

Gunmania

Autumn 2006
Issue 4



Photo by Alana Baxter

Editor's Note

Hello everyone!

I hope that your autumn was splendid and that you are preparing to keep warm during the cold winter.

As always, Gunmania is looking for contributions, so please send photos, articles, poems, artwork, rants, and anything else to gunmania.editor@gmail.com.

Big thanks to everyone who contributed to this issue.

Have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

--Bahia

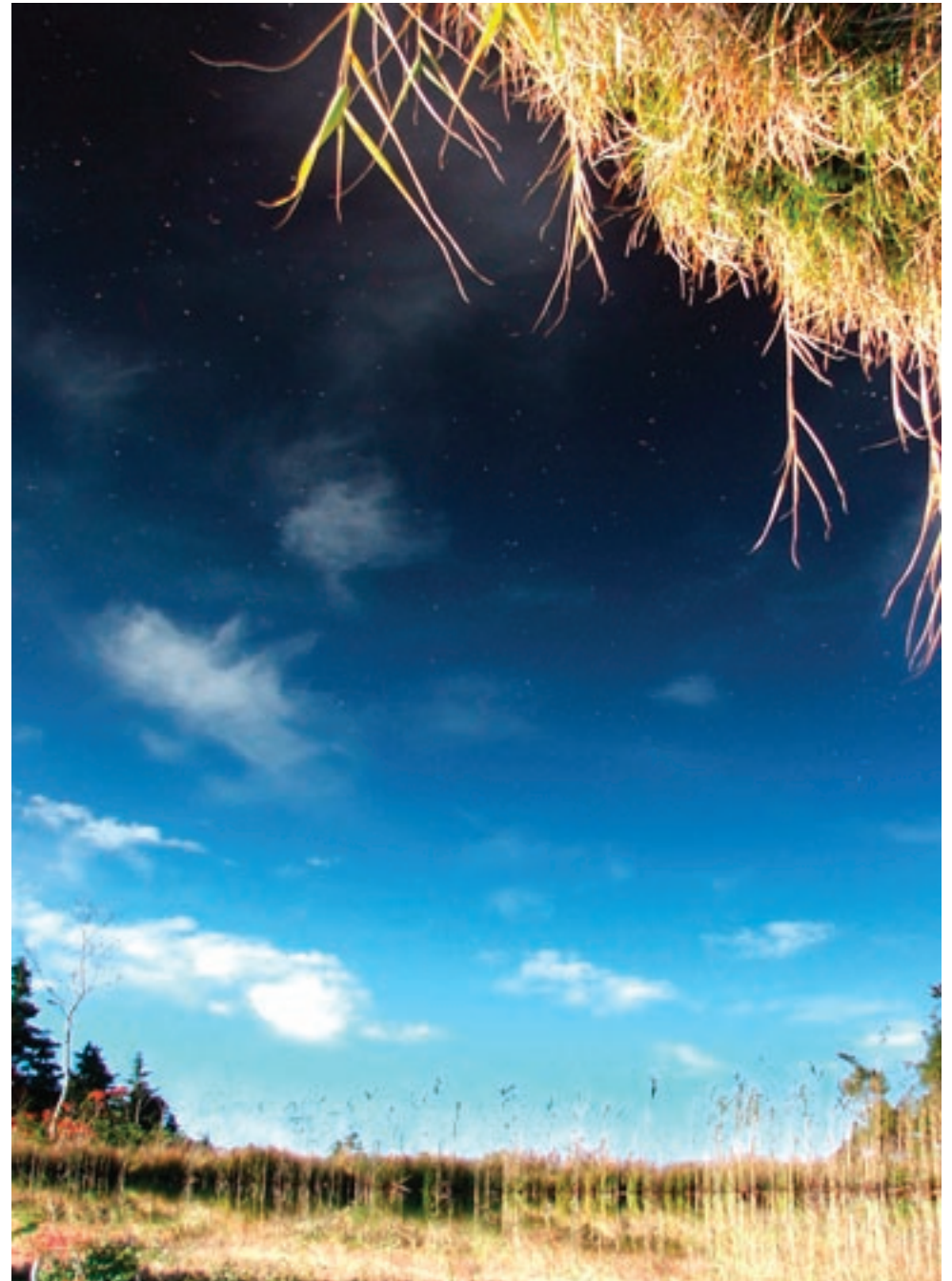


Photo by Alana Baxter

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Photo taken by L. Bahia Simons-Morton



Advice Advise

Hints for the hopeless in today's troubled times.

Dear Veronica,

I was wondering if my sake drinking is a problem that I should be concerned with. I'm up to three liters every day but I am able to do my job and look sober. Please advise!!

-Lush in T.O.

Dear Lush,

What you are an A-L-C-O-H-O-L-I-C...alcoholic. Let's be real, when you show up to school smelling like a hostess bar it is a problem. Maybe you should take up another hobby like walking, running, or painting something that will keep you off the sauce for awhile. I do understand that quitting drinking in this country might be one of the hardest things to do since there are alcohol vending machines on every corner. It would be easier to get chocolate away from a crack head...I know this! But I digress, this is what I suggest: give all your alcohol to your Kyoto sensei or one of the math teachers because we all know they will take it. Wrap it in some nice paper so they know it is a gift and not something you just bought at the combini down the street. Remove all the alcohol from you "secret hiding places," yes I know you have them. Once you have done this, then you much limit your drinking to the weekends. This will help you with your problem. Remember the first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem, and friend you've got issues. GAMBATTE!

**Dear Veronica,
So the fall has arrived and I found myself snuggled up to a lovely lady. It is nice to have a warm body next to mine in this weather from time to time. At first it was only a weekend things, but it seems to have developed into more than I have bargained for. How do I stop the relationship and keep the sex?**

- Irritated in Itakura

Dear Irritated,

Looks like you have yourself a bit of a problem. Here is the thing. Sexual relationships (a.k.a friends with benefits; a.k.a friends+ (plus); a.k.a...you know the last one) that turn into relationships can not be turned back into the former. However, relationships can dwindle down and become simply a sexual thing after awhile. So what I suggest to you is start over. Dump the girl you've got (in a nice way), and get yourself a girlfriend. I suggest that you choose someone that you know you won't get along with for a long period of time. Start off the relationship by being sweet and kind, basically the perfect boyfriend. After awhile let your true colors show, and because you even asked me this question I am sure that your true colors will turn her off. Now, sex is usually the last thing to go in the relationship so unless you are terrible at it

(which is a DEFINITE possibility) the sex will remain whilst the relationship will die out. In this case you have won the battle. All that being said, this will take some time to accomplish; you would be better off choking the proverbial chicken all winter because by the time you have put in all that work you are probably better off just keeping the girlfriend. As the old saying goes, it is in fact, cheaper to keep her.

**Dear Veronica,
I am an elementary school teacher working with kids under 10 for the most part. I have been and am continuously subject to the infamous "kancho." My body is weary from all the unwanted penetration. How do I put an end to all the 'English enemas?'**

-Not-able-to-sit-down in Nitta

Dear Not-able-to-sit-down,

I have only experienced it once in my life. It was something the child did and never again since I follow the advice of a friend of mine. I will paint you a picture of my friend. He is at least 6'3" tall. He probably weights about 250 pounds easy, mostly muscle. One day a kid got too comfy with him and decided to give him the enema. My friend then turned around and picked the kid up and held him against the wall and proceeded to

threaten his life in English, but I am sure that the message got threw. This was happening whilst the teacher was watching. No one ever dared go there again with him, but still had a good time in his classes. So you have a few options. You can ask nicely, but all the little kids that do the kancho are bastards so we know this wont work. You can just take it. Or you can threaten their lives...I like this one. Stand your ground; also remember that you can find a way to "punish" the whole class off of one person's actions. Humiliation in the end is always the way to go.

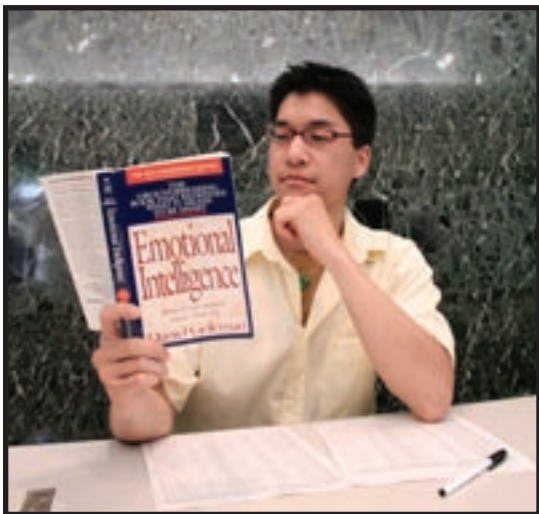


Illustration of the kancho from wikipedia.org

High School ALTs at Chuo Maebashi Junior High English Camp



Photos taken by Douglas Emmett



Gunma Orientation 2006



Photos taken by L. Bahia
Simons-Morton

The First 10 Things I Have Learned Since August

By Jennifer C. Park

As JETs we are all teachers. ALTs are teachers by title and CIRs are teachers through grassroots internationalisation, in theory, that is. But I have no doubts that most of us will find that we've learned much more than we've probably taught. So in the same teaching-learning vein, I wanted to write something that would convey some of the valuable lessons I've learned from my experiences in Japan. However, as a 1st year ALT who hasn't read many issues of Gunmania, I run the risk of writing something that has already frequented many back issues and is immensely familiar to many expatriates. I wanted to avoid boring readers by writing rants about how the percentage of male JETs "getting any" in relation to the percentage of female JETs "getting any" was all out of proportion or about simply writing tips on how to survive Japanese culture. So I did none of those. Instead, I shall bore you with other matters. So, without further ado, here are "The First 10 Things I Have Learned Since August."

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If you're ever at the prefectural outing during the Tokyo orientation for some good ol' fashioned karaoke and nomihoudai, and you're planning on visiting the toilet during said outing, make sure you (1) know where your karaoke room is in relation to the toilet and/or (2) take someone with you to guide you back. If none of the aforementioned options are available to you, make sure you wander the elevators until you run into some sober Fujioka JETs, willing to guide you back.



The best Peek-a-Boo-Pooh 100 yen toy machine is at the Value market behind my apartment. They have Pooh characters dressed as other Pooh characters. Ah, yes Japan. I salute you.

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You know already that you are not supposed to ride your bike when you're inebriated. I've learned that riding your rear basket in a drunken stupor is not the best of ideas either. The ratio of butt size to basket size is not in your favour. But the likelihood that your underwear will be photographed during these escapades is high.

If you do anything, it is compulsory that you make it look like you are hurrying. If you go to a bank, you will soon see an illustration of this. A woman will run over to you in the same time it would take her to walk. I believe pretending to run is part of any office protocol. I'm quickly acclimating to Japanese office culture. As an Assistant Language Teacher, I often find myself with hours upon hours of free time with absolutely nothing to do, especially on Tuesdays, when I have no classes. I practice my busy-at-work poker-face. As I sit in front of my computer writing this article, I type away feverishly and furrow my brows as if I'm focusing intently at something crucial to life. It's a good idea to add a pensive sigh once in awhile. I'm sure the staff members who see me "at work" estimate that I am on the verge of fine tuning my formula for a perpetual motion machine, finding a cure for AIDS (and be sure that you see, that this is not HIV, but full blown AIDS), or inches away from earning my black belt in full-contact origami.

Here, Jen demonstrates what NOT to do...



7

Shin, the Bee Bar owner, with shiny dog.



Many of you have, or will go to Bee Bar in Takasaki during your tenure in Japan. Understand that Shin, the bartender, believes that as bartender, his duties include making drinks for customers and drinking drinks with customers. With that in mind, order any food you think you'll want early in the night because later, he may feel too drunk to be "able to work the deep fryer." Also, whilst there, please pet the shiny dog statue near the dart board. He's very lonely.

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The best purikura machine in Takasaki station is called "Hime Black." (There is one located on the 5th floor and one in the first floor arcade area.) You can order more than 1 print of the same photo set, and frankly, that rocks. That means more prints of your sexy self. But don't go in thinking that you will be able to choose your special "setting backgrounds." I went in 5 times thinking I could select the special "toilet/bathroom" background. No, my friend. Every session gets 1 or 2 random special backgrounds. The rest of your shots will contain a jazzy-fresh background reminiscent of retro America, circa 1983. I may be hoping for too much, but I'm waiting to get the "Thundercats" and "Fraggle Rock" background. While we're on the subject of purikura. Students love these things and even the most reticent of students will come seek you out and speak long soliloquies to you in English and write tomes of original prose in Shakespearean style to get some. If you give them some purikura, make sure you know what all the kanji on your photos mean. Make sure it doesn't mean "Husband and wife, forever."



4

If you love the sleazy clubbing scene as much as you love foot fungus, avoid the streets of Roppongi. All the smarmy champions of Sunset Blvd. and similarly sleazy venues have apparently been relocated to Roppongi. Sunset is just a residential area for all the runners-up in the Smarm Competition. And, if you do decide to even walk down a street in Roppongi, I suggest a full-body condom a la "Naked Gun."

Japanese keyboards are interesting. It seems all the special characters have shifted one key to the left, the "@" sign is an entirely new key that also includes the apostrophe, the quotation mark is SHIFT 2, and the spacebar is approximately the size of an eyebrow. That being said, for every quote and email address you make me type, I shall kill you.

3

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And for number 2, a hypothetical situation to avoid. Let's say that, hypothetically, you went to support your friend at a hypothetical Pride festival and went as far as going topless all in the name of friendship and fun. And, let's also say that, hypothetically, lots of people sent you digital photos of your "toplessness" at that event and they are now stored on your hypothetical laptop, which you brought with you to Japan. It would probably be wise to chaperone periods of time that JETs use your laptop in order to avoid the risk of having said JETs see your said "toplessness." Also, storing them under a password protected account, apparently, is not much of a security system.

1

I have learned to adopt Japanese values toward my writing. I create a lot of trash, but I recycle my trash.



A night at Bee Bar.

Private ALT Contracts

Thinking of going private after JET? Read on...

By Chris Lane

Having worked in Japan for 7 years and entering my 8th and probably final year my very treasured experience in Japan has been tainted by an issue that is coming to light more and more.

I came to Japan on the JET Programme and was enticed by a very reasonable salary offered by JET. Having left JET I have had a series of private ALT contracts.

You would think that as my teaching experience grew and my Japanese language ability grew with it I would become more of a valuable asset but in the world of private ALT contracts in Japan the current climate sees worsening conditions.

With the event of many local government mergers in Japan many local government officials are trying to force previous small boards of education to conform to lower standards in order to save money. Unfortunately this is at the expense of children's education.

Elementary schools need highly experienced Japanese speaking ALTs to teach young children efficiently, because the Japanese teachers at elementary schools more often than not don't speak English. It is also necessary to be able to build up a teaching rapport with young children, something which experienced teachers can do often much more quickly.

Local governments in Gunma don't seem to be interested in hiring high quality experienced ALTs, though. They are more interested in saving money.

I use my experience and fluency in Japanese from 8:15 till 5pm everyday not only teaching English, but P.E., Club activities, substitute teaching and playing vital roles in school sports and cultural events as well as hosting my own school assemblies every month and continuously improving the school syllabus as well as making the school English web page.

All these efforts though are to be rewarded next April by a 30 000 yen pay cut.

This has been brought about because another private company has told the local Board of education that they can supply an ALT for 30 000 yen less than my current wage. So I have been told that I either accept the pay cut or my job, which I have done very well for the past 3 years, building up considerable experience and rapport with the students and teachers, will be given to a complete stranger who is willing to accept a lower wage.

The local government doesn't care how much experience or skill I have, or how good I am in this position. They don't care about my 3 years

work and considerable effort made with this school as well as my previous 4 years experience working with Senior High school and Kindergarten for Gunma Board of education. They only care about saving money.

This is the same local board of education that has "advised" its schools to stop using recycled paper because white bleached paper is cheaper; white bleached paper produced in Thailand from pulp grown in the eucalyptus plantations forced upon Thailand and for which reason 5 million people were driven from their own land by the Thai military in the last decade.

This is the same board of education, which has forced the local school lunch centers to conform to cheaper, less nutritious school lunch menu.

So you see, they really don't care about their foreign teachers, or the people of Thailand, or the environment, and most of all they don't care when they are lowering the standard of education for their own children as long as it is saving precious yen.

It is the children who I have grown to love over the past 3 years that matter most to me in this situation. It shocks me to see a very

Feature

successful elementary school English program ruined to save money when my goal in Japan for the last 7 years has been to improve English education, especially when that goal was given to me by the Japanese government itself!

This isn't just happening in Gunma this is happening all over Japan.

Local governments will never entice qualified, conscientious skilled teachers from abroad unless they offer them the monetary incentive. As salaries get lower due to private language A.L.T. contractors undercutting each other, the standard of teachers is also progressively getting worse. This year alone in Gunma, boards of education who have opted to hire cheap A.L.T.s have been very disappointed because many of these A.L.T.s have left their contracts half-way through the school year because they were not really serious about the job.



Niisato Elementary School *Undokai*



Niisato Elementary School *Undokai*

To be honest, I can't really blame them for losing interest in the job, too. Contractual conditions have gotten terrible. Some ALT's don't get any sick leave. Some get neither paid leave, or sick leave and instead they have money taken from their wages if they are absent from school for whatever reason. That, coupled with a low wage and lack of care from contracting companies often based in other prefectures, often leads newcomers into very dangerous and depressing situations with no support group such as that which exists for people on the JET program.

It also scares me that the low price agencies that are helping to persuade local boards of education to put money savings before quality are not screened in any way. Their selection processes aren't monitored. They could be putting anybody into a school to work with children as an ALT. The problems caused by this will

ultimately reflect on the JET program too, as these people are being put into the equivalent of JET positions and the Japanese public isn't going to see a difference between the behavior of JETs and privately hired ALTs.

I don't want to paint too damning a picture of private companies hiring out ALTs. I have been very lucky to work with a local language company who has put teacher quality first and foremost by always insisting on hiring previous members of the JET program and people with recognized University degrees or previous teaching experience. The company I have had the pleasure of being hired by for the past 3 years has always taken care of me very well, but companies such as this are being forced out of business by the other irresponsible companies I have mentioned above and by local governmental greed.

I worry very much about the near future of young people being educated in Japan.

Until something serious happens and maybe a dangerous person is hired or the ALTs quit so many times that it begins to be reflected in the level of education, then the local government officials will only be looking at their precious budget and not at their ultimately precious younger generations.

Chris Lane

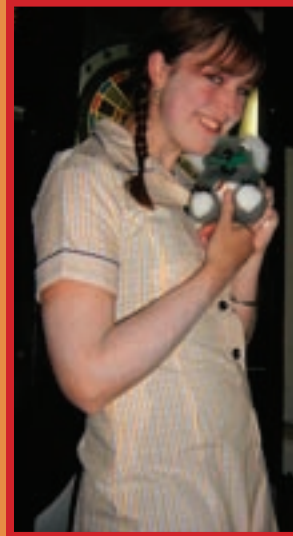
Niisato Elementary school.

Kiryu B.O.E.



Teachers help children of Niisato Elementary School make a human pyramid.

Halloween Party 2006



Photos contributed by Jennifer Park, Kenji McCullough, and Skye Brumby





Harvest Festival at Coco Winery:

November 18-19, 2006

By Jennifer C. Park

From what I hear, the yearly Harvest Festival at Coco Winery has been blessed with fair weather conditions at least for the past 4-5 years. My memory of Saturday, November the 18th, 2006 is riddled with holes and static. However, I seem to recall the weather being favorable and from what I hear from others and from the photos, my memory serves correctly.

10:30 am. That's the time the event started. 1 hour. That's the amount of time it took to train it there from Takasaki. To reach the vineyards, I also had to include a 30 minute bus ride from the Ashikaga train station to the actual winery, but I was accompanied by a pleasant introductory video about the winery's history. Being a Takasaki denizen, I found that the trek wasn't too hard to handle and the waking up at the butt-crack of dawn was rewarded with absurdities that you just don't see enough of in daily life.

Disembark the bus, walk up to the venue, pay 2000 yen, grab a bottle of wine or sparkling grape juice and a commemorative 2006 wine glass, buy a wheel of brie, and proceed up to the vineyards.

Fair enough. By the time our group had arrived, at approximately 11:15 am, the hillside was already looking pretty populated. I suppose the choice spots would be the level ground that occurs intermittently up the hill, where grape vines would not be growing normally. Now, I'm no expert, but if I owned a winery, I'd rather gouge my heart out with a spoon than let a thousand drunken people sit on my vineyard hills. But, to each his own I suppose.





Find a spot, then plant my butt down as firmly as possible to create enough of a foundation to keep me from sliding off the hill. One man, who had already been there enjoying the festivities by the time I arrived, was already looking a bit pink in the face. Soon after giving my introductory hellos, I noticed him sitting cross-legged, with a glass of wine in one hand and a plate of food on the other hand, all the while, sliding down the hill but he seemed unfazed. Maybe he didn't know he was sliding. I thought it right to inform him, "You're sliding."

"I know," he says nonchalantly as he continues to slide down.

"You're sliding!"

"Uh huh," he says again as he is now sliding

off the tarp and onto the dirt.

And after a more harried "YOU'RE SLIDING!" I put out an arm in vain to hold him back the way moms put out their arms to hold their children back when the car stops all of a sudden. "Mom arm" or "World's First Seatbelt" I think they call it.

A few minutes later, I noticed some ruckus about our tarped-off area. There seemed to be a petite Japanese woman rolling around in the dirt. She was trying desperately to climb back up to where she must have camped out but her minimal hand-eye-foot-body coordination from the high wine intake was working against her, as was gravity. I seem to recall a random arm reaching out, grabbing her butt, and hoisting her closer to her destination. A few minutes later, I noticed she appeared to be struggling at the next tier of dirt, where she flung large amounts of earth onto and into everything that was on a couple's floor mat.

Meanwhile, I was entranced by the warm sun, less-than-appetizing wine, brie, music, and the people dressed as bottles of wine. More interestingly, there were people also dressed as fruits, a la "Fruit of the Loom" and I dig underpants mascots.



There were quite a few workers dressed in angel wings and I still fail to see the relevancy of that attire. But that, of course, didn't stop me from wanting a pair for myself. Luckily, I had swarms of jumping spiders attacking me which diverted my attention away from my longing for the angel wings.

I seem to also recall a small frog jumping from my shoulder to the rim of my wine glass. Of course, I continued to drink my wine thereafter. I wasn't about to waste any alcohol.





Looking back, I'd have to say that it was one of the best events I've had thus far and I'm looking forward to attending both days of next year's Harvest Festival. Wine, music, cheese, folks dressed as fruit and wine bottles all in the company of good friends and warm sun. It's also good to know that the proceeds support a business that employs folks with special needs and mental disabilities.

Though I can't remember much else of that day, I'm proud to say that I was sober enough for at least 2 hours to know the gist of what the event entailed. For everything else, there's digital cameras.



Call for Submissions

What: Call for submissions for a creative compilation of poetry, creative writing, art, photos, music, performances, etc.

Who: Anyone

When: Deadline to submit will be the last day of February, which is Wednesday, the 28th.

How: All writing should be in Word format. All art and photos should be in JPEG or GIF format.

For all else and questions, please contact Jennifer C. Park at jencpark@gmail.com

High School English Camp on Mt. Akagi

