

9/11/59

"Why don't you write a book about Japan?" is a question often asked me by my kind relatives and friends. They are good enough to say they enjoy my letters telling of my experiences in this country. However, it is quite a different thing writing to people one knows and stressing the things I know the particular person is interested in, and another matter to hold the interest of strangers.

In the first place, if one is going to write about Japan, especially the people, they should not wait a year to do so, but very soon after arriving and can write glowing accounts of first impressions. The longer a Caucasian stays in Japan, the more they realize they can never know the Oriental! So if I attempt to write of my experiences, it will have to be entirely of surface things, with no attempt to delve into the whys and wherefores...

My husband and I came here from "the Paradise of the Pacific" - Hawaii, where it is summer all year round, the scenery and flowers are beautiful, and all the people speak at least pidgin English. So why am I so impressed with this country?.. Maybe it is the challenge one meets every day, in language difficulties, in primitive methods of doing things, in the difference of seasons, wildflowers, costumes and customs, the feeling of an ancient land, and in always trying to know the people better.

I will not attempt to write of the cities and the routes which are frequented by tourists, as that has been done many times before. I have been privileged to live in a remote, country village in the Japan Alps where people are very much the same as they have been for centuries past. The small farms are still handed down to the eldest son as they have been for generations and the terraced rice paddies are maintained with primitive implements and constant hard work of men, women and children. Except for the uniformed school children, I believe the costumes are much the same as those worn by their forefathers.

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My arrival in Japan the latter part of September, 1958 was spectacular. After a fine, calm trip from Honolulu I arrived in Yokohama on the S.S. Pres. Cleveland with typhoon "Ida". We were three hours late in docking, and in the wind and rain, and our West Highland White Terrier "saltie" to be gotten off and to Quarantine, I was indeed thankful to see my husband who had proceeded me to Japan by two months, waiting on the dock to come to my assistance!

My first experience of the unusual kindness of the Japanese people was the arrival at the ship soon after my husband, of one of the firm's interpreters who had driven from Tokyo in that weather, to see if he could be of some assistance!

After getting thru customs and a bewildered Saltie off to the Quarantine Station, we took a taxi to the Hotel New Grand where my husband had a room. By that time water was so deep that the taxi drove up on the sidewalk, under the flapping awning to the steps of the hotel. I was wet, excited and somewhat tired as I had been under quite a strain since six o'clock that morning and it was now past noon. The greeting I received by the hotel staff would have made a stock holder glow!.. Our nice, big room looked out on a typhoon tossed harbour and the rain was angrily beating at the windows. I did not mind at all when we heard that no trains were running north to Tokyo or south to Nagoya because of wash-outs and landslides and we could not get thru until the next afternoon.. The sun was out in all it's glory the next day. The head porter at the hotel went with us to the station, as he spoke perfect English, and tho he had to stand in line for three hours in a jam-packed, wet station to get our tickets, we were on the first train out for Nagoya.

We had been in Japan as tourists the early part of January, never dreaming we would be back for a much longer stay so soon!.. At that time we

had the great fortune of seeing Fuji-yama in the unearthly light of a full moon, and again, from almost the same location, we saw Fuji-yama in the light of a full moon, but this time it was looking sadly down on a scene of death and destruction! Loss of life, injuries, and homeless were high in the thousands!

We stayed two nights and a day in Nagoya where my husband's engineering firm has an office. Then we took a train and arrived in Kiso Fukushima three hours and thirtyfour tunnels later after about a 75 mile trip north. There we were met by my husband's secretary, our maid and driver.

Kiso Fukushima is our closest railroad station. Tho it has a population of about 10,000, it has only two paved streets and many bridges. There are two fairly nice ^{Japanese} hotels and several small ones, and shops are adequate only for every day needs of simple living. There are no sidewalks and everyone walks in the street. Over all is heard the almost musical click clack of the wooden geitas. To see any beauty in a small Japanese town, one should visit it at night when the ornate and colorful ^{neon} lights give a carnival look to them all.

Mitake Mura (village) is about eight miles west of Kiso Fukushima, but seems twice that far due to the very narrow roads where one car has to back up to a wide enough place in the road to allow another to pass. This is often scary business as the road drops off on one side to a river bottom far below, and there are no guard rails. The other side goes straight up, and the frequent hairpin curves do nothing to reassure a timid traveler. When one has made the ^{trip} a number of times and realizes what good drivers we have or becomes fatalistic about it, then one can see and appreciate the beauty all around. The huge trees, wildflowers, or snow - what ever the season may be, and the ever present, beautiful clear river, usually far below. All along the road - which is entirely unpaved - are stone markers, some old and some new, as this is one of the roads the pilgrims have used for centuries on their way to Ontake-san, one of the countries most sacred mountains and climbed by thousands of people every summer.

Near the end ^{of} our journey we go thru a modern vehicle tunnel, the door to a small plain in the river valley where our little village of Mitake is located, with rugged Ontake-san standing guard in the distance!

... Our little house is completely western even to steam heat from a boiler plant behind the high fence which cuts off the two company houses from the rest of the village. The houses are identical in plan, one built for the resident engineer and the other for the drilling and grouting engineer for the Chicago firm who are consulting engineers on one of the largest ^{rock} filled dams in Japan. They are built on a point and the front yards face a steep cliff down to the river. The cliff is covered with chestnut trees, wild cherry and bamboo, all laced together with fuji-no-hana (wisteria) vines and azalia dotted all about. Our yards are made up of flower beds and strawberry beds, with rock walks forming ^{the} beds.. When I arrived our chrysanthemums were in full bloom in many lovely colors, and cosmos grew tall and showy against the high fence. Beautiful roses were still in bloom, and continued to bloom until after our ^{first} snow storm!

On a point as we are, we have a view up and down the valley which I never tire looking at. Just across the river, wild and rugged hills climb steeply up from a narrow gauge logging railroad track which is our only visual sign of life. The tiny deisal engins, and sometimes toy steam engines, pulling their fantastic loads of logs down the valley are a source of pleasant interest. The logs are huge in diameter, but cut short to fit the little cars so they can get around the sharp bends in the road bed. Never ^{more} than fourteen cars long, and a brakeman stands between every other car to help control the speed down grade. I do most of my writing on our nice front porch, glass enclosed in

winter, as the view is always so beautiful. In winter, if the wind blows up the valley it is a sure sign of snow, and I can watch it coming, gradually blotting out the mountains in the distance, then nearer until the flakes swirling upward, blot out our own river canyon.

Besides our two houses, the Japanese engineering firm has a two story office building where my husband, as resident engineer, has an office. And next to it is maintained a Staff House for our American engineers and their families who sometimes come up on business or pleasure from Nagoya.. The dam and another office is located about four miles up one of the rivers which flow into ours. There is a small dam and lovely reservoir very near the Mitake office. The reservoir and lake form a splendid mirror for Ontake-san and a graceful aqua-marine ^{colorful} bridge.

Our next door neighbor and his wife were the only other Americans nearer than Nagoya. We played cribbage at nights, and fortunately Fran liked to take walks. Nearly every day we hiked on a different mountain path as they are so numerous. In November our second dog had arrived from Hawaii, and how they liked those walks! Often we were accompanied by one, if not all three of our maids and they could tell us much of the country side, and the Japanese names of so many things.

Maybe it was because I had not seen the change of seasons for so many years, but I could not remember ever seeing such vividly beautiful fall colors! There are so many different kinds of maple trees with their leaves ranging from sunshine yellow to a deep bronze, cherry trees, larch, birch and many others I did not know in showy dress, and mixed all thru them were the black-green of the many evergreen trees and bamboo. The cryptemaria, or a type of cedar tree, reaches tremendous proportions and towers over all. These are the stately evergreens seen around the countless shrines *and temples.*

With all the logging going on in the country it seems that there could not be so many trees, ^{left} but their reforestation program is well planned, and where trees have been cut, new ones are planted. They seem to grow very quickly in this climate.

I have never lived in a place where the snow is so lovely as in this section of Japan. It is deep, but so clean and dry, and squeeks when walked in. The huge flakes come down like the cherry blossoms falling, and as it is usually so still, the snow sticks to everything it touches making a fairyland out of the drabest of scenes! There is no ice under foot to make walking treacherous, the rice paddies, ponds and streams are frozen over. Twice during the winter we had what are called "Siberian winds" and they are not pleasant, but do not last long. They shake the house like a baby's rattle, and snow is driven thru the smallest cracks of windows and doors!

Fairly often during the winter we found ourselves without lights, phones and even water a few times, so we used the fireplace or a "konra" for cooking. This only added interest to our lives.

The dogs loved the snow as they had not seen it for a long time, and the breed seems to thrive in it. Our little Canadian Champion was at her happiest during the winter and was a joy to watch in the snow. Now as we face another winter, we have our third Westie with us. He has never seen snow as he was born in Hawaii, so we are eager to see him in his first snow!

When all the leaves are gone except from the evergreens, and snow is deep upon the mountains, the numberless paths are darkly outlined all over them, and give one the restless urge to explore them all. Nearly all seem to converge into a few larger, well beaten trails to Ontake-san about twenty miles away. As one gets closer to the sacred mountain the dark stones and monuments along the way become more numerous, often marking graves of pilgrims on their way to or from the mountain who had not been able to make it as much as 200 years ago. Today, buses take many of the people as far as the 4th station, but in those days the trip was made on foot for many a mile before the foot of the mountain was reached.

This summer the railroad station at Kiso Fukushima has been crowded with pilgrims. They are very picturesque in their long white robes and sandals or often boots of straw, and staffs in their hands. All have packs on their backs of varying sizes, and often a bottle of saki protrudes from the pack. And all have small tinkling bells attached to the rope or belt around their waists! These are the same types of outfits worn by the pilgrims for generations. There are numbers of other, less picturesque hikers bound for Ontake-san too, as Japan is a hiker's paradise and their favorite sport. I understand there is an overnight lodge and several large shrines at the top of the mountain, but we have not climbed it. I hope we can do so before we leave the country. One can go up Fuji-san ^{for many stations} on horse back, but the trails do not permit that on Ontake-san. (Dinner food)

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^{Out just}
At Christmas we all had a joyous time. The Japanese are recognizing it more every year, but it was not a holiday at the dam. Our lovely Christmas music is heard everywhere however, as the people like it very much. Our maid was humming "Jingle bells" one day and when I asked her to sing the words to me, she sang our English words! I did get her to sing "Silent Night" in Japanese however and it was lovely. Our maid, our neighbor's maid and the Staff House maid love to sing and have lovely voices. They like our music with Japanese words better than their own!.. My husband and I had succeeded in getting a fine turkey at the U.S. Naval commissary in Yokosuka where we are privileged to shop as he is a retired Naval Officer. We had fourteen guests for Christmas dinner, all Japanese except the four of us, and none of them had ever eaten turkey before! The girls had cooked it beautifully with very little help from me. It was then that I learned that gravy is "juice". We had our record player playing all our Christmas carols in the background, and exchanged gifts under a lovely tree which we had decorated the day before with lights, ornaments and lucky paper cranes which the girls had made. We had our traditional eggnog, which was another first for most of our guests.

(Our dinner had been held in the Staff House as our home is far too small) Someone had brought us a beautiful tree and left it outside ^{the} house. We never did find out who brought it, but I think it was one of the nicest, most friendly things that has happened to us in Japan! It was a lovely tree and smelled so fresh and good, ~~so~~ we had the fun of decorating it too. The ornaments and lights made here are very beautiful and we had gotten the most unusual lights I have ever seen. They were very tiny colored lights covered by real, snowy white cocoons! When the lights were off the cocoons looked like snow on the tree! With stockings on the mantle for the dogs, a fire roaring in the fireplace and snow falling gently outside, we did not feel so far removed from our loved ones and all our Christmas beliefs.

New Year is not celebrated in Japan with noise and gaiety as in our country, yet it is one of the most important of their holidays. It is a time when families get together and rededicate themselves to a better life. Many call it the "transition" period, and might well be copied by other nations. They have a holiday of one to two weeks, families visit their shrines dressed in their best kimonos and hair done in traditional style. At this time most abandon the western clothing which has become so customary.

We spent a very quiet New Year's. Most of the Japanese engineers and their families had gone to their homes and our American neighbors had gone to Nagoya. On New Year's Eve we listened to lovely music on the radio. The night was still and ~~lovely~~ beautiful, and at midnight the kani or temple gongs sounded and echoed up and down our valley! They were struck over a hundred times, and the deep, mellow tones are an unforgettable memory. Almost pagan in sound, but far more inspirational than our noisy blaring of horns, beating on tin pans,

firecrackers, and every other means of celebrating as boisterously as possible!

... Winter seemed loath to leave our valley. We had snow flurries well into April. The frost was the strangest I have ever seen, pushing up out of the ground as much as six or seven inches in shapes like icecicles. When broken off each one ^{was} ~~was~~ infinitesimal, glassy looking threads of ice. Flowers would not be put off by the cold weather, and first to appear were white plum blossoms, soon followed by pink, then red ones. Soon a lovely yellow ground flower called ~~fulujaso~~ covered the slopes and blue and purple violets added their color. Plum trees were followed by the famous cherry blossoms, then peach and last, but not least - apple. The flowering trees are lovely planted around the shrines, along waterways, etc., but to me the sudden coming upon one of them in full bloom in the forest was the most wonderful of all! We found a tremendous cherry tree deep in a remote section where other trees had been cut around it, but for some reason it had been spared to age in lonely, stately splendor!

I had never seen wisteria growing wild before, but here the pale purple, white and later in the summer a wine color fuji-no-hana with its very sweet perfume scenting the air, grow riotously. There are ^{many} wild flowers I have never seen before, also a flame colored azalia, ^{and pink rhododendron} add to the splotches of color on the ^{mountain} ~~palets~~. Among the wild flowers, new to me, I think I was most impressed by a short blooming lily called yama yuri or mountain lily. A lovely shade of pink on petal tips that fade to a very pale pink throat, it has the most delightful indescribable bouquet odor that I have ever known.

Garden flowers have been beautiful all summer long, but they do not impress me as do the wild flowers. Everything seems to bloom in profusion. Even with a single flower however, the maids can make a strikingly beautiful arrangement. I have tried to learn from them, but my efforts seem insignificant besides theirs! The way a twig bends, or a vine grows, they can see at a glance how to use it in an arrangement.

The nicest and most surprising thing grown in our yard are the strawberries. We picked quantities of them from May thru July, and they are as delicious as any I have ever tasted! We missed having good, thick cream to glorify them, but found many substitutes.

One of the main industries of Japan had never interested me so much as it does now, because I have raised some silk worms!.. Late in May Sachiko-san (our maid) and I went to the Government building to see the newly born worms receive their first meal of shredded mulberry leaves. The very nice manager explained it all to us. The large, spotless room was filled with flat, wooden ^{crates} about 30 x 4' x 6" piled about ten deep. Each of the large flats had six or eight small boxes about 8" x 10" in them and they opened like a book. Oil paper was on each half and were covered by the tiny black worms, and shredded mulberry leaves placed on one half then the other half was carefully closed so the food was between layers of ~~its~~ worms.

The room had to be kept at a constant 30 degrees and was very humid. This is done by a special type of heater and water, and was manually checked. The babies are kept in this room for a week, being fed every $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours day and night. Then the worms, now about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long and a grey color as they shed often, are sold to local people who raise them in their homes as an additional source of income. After the first week or so their care is quite simple as they are fed when the food is gone. They sleep at night, usually with their front half of ^{the} body reared up.

We went back to see the worms the day before they were to be sold, and noting our interest, the manager gave us what I thought to be a few worms, but as they grew larger I found that we had nearly a hundred! They soon out grew the small box and had to be transferred to a larger one, and when they started spinning their cocoons we had to put them in two large boxes. They

always seemed hungry and as we had no mulberry trees on our place, the girls and I had to pick them from the groves we passed on our walks. They had to be fresh however, and no water could be on the leaves... The worms thrive and we didn't lose a one. The latter part of June, when about two inches long or more and as big around as a pencil, they started regurgitating their food in the form of silky, spiderweb like thread. Rice straw had been put in the boxes loosely and the worms fastened their webs to the straw and slowly rotating, spun the cocoons around themselves.. If the dormant worm were left alive it would finally awaken and eat its way out, thereby ruining the silk threads, so they are killed by several methods. The most commonly used method is to put the cocoons on flat, hot rocks in the sun every day until upon shaking, one can hear the dead worm rattle inside. Others put them into boiling water, and the few who have stoves can put them in the oven after covering the cocoons with wet mulberry leaves.

Cocoons are sold back to the Government who in turn sell them to the manufacturers of silk thread. The process of unraveling the cocoons and the final spinning of the thread is about the most interesting of all the process which goes into the making of the lovely silks of Japan. It is all far too involved for me to explain here.

..... In April the wedding of the Crown Prince to a Commoner was of great interest to our girls and to the other Japanese people here in the village. The radio was kept on to hear all the news about it. The maids spent the afternoon at a hotel to watch the one and only TV in Mitake. I think most of the people were very pleased by the marriage, but some expressed the feeling that it should have been kept in the royal lines. No one could say that Michiko-san did not make a lovely and gracious bride!. Now there is a great deal of anticipation about the birth of a royal heir.

... In our part of the Japan Alps, one rises to 3000' in the 75 miles from Nagoya at sea level. Mountains tower around us to Ontake-san at 10,108' and Komaga-take at about 8,000'. Some snow stays on these mountains all year round. In the crisp, crystal clear winter days, the peaks seem deceptively near, and every sharp ridge and valley are magnified. ~~I have lived near the equator, but have never seen the stars and moon so clear and seemingly close!~~

We have seen a dreadful side of nature in Japan too. Besides the typhoons, we have seen terrible floods, and we were very near Mt. Asama when it had the worst eruption in 29 years! We have also experienced several earthquakes, which of all nature's terrors seem the worst to me as they are so unpredictable. The Japanese people will not talk of them as they say the gods are angry, and who am I to say this is not so!

..... One of my favorite long hikes is far up a winding mountain trail to an ancient Shinto ~~temple~~ ^{temple}. One enters a natural cathedral of huge cryptomeria ~~spine~~ ^{spine} trees on a plateau and a short distance to the right is a large round hut, with hand hewn shake roof extending to the ground from a high center beam. The entrance is dug out of the hillside and upon entering, after one's eyes become adjusted to the dimness, one sees the several bunks built up off the earth floor and filled with straw and a pit is near the center for a fire. I have not been able to learn too much about this building except that it was used by visiting priests and is very, very old. It is still kept clean and is enclosed by a barbed wire fence with gate locked.. The ~~temple~~ ^{temple} ~~shrine building~~ entrance is guarded by two stone lions and is much like hundreds of other very old, weather beaten ones. There are several other buildings near and the largest of these is an open pavillion with picnic tables in it. Upon entering this building I was amazed to see high up near the roof, huge paintings ~~on wood~~ ^{on wood} of all sorts and obviously very old. Some were in ornate, carved frames and others plain or no frames at all. In spite of being more or less in the open, they were in good condition, and most surprising to me, there were no signs of any vandalism! Yet I have never seen anyone there to guard the place. I am ashamed to say that such a thing would be impossible in America! The only sound here

was the eternal sighing and whispering of wind in the trees and birds singing. Before the time of buses, I understand that this ~~shrine~~^{temple} was a favorite stopping place for the pilgrims.

.... I have been surprised at the cheerful, friendly way of the Japanese people, and they are unfailingly courteous to a stranger among them. So often they have made a very tiresome six hour railroad trip to Tokyo more pleasant in many unusual ways. We use the Chuo line and it is just an hours trip from Kiso Fukushima to Shirojiri, where we have to change trains for the five hour trip to Shinjuku Station in Tokyo. The coaches are all third class except one second class coach which we usually take, not because the seats are very much better, but because it is not as crowded due to the additional cost. There are never any porters in the stations, but we have always found the trainmen very courteous and helpful. In the many trips to and from Yokohama, my husband and I have never had to sit in separate seats, as someone would move to another seat so we could be together. Often a passenger will pick up our suitcases and carry them to the platform when we were leaving the train. We found that any Japanese who could speak English would come and talk to us as they are proud of the accomplishment, and would offer their services in any way. Some of the most interesting people we have met in Japan have been met in this way.

On one of our trips we were pressed for time, so decided to try a sleeper from Shirojiri to Shinjuku. The only one my husband's interpreter could make a reservation on was a "tourist" class, and as we knew no better we took it. I would never do it again, but would not have missed the one experience! There are compartments divided from the train coridor by a curtain, and in each one there are six bunks. The middle bunks are the worst ones and that is what we had, and I shared the compartment with four men besides my husband! One could not undress, but took shoes and coats off before climbing the little ladder, and then crawled head first into the coffin like space, squirmed and struggled around to get feet first into the futon provided on each bunk. I am a small person, but it was impossible to sit up, and a broad shouldered man found it difficult to even turn over without rubbing his shoulder on the birth above! They were the hardest beds I have ever attempted to sleep on. Tatami on the floor is much softer! It was the noisest, roughest trip I have ever made and my husband nor I had any sleep that night. All four of the Japanese men who shared the compartment snored in different keys and volumes of sound. All of a sudden I became so tickled that I could not suppress my laughter and my husband across the aisle asked me what was so funny. I told him "us and this" and we both laughed until we cried, not trying to suppress it as we knew nothing would awaken our companions!. We were very glad to get off the train at 4:30 the next morning and catch the train on to Yokohama!

The first time we brought one of our dogs home from Yokohama, he came in a crate on the baggage car. However, we learned a few things before bringing the next one, and brought her right on the train with us. The train was not crowded and she ~~laid~~^{lay} on a towel on the seat beside me. She attracted a great deal of attention as the people like dogs very much and she was a new breed to them. Our third dog we brought in the same way as his mother, but the train was crowded, so he had to sleep on the floor under our seat most of the way. He too received his share of attention however.

The maids are very fond of the dogs and every one in Mitake Mura and workers on the dam know them and are very kind to them. By the time they leave Japan they will be thoroughly spoiled... One day I was surprised to see two men come to our house leading a white Spitz on a rope. It seems that they were working on one of the bridges about a half mile from us when they saw the little white dog with broken rope at her collar. They caught her and walked the half mile to our house leading her as they thought she was one of ours! Fortunately Sachiko-san knew to whom she belonged, so took her home.