our final game, and despite my loss, Nakeno-sensei suggests I try without any handicap. This last game takes longer than its predecessors and Go seems to have become much more difficult. As I am now trying to think ahead, mountains rise out of the once flat prairie. Still, I don’t know enough to get myself into much trouble. When all is done, ‘shukyoku’ reveals I have won.

“You have done very well tonight, Moree-san. I would like to play more sometime.”

“I would like that also,” I reply, feeling quite pleased with myself.

It is now well into the night. I thank Nakeno-san and his wife for their generous hospitality. I bow and say *sayonara* to them and their daughter, then head for the bus stop. Riding home alone in the blackness, I realize what a good and generous host Nakeno-san really is: “He let me win!”

6. *Knapper's estate:*

Knapper has invited Randy, Yoshimi, Barry, Sandra, and me to visit.

We five make the trip in Barry's car, travelling first on the highway to Mashiko, then turning off somewhere to proceed down a winding road through the countryside. We've all eaten supper and will arrive before long since our journey won't be interrupted every few minutes by bus stops.

Barry is enjoying the road! He himself is now Sterling Moss racing his Mercedes 350 SLR in the "Mille Miglia" against other steely-eyed maniacs hurtling madly from Brescia in Ferraris, Maseratis, Lancias, and Alpha Romeos: double-clutch downshifts, heel-and-toe braking, wheels turned wide opposing understeer in every turn. Legends never die! Barry the Intrepid applies just the right finesse to avoid a violent crash into vineyard or down Appen precipice. Dirt flies. Exhaust sings. Engine screams. Black thick clouds of dust boil high behind. Fortunately for them, the cheering throngs of Italian (and Japanese) peasants have all gone safely home for supper. At last, we career round a corner, then glide onto the crunchy gravel path leading to Knapper's home. Coming to a stop, Barry switches off the key. His old Honda heaves a sigh.

"We're here!" Barry announces rhetorically.

"We're here," Yoshimi echos thankfully.

Knapper, having heard our approach, is in the yard to greet us. "Welcome!"

"Hi, Gurd! Thanks for inviting us!" Randy responds.

Like everyone in our group, Gurd Knapper is also in his mid twenties: a big German with wavy shorter blonde hair that seems slightly unnatural, as if it had been waved; a big square face; and a big constant toothy grin that also seems slightly unnatural. Trying too hard, I sense. Like Randy, Knapper-san has been in Japan for many years. Far from his place of birth, Japan would be his life-long home.

Knapper-san leads us round the corner to stairs into the house. Sandra and Yoshimi carry some snacks they have made. Randy, Barry, and I carry the beer (biru). This is 'Kirin Biru' ("Giraffe" brand beer), contained in two litre 'garasu bin' (glass bottles) — as opposed to 'kan-biru' (canned beer), a recent invention. They come nine bottles to a plastic crate ('purasuchikku hako') and we have two

hako so no one will get thirsty during a night of conversation. I have switched from Export 'A' cigarettes to 'Golden Bat'; Randy has always rolled his own. Yoshimi doesn't smoke. Everyone else does. Knapper-san may have some 'Suntory' uisuki (whiskey) if we go dry, I'm told.

It is about fifteen minutes before sunset and we get a quick tour:

There is not much to see but the house. Knapper's house stands alone in a large grassy open space surrounded by trees and bush. The east side of his property drops into a deep bamboo-and-tree-filled ravine running more or less north and south. No neighbouring farms can be seen in any direction. I imagine I could be at a farm house surrounded by shelter belt somewhere on the Saskatchewan prairie, yet this is more intimate. Knapper's seems a large farm house, compared to those I'd observed from roads during my limited travels. Aligned with the compass points, its front overlooks the ravine. The shoji are open, exposing some of the interior rooms to the outside. In fact, when shoji are open a wall has been removed. This gives a clear view of the ravine, but while picturesque, 'mushi' (bugs - mosquitoes) would become a nuisance as soon as the sun sets.

I am fascinated by Knapper's house:

It is a traditional Japanese wooden post and beam structure. The posts (thick vertical members) are anchored to the tops of piles that have been driven into the ground. The floor is a wooden platform about two feet above the ground resting on beams (horizontal members) that are attached by joinery to the posts — the joints connecting all the members are designed to permit movement — to flex during an earthquake. Metal devices such as nails and brackets aren't used at all making it possible to disassemble a building, move it, and reassemble it elsewhere. Outside the exterior walls of stucco; wood; or sliding shoji that are covered with rice paper to admit light when closed; the wooden platform becomes a walkway that can go right round, but does not in Knapper's house. Inside, the floor is covered with tatami, whose surface is level with the walkway. Simplicity of design resulting from centuries of refinement permits occupants of the Japanese house to comfortably experience their environment's changing weather and seasonal cycles. Residents are part of nature rather than being isolated from nature. Balance between yin and yang is the harmony sought and reflected here. Grace.

The layout of the Japanese house is determined during planning by the number of tatami the house will contain. Tatami are three feet by six feet by three inches thick; their core is rice straw covered with a 'goza', a covering made by sewing together fine reeds; a fabric boarder about two inches wide is sewn all round the edges of each tatami. Tatami provide a firm, yet yielding, living surface for life without furniture. Interior spaces are divided by more sliding doors called fusuma

which are also three feet by six feet, like shoji. Above fusuma one may sometimes find transoms providing air circulation in summer without sliding open, or removing, the fusuma, thus retaining privacy when it is hot. (Privacy, I am beginning to more clearly understand, is largely a mental situation resulting from respect for others, rather than a material absolute: private matters necessarily go unremarked and are the source of decorum, the value of which Freudians and the “let it all hang out” movement apparently don’t understand.)

Atop the house — supported by the posts — is the roof, the house’s most distinctive exterior feature. The roof’s eaves extend far enough to cover the entire building, including the exterior walkways (where one can sit in dryness to contemplate the garden when it rains). Knapper-san’s house has a double-pitched hip roof with a hooded Chinese gable on either end. This feature alone — the lower half of the roof less steep than the upper half — creates the illusion that the roof is “turning up” at the eaves, the key element of a pagoda roof. On Knapper’s house this illusion of flight (for what is in reality a very heavy structure) is enhanced by a ridge board that sweeps gently upward at either end as well as by the four hip ridges that gently sweep upward in the last few feet before reaching the eaves. Dark ceramic tile rain gutters running horizontally along the rafter ends complete the roof line. The roof is covered with more dark ceramic tiles and has no grand ornamentation that would easily over-do and spoil such a country residence.

The house is put together like quality furniture or a marqueterie jewel box with intricate sliding drawers. All its wood is structural, exposed and unfinished, with the dark patina so highly prized — no paint. It is very handsome indeed! For all I know, Knapper’s house could be an historical treasure. I love it!

The sun has set and we retreat indoors to enjoy the twilight view of the ravine (kyokoku) and the darkening tops of its trees below. We might see the moon. Knapper-san pours drinks and serves food. Yoshimi-san is satisfied with ocha (tea) and a snack.

“I really like your house, Gurd,” I say.

“Thanks, Morley. There is much to do, but it’s coming.”

Sandra excitedly tells us she has a new job with Shiseido, the Japanese cosmetics company. “I’ll be demonstrating their products and modelling!”

“Honto! (Really?!) A moderu! (model)” Great, Sandy, good for you!” Randy exclaims.

I am surprised too, since Sandra is a bit of a cow. She would never be

considered in the West. But why in Japan? If the little traditional kimono-robed paper dolls I've seen here are any ideal of Japanese feminine beauty, a model would be long and sleek, having a delicate refined face that would make a man's heart stop, leaving him stunned. Ecstasy (ekusutashi), well known to advertising men everywhere, sells — women want to have that effect. I wonder, has any Japanese woman has ever looked like that? I have yet to see one.

“They like me because I'm different,” Sandra goes on without conceit. I'm taller than everyone and they think my hair is blonde.” (It's light brown.) “What fun!”

“A toast to Sandy!”

“Randy tells me you're off to find a Zen monastery, Morley. What will you do there?” Knapper-san asks.

“I'll know when I get there,” I reply.

“How is your Japanese coming?”

“Pretty slow,” I reply.

“He's not working hard enough,” Yoshimi adds.

“Well, I can count to ten now.”

“Okay, let's hear it.”

“Ichi, ni, san, shi, go, roku, shichi, hachi, ku, ju. So there!”

Everyone laughs. They all speak Japanese fluently, though everyone is speaking English (eigo) tonight.

Randy and Yoshimi have been helping me learn Japanese, of course. Although they are both artists, they have very different approaches to life and to learning: Randy just let's everything take it's own course, laissez aller; Yoshimi sets a goal, makes plans, and begins with step one, then step two...

Randy has often told me, “You won't find any help at all trying to discover equivalents between English grammar and Japanese. You aren't a grammarian anyway. Neither am I, unlike my mother the teacher. Monkey see; monkey do! That's what works! Most foreign men first learn Japanese from their girlfriend (garufurendo). The only problem, if they don't mix with other Japanese soon

enough, is these men (boifurendo) learn to speak Japanese like women, something Japanese men find hilarious. Keep your ears open and ask questions. That's how to learn. And it's a big help that so many Japanese words come straight from English. You've already noticed this! For example 'sex' is 'sekkusu' though they knew about sex in Japan before they learned about English; sex is also 'neru'. Learning Japanese is like learning to use chopsticks; when you get hungry enough, you learn. Reading and writing is harder than listening and speaking, but the same approach works."

Yoshimi, on the other hand, has provided a book. It contains phrases and rules of grammar. Boy, I am sure dumb! "It's not hard, Morley-san." (Yoshimi began pronouncing my name correctly after one day). "The Japanese language is written in hiragana, katakana, and kanji. When it is written alphabetically, romanji (the English alphabet) is used. Kanji are Chinese characters with meanings that are similar to Chinese, but not identical to them. Books are published from back to front. Characters begin in the upper-right corner of the page and go down in a column. When you get to the bottom, you go up to the top of the next column and read down again. Or sometimes, characters go across the page, from right to left." Well, by gum, it sounds pretty hard to me! So far, I've learned more listening to Yoshimi and asking questions, than from reading about it. I am dumb.

"Don't worry about it, Morley," Barry encourages. "You'll learn quickly enough once you get into a Zen temple."

The conversation switches to pottery. Randy answers technical questions posed by Barry and Knapper about firing a climbing kiln. He tells them what type of wood is best and how to build a fire correctly to get the high temperature required while avoiding too much heat that will damage the pots. Knapper-san tells us about his own work. Barry talks about Chinese pottery, giving a quick tour of the National Museum in Taipei created with tons of art treasures Chiang Kai-shek rescued from the Communists in 1949:

"Taipei is impressive, but the really good stuff is in Peking," Barry emphasizes.

SMACK!

"Damn mosquitoes! The place is full of them," Randy complains. "How can you sleep in here, Gurd?"

"Under a mosquito net."

"That would help. Morley had trouble with the mosquitoes in our place and

built screen doors for the balcony. Now we can keep cool at night with the doors open and sleep in peace.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” Gurd replies, “but that wouldn’t conform with the architecture. Wouldn’t work here.”

Before much longer, the mosquitoes are working overtime and finally succeed in driving us out. It’s getting late anyway. We make our excuses; thank our host; and head for the car. The drive home is a little slower than was our arrival.

“So what do you think of Knapper’s house,” I ask Yoshimi-san.

“I HATE it!”

“Why? I don’t understand!”

“It stinks! It’s dirty; the benjo (toilet) reeks; the tatami are mouldy. And the swamp in front is lousy with mosquitoes. I’d burn it down!”

“Oh! I thought it was nice. But I do agree it needs restoration.”

Someday, I think to myself, Knapper-san will likely have the wherewithal to do justice to his treasure. Then, it might be named an historical monument by the Japanese government. Or he’ll buy a better place.

7. *Shopping with Yoshimi:*

This morning, Randy has gone off to Tokyo to make arrangements for his next show in the department store in the Ginza. Yoshimi doesn't have classes today and I have stayed home to help her with housework. Later we'll go shopping.

Housework involves cleaning and dusting, sweeping the tatami, airing out the futon by hanging them over the balcony railing, washing the ofuro and benjo, and doing up dishes from breakfast. After Yoshimi shows me how, I load the washing machine which is in one corner of the benjo. I've never see a washer/dryer combination like this before. It's stacked! The appliances seem tiny, compared to the laundry monsters elsewhere, but they hold a surprising amount of dirty clothing and sheets. Pretty smart! Japanese are very efficient, I think. They don't make unnecessary work for themselves: they just do well what is required. Not more. Pretty smart!

With the laundry underway and the cleaning all finished, I begin bringing the futon in from the railing so Yoshimi can fold and put them into the closet for the day. You may remember that the balcony faces west overlooking a rice paddy. Out in the middle of the paddy, I see Barry and Sandy's "scarecrow" and smile. It's not really a scarecrow, you see; it's an Afghan coat. A work of art, it is made of goat skins, fleece to the inside, gorgeously embroidered with brilliantly coloured silk thread. Unfortunately, the skins were tanned with animal urine. That worked perfectly well in Afghanistan's deserts, but in Japan's subtropical summer humidity, the garment has developed an unbearable, and nauseating, stench. I'm sure it keeps crows away, and the farmers too! Someone will sneak out there some night, steal it, and take it somewhere for a decent burial. Barry and Sandra can't bear to put it to rest themselves, but it is a goner.

With chores done before ten o'clock, Yoshimi and I have time to visit.

"Tell me about your family, Yoshimi-san. Were you born in Tokyo?"

"My parents came from a place near Kobe. They moved to Tokyo after I was born."

"What do they do there?"

"My father owns a factory that makes white cotton gloves. Randy gets from my parents the gloves he uses to unload the kilns."

Remembering all the white cotton gloves I'd seen people everywhere wearing, I wondered if Yoshimi's parent's were rich, selling millions of pairs every year.

“Is it a very large factory?”

“No, Morley. Not very large. In Japan nearly all the businesses are small, a few hundred employees, or less. There are only a few very large companies in Japan — the famous ones everyone knows. Small companies have contracts to supply larger ones. They have contracts to supply larger ones and so on.”

“What are you studying in your classes?” I ask.

“Right now, I doing drawing and learning to tie-dye and batik fabric. Here, I'll show you.”

Yoshimi brought a sketch book of drawings, a wall hanging and a few garments of her own design. I like her work. It not only shows craftsmanship, but manages to evoke a mood of stillness and clarity.

“Batik is not native to Japan,” she says. “It's originally from Java. But it's quite popular here, so I'm learning to do it.”

“How do you do batik?”

“I sketch what I want first. Then I pour wax over the areas I don't want to be dyed. Then I dye the material so it colours the parts I want to have that colour. Next I wash out the wax with solvent, usually gasoline, and start with the next colour by pouring more wax where I don't want the next colour. Where one colour combines with another a third colour is created. But I have to know before I do it what will happen when dyes combine. When I'm finished, I have a completed picture.”

“I like these! I think they're good, Yoshimi. Randy says you and he might someday go to Canada for a while. Why?”

“I would like to see what Canada is like, Morley. I think women there have more freedom there than women have in Japan.”

“Women here aren't free?”

“No, not really. In Japan women can't do as many things as they would like. It's changing, but I'd like to see how things are in the West. Maybe we'll go when

our child is a few years old.”

I wonder just how free everyone in the West really is, or whether it isn't all just like high school's three castes: a couple of dozen winners, a couple of dozen losers, and a thousand and fifty faceless nobodies. “These are the best years of your life,” they said. I hope not. And the alternatives all seem to be wrong.

“You're going to have a baby?”

“Of course!”

“Wonderful! When?”

“In October... Let's have something to eat and go to the market.”

“Sounds good!”

The market is really every street in downtown Kasama. And Downtown Kasama is only a short walk from our apartment on the outskirts of town. All manner of things have spilled outside the stores to be set up on tables co-mingled with tables holding items brought from elsewhere.

“You need to get a yukata, Morley-san”

“A what?”

“It's like a kimono, but very informal and light weight for the summer. Randy sometimes wears one at home in the evening when it's really hot.” (He usually wears a t-shirt and blue jeans, like me, I've noticed.)

“Well, okay. What do you suggest?”

“Here's one that would be nice.”

It's a folded square of cotton crepe with an abstract miniature check of blue, white, and navy. When Yoshimi gives it a flick of her wrists, it unfolds to become a kimono she holds up by its shoulders. Reaching upward, she keeps its hem just above the ground.

“Turn around so I can see if it's long enough,” she says.

I obey while she checks the yukata's length from my shoulders to the ground. “Just right. You are the perfect shape for a tall man in Japan, Morley-san.

Randy is too tall. People should not see your ankles and legs when you are wearing a kimono, and it should give you a long slim line. Randy has an expensive kimono that fits him properly, but he can only wear it on special occasions. You can wear anything.”

“Okay, I’m sold.” (How could I argue with THAT sales pitch?)

“Now you need an obi.”

“Okay.”

“Here’s one that will look good with this yukata.”

Unfolded, it’s a stretchy piece of cloth about a foot wide and eight feet long with a wide navy border on each end.

“The obi is a belt. Men wear it around their hips; women wear obi around their waists. You begin tying it with the middle of the obi in front, then wind it round yourself several times so it can be tied in the back. This type of obi is tied in a knot. The obi for a kimono is more formal than this and is folded over itself in the back to keep it fastened. The obi is very important.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

“You could buy some geta today, but you can wear flip-flops for now and if you only wear your yukata at home, you don’t need any footwear. We can leave that for now.”

Geta are wooden shoes with two vertical slabs under the platform, one under the ball of the foot, the other just in front of the heel. Most platforms are two or three inches high. Young toughs like theirs higher, as much as six or eight inches. Hard to walk in. The higher the better.

With my purchases safely in a bag, we continue down the street. The sun is shining, but it’s not oppressively hot. The streets are full of things and people, sellers and buyers. Here are stalls full of produce from the countryside; there are some tables with newly-fired pots; down the way a display of bonsai.

“Oh, I like these,” I exclaim.

“They are only fair.”

“I sure like them.” Bonsai are supposed to be small, but I like things big and

impressive. In front of me is a tree, a pine tree, a very old pine tree. It's eighteen inches high and even wider. It presumably has been pruned and forced to assume exquisite shapes over the years. It now resembles an acacia tree in east Africa with gravity-defying branches swooping wide toward the ground, then up towards the sky. Everything is miniature, even the needles and gnarled bark and boulders surrounding the trunk. "I'd like to send this one home."

"Botanical regulations would prevent it. And look at the price!"

The price is in yen, so I divide by 350 to get dollars. "Out of the question! I agree. "Let's see what else is here."

Here we find a display of origami. "Each of these has been folded from a single piece of square paper, Morley."

"How could anyone sculpt something like that by folding a piece of paper?"

"No cutting or pasting is allowed, only folding."

"Amazing!"

"Every child learns to make the crane (tsuru) in school. The crane is the symbol of peace. I've folded thousands of them. I'll show you how when we get home."

"Sounds like fun, Yoshimi. Let's do it."

"I'm hungry. Shall we stop and have some misoshiru?"

"What's misoshiru?"

"It's soup made from fermented bean paste. Shops that serve it also offer ocha (tea), and udon or soba."

"Udon and soba?"

"Noodles. Udon is made from wheat; soba is made from buckwheat."

"How about sushi?"

"Let's do that some evening! This is just a snack."

"Ah, fast food!"

“Correct!”

After some delicious soup and tea, we resume our tour and come upon some tea bowls.

“These aren’t as good as Randy’s,” Yoshimi comments. “He makes excellent tea bowls. Some have sold for very good prices.”

“Tell me about Tea.”

“The tea ceremony is only partly about drinking tea. It’s mostly about the ritual, the ceremony. It’s religious, it’s Zen. The *ocha* we drink every day is not what is used in the tea ceremony. The tea is *matchu*, which is a powder made of green tea leaves. Everything in the ceremony is prescribed, every movement of the host and guests must be learned by heart and there are several different styles that can be used. People who want to preserve the Japanese culture take classes to learn how to do it. The powdered tea is kept in a container called a *natsume*; the *chashaku* is a spoon made from bamboo that is used to put the tea into the *chawan* (tea bowl); the hot water is kept in the *mizusashi*; the *hishaku* is a bamboo ladle used to draw hot water from the *mizusashi* and pour it into the *chawan*; the *chasen* is a whisk made of bamboo that is used to whip the tea and the hot water into froth in the *chawan*; when the tea is drunk, more water from the *mizusashi* is ladled into the *chawan* to clean it; that waste water is dumped into the *kensui*; then the *chawan* is wiped dry with the *chakin*, a linen towel.”

“Sounds complicated.”

“It’s very complicated. I’m not trained to perform Tea. Oh, I almost forgot; the water is heated in an iron pot called a *kama* and even the rest its lid is placed on has a name: the *futaoki*. The *kama* can be heated on either a brazier or an open hearth. Of course a different protocol is required for each.”

“Why would everything be so complicated?”

“It’s a ritual. It’s a form of meditation.”

“Sounds like golf.”

“Of course! The central utensil in the tea ceremony is the *chawan* (the tea bowl), so it is a great honour for Randy that his tea bowls are considered worthy. Tea connoisseurs and collectors are often surprised when they learn he’s not Japanese!”

“Well, I am impressed! Who would have thought someone from Cupar would find his calling making tea bowls in Japan?”

“Maybe you will find your calling here too, Morley-san.”

“Maybe I will. Hope so... There’s a Japanese garden at UBC, the University of British Columbia, Yoshimi-san. The brochure says there are two paths through the garden to the tea house. One is picturesque and easy; it has lovely views of the lake and of soft lush foliage. The second takes the pilgrim up steep slopes and down into dark ravines; the way is not always clear. They say both paths are rewarding and that the second may be more rewarding than the first. But it’s harder. I want to take the easy path, but I think it’s not mine.” Randy is lucky to have a wife like Yoshimi, I’m thinking. Hope he knows it.

“Let’s buy a few fresh things for supper, then we should head home.”

“Lead the way!”

8. *Kyoto:*

Yoshimi has told Randy that her pregnancy has progressed to a point where she no longer wants a house guest. She feels it's time for me to move on to Kyoto; she'd like her privacy again. Makes perfect sense to me.

After making my way on the old train from Kasama to Tokyo's Akihabra station, I have just taken my seat on the bullet train. "Make sure you're on the 'Speed of Light' bullet train," Randy had warned. "It's much faster than the 'Speed of Sound' bullet train and you'll really notice a difference between it and other trains you've travelled on." I am on the faster version. Its interior looks more like an airplane than a train, all light plastic and aluminium. The seats are more comfortable than the benches on the old trains and there is the faint hiss of air conditioning, just like an airplane. "I wonder what this will be like," I muse.

"The bullet train is really fast and you don't need to worry about earthquakes," Randy encouraged. "The bullet train has sensors all along its track which automatically stop the train should an earthquake occur."

Well, that was reassuring: I remember sitting in Randy and Yoshimi's apartment one evening having tea. I heard a big truck coming down the road outside. It got louder and louder. A really BIG truck I thought. Then I thought it must be a train, but there were no train tracks near the apartment. Louder and louder it roared. Then the apartment started to shake. First just a vibration; then the whole place started jumping. Things began falling off the counter in the kitchen, crashing onto the floor. I looked at my host and hostess who sat on the floor smiling placid smug smiles. I leapt to my feet. Should I run out the door and down the stairs? Should I jump off the balcony and run to the rice field where Barry and Sandra's scarecrow stood? Then suddenly it was over. There was a strange silence and everything was still. As I sheepishly sat down, Randy and Yoshimi rolled over with laughter. I suppose my panic WAS hilarious. Suddenly their smiles were wiped off their faces as the apartment was gripped in a truly violent shaking. This time, all three of us leaped to our feet and they too were looking for a way out. Then it stopped. We all sat down. This time no one was laughing. There was a bead of sweat on Randy's brow. The next day Randy told me the radio reported the 'quake was centred in Mito where considerable damage had occurred. "Mito is a large industrial city not far away on the coast. There wasn't any damage here in Kasama," he went on. "Japan has six or seven thousand earthquakes a year, so everyone is used to them." Okay, sure they are, I thought.

The bullet train has begun to fill with passengers. These people are more

upscale than the country folk I had seen on the trains leaving Akihabra station for the towns north of Tokyo. They are more like the travellers one would encounter at airports and see on jets. The air conditioning hisses.

I wonder what will happen in Kyoto. I'll have to find a place to stay while I look for a temple that will take me. Maybe I'll find a youth hostel. Will I have to sit in the lotus position for weeks or months outside a temple's gates and endure the monks' beatings, like men of legend in D.T. Suzuki's books? Something will happen. Will I experience enlightenment? Many never do, they say... It won't be easy.

Everyone has taken a seat and the bullet train has begun to roll. It accelerates quickly with a whoosh. Scenery glides by at an ever-increasing pace. Faster and faster. I'm actually pushed backward into my seat. This is certainly different from other trains. There is no clickety-clack; they must have welded the rails. This is even quieter and smoother than the Metro in Paris and that is quiet because it rides on rubber wheels, not steel. These Japanese wheels are steel and yet they are quiet. Clever people the Japanese.

And honest:

While staying with Randy and Yoshimi, I had taken the train from Kasama to Akihabra station in Tokyo and back to Kasama several times. I had travelled around Tokyo by underground subway, newer than London's, bigger than Toronto's. Clickety-clack, clickety-clack. I had always been well treated by the Japanese. There is an important reason for this, I think: property. One time after purchasing a gift for Randy and Yoshimi when in Tokyo, I had placed it beside myself on the bench on the platform as I waited for my train.

I was halfway home before I realized I'd left my gift behind. Arriving, I was still furious with myself. "What wrong, Morley-san?" Yoshimi had inquired. I told them about my stupidity. "That's okay, Morley-san," said Randy. "You're going back in a few days, or next week. When you arrive, just go to the little kiosk at the end of the platform. They'll have your package. If they don't, it'll still be where you left it on the bench."

"Yeh sure it will," I groaned. "A million people go through Akihabra every day!"

"It'll be there; don't worry about it," Randy soothed. "When people go shopping in the Ginza, they often leave things they have already purchased on the sidewalk outside a department store. They go in to buy more stuff, their packages left unattended for an hour or two. They always find everything as they left it when

they return. Try that in New York, or Regina!”

I didn't believe it, but went to the kiosk when I returned to Akihabra some days later, just to prove Randy was wrong. Yet there it was, my gift, safe and sound. I conclude Japanese people are very scrupulously honest: if something isn't mine, they seem to reason, it must belong to someone else. I'd read that until recently, a thief paid for his crime with a hand; a three-time thief, or murderer, paid with his head: samurai swords dispensed unyielding justice. This may have been the law until after World War II when Japan became a completely modern country. Old habits are long remembered. Good thing!

Now we're really flying. We've zipped through the endless grey concrete box buildings of Tokyo — where are all the pagodas? We are now out in the countryside. I can't say I'm very enthusiastic about what we moderns continue creating: everything is ugly, garish, plastic, noisy and unsettling. Or worse, it's completely sterile. “You'll know when you're in Kyoto,” Randy opined. “Just like in every city that thinks it's important in the West, they built a giant phallus symbol at the train station to mark the spot and transmit TV signals. In historic Kyoto! Japan's capital for a thousand years.”

I heave a sigh of relief to be in the countryside now, breezing along at well over a hundred miles an hour just above the ground on the ultramodern bullet train.

I have a seat on the right side of the train and can see rice paddies stretched out beside me. Clumps of trees near and far dot the land. We're whisking past villages where life is peaceful and quiet. So different from Tokyo! The sky is clear and blue. Before long I see Mount Fuji towering in the distance, its white snow cap gleaming. This Japanese icon of serenity and peace I know is in reality an “extinct” volcano and I wonder if it will always be so in this geologically active land. Now Saskatchewan, *that* place has stable geology! Soil miles deep. Everything there is *so* stable. Why, things hardly change at all. Maybe, I think, changelessness is not such a good thing after all. And maybe old things seem good only because it is that only the best is saved while most of the every day junk is discarded, to be replaced by a new day's junk: Somewhere in today's pile a few good things will survive to be cherished in the future when people will fondly remember the good old days.

Whatever eventually replaces it, the bullet train will be fondly remembered. I'm sure of that. Here comes a crisply-uniformed stewardess. Just like on an airplane! She has steaming towels and behind her another stewardess pushes a trolley with snacks and beverages. Just like an airplane. This is really first class!

We make only one stop at Nagoya along our way. The bullet train is a true super express. After leaving Kyoto, it will continue on to Osaka and Kobe, the

largest coastal cities on the Inland Sea. As Randy had said it would, a TV tower dominates the skyline at the Kyoto station, so I'm pretty sure I'm in the right place.

I'm spotted by a long-haired American about my age who is accompanied by a gorgeous Japanese girl with very long black hair.

"Hi. How are you?" he queries.

"Good," I reply.

"Been in Japan long?"

"Not very long. Couple of months."

"I'm Ben. This is Aia-san."

"Pleased to meet you both. I'm Morley," say I, doing my best not to stare at Aia-san. She is unusually tall, maybe taller than me, and unusually good-looking.

"What are you going to do in Kyoto?" Aia-san asks.

"I'm going to find a Zen temple to see what I can learn."

"Got a place to stay?" asks Ben.

"Not yet. I'm going to look for a youth hostel."

"No need for that," says Ben. "There's some space where we are living. You can probably arrange something with the landlord until you find your temple."

"That sounds pretty good! Let's go."

The three of us hop into a taxi and are soon at the front door of a house. Ben (or is it Jim, or what?) introduces me to the landlord and interprets so the two of us can make arrangements.

After supper, I relax on the platform at the back of the house. I marvel at the garden with its towering trees which has been created in a very small space. The next morning, I head for the big historic Zen temples that are located along the slopes of the east side of the Kyoto basin. I have no real idea what I'm looking for or where I should look for it. Something will turn up. By mid afternoon, I'm getting quite tired as I wander into a large park in the midst of some large temples. I come upon a monk. He's wearing black robes and a monk's straw hat and

singing at the top of his lungs as he strolls along. I walk over. He stops when I reach him.

“Can you help me?” I ask.

“I don’t think so,” he smiles and walks away resuming his song.

It’s getting late and I head for home. After supper, Aia-san asks how things went.

“Not very well, I’m afraid.”

“I know someone who’s staying at a Zen temple,” she goes on. “Maybe you can stay there too.” She gives me a map and explains how to get to the temple.

“You’re very helpful,” I say, “and you certainly speak good English.”

“I was born and raised in California,” she replies playfully.

“You’re an American?”

“Yep.”

“Oh.”

“I’m moving from here tomorrow,” she continues. “You can reach me at this phone number.” She hands me a slip of paper. Since this is the first time in my life a beautiful girl — or any girl — has given me her phone number, I’m sure I will call.

In the morning, I follow Aia-san’s map and easily find Antaiji. It’s on the opposite side of Kyoto from the places I’d been touring yesterday.

I’ve found my new home.

9. Zazen:

I have travelled by city bus to the northwest slopes of the Kyoto basin following Aia-san's map (I would not have found my way without her instructions since Japanese cities have few street signs — and those are in Japanese! — and no house numbers). The city sprawls below. Around me are houses and shops. After a short walk, I leave the street to head north-easterly along a path that winds its way through thick bush, bamboo and towering trees. At path's end I find an open gate where just inside is a tiny house. A ramshackle fence meanders away from either gate post to be lost in the bush. Ahead is the temple: a collection of ancient-looking ceramic-tile-roofed buildings connected to each other in the watadono style of ancient Japan, the main buildings are connected by semi-open roofed walkways. It all looks like Knapper's farm house, nothing like the big historic temples I saw yesterday across town. Could this be the right place? I wonder. Then a monk in black robes smiles as I approach.

“Konichiwa,” he says and motions for me to wait. In a moment the monk returns with another monk who speaks English. I explain that I've come from Canada to stay at a Zen temple and learn to do zazen. I'm told to wait again. He returns after a few minutes to say that would be fine. With him is a foreigner.

“John will explain everything to you,” he says turning to leave.

“I'm John from Kansas.” John has a shaved head like the monks and I expect my hair and beard will soon have to go. I wonder what I'll look like then: No matter, I think, I've come to start a new life. “Follow me,” John says as we remove our shoes, walk up some stairs and enter a large open room. Sliding back fusuma half way along one wall he says, “You can put your knapsack in here and I'll show you what to do.” I follow him down a couple of stairs into a second large room. We walk through it, turn right and proceed down a long hallway that becomes a covered walkway open on either side. Then at the walkway's far end we turn left, go past a very large bell with a log-on-ropes knocker, and enter another large room. All around its walls sit zafu on zabuton, round black cushions sitting on flat square cushions. The floor is tatami of course; the walls are white plaster with a bank of screen windows all around. On the north wall in a raised alcove is a large Buddha sitting placidly on a huge lotus blossom. He is surrounded by assorted wigwogs of some symbolic meaning unknown to me. Opposite the Buddha on the south wall are two doors opening onto a deck and a garden. Beyond that is the gate where I had entered not long before.

“You sit on the zafu facing the wall,” John explains. “You put your left foot

on your right thigh and your right foot on your left thigh. It is very important to sit up straight. Then you rest your left hand on the heel of your left foot and place your right hand on your left hand. The ends of your thumbs touch lightly; your hands form an oval. Your eyes are open and you look at the wall, but don't stare. Go ahead, try it."

I sit down on the zafu and with some difficulty get myself into the full lotus position John has described. "How long do we sit like this?" I ask.

"Fifty minutes at a stretch with ten minutes of kinhin (walking meditation) in between. In the morning, the monks signal it's time to get up ten minutes before five. Then we do two sessions of zazen before breakfast. We do another one before lunch and two more after supper. We go to bed at ten o'clock. Every day is the same except during sesshin."

"Sesshin?"

"Then we do fourteen hours of zazen a day instead of only five. We just finished a three-day sesshin yesterday — except in summer, sesshin is five days. There won't be one next month because of the summer heat. During sesshin no talking is allowed at any time anywhere. You don't need to worry about that now."

"I find it very difficult to sit in the full lotus. Can people sit in the half lotus?"

"Sure, you can sit in the half lotus, but its not as recommended. Put your left foot on your right thigh and leave your right foot on the floor."

"It works better for me if I put my right foot on my left thigh," I say.

"You can do it that way too, if you want. It's almost time for noon-day zazen," John continues, "so we'd better go. When that's over, you'll know what it's like."

"Is that all I have to know?"

"That's enough. There is only one rule at Antaiji: You have to do all the zazen they do or you have to leave. Once you leave, you can never come back. That's it."

In ten minutes, my new life is about to begin.