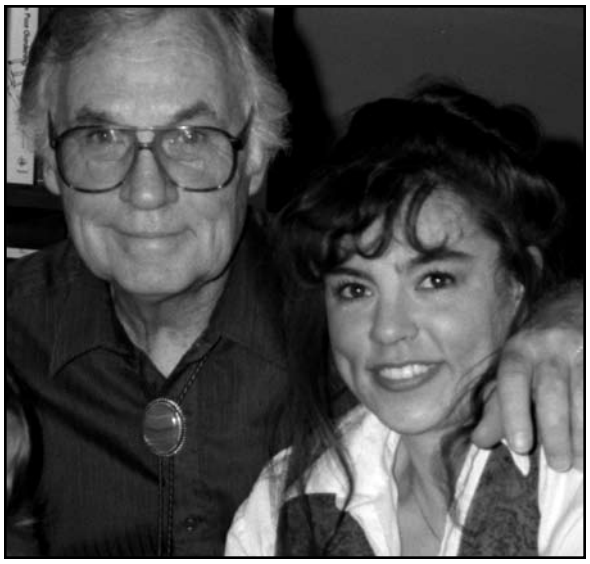
Bittersweet Journey

Stories for My Dead Daughter

By JACKSON SELLERS



Jackson Sellers and daughter Keiko

Questions by KEIKO SELLERS, 1967-1996

Where do I find the strength
to live through each day?
What will I have
if I throw it all away?

As recorded in her diary . . .

Part I: 1999: Aching Heart

Kei Darling:

I haven't written much since you died. Oh, I've put together manuals and guidelines and memos for the *Los Angeles Times*, and written occasional letters, but you know what I mean. The personal work I was doing prior to December 13, 1996, the Friday the Thirteenth when you passed away in your sleep, has languished to the point of nothingness, because there is nobody left who is as interested as you were, and because, without you, I no longer had the heart for it. You were my primary audience for that kind of writing, and you still are, judging by this self-therapeutic journal, addressed as it is to my lost daughter, my only child.

Dear Jack, the lengthy autobiography and family history that amused you, sometimes causing you to roll on the floor in laughter, lies dormant — although this postmortem *Bittersweet Journey* book, containing traces of humor within its general morbidity, might be seen as a *Dear Jack* resurrection of sorts, a grief-delayed conclusion to the story I was telling when you died. I will always treasure your declaration that I was an "unconscious humorist." When I expressed surprise, you elaborated: "It's just the way you put things, Daddy." *High praise for a writer*. Nobody but you has ever called me a humorist, unconscious or otherwise. Friends see me as a sober man who likes to talk shop, seldom engages in repartee and often fails to understand the corny puns of which they are so fond. But I loved making you laugh, and I take pleasure in knowing I was successful at it.

To you and me, the title *Dear Jack* is not as precious and self-hugging as it appears. Perhaps I should explain it here, so that any odd reader won't get the wrong idea. About ten years ago my mother gave me a big bundle of letters I wrote in the Navy. She saved them for three whole decades, as though they were important. And I found myself fascinated when I started going through them. Here was stuff I had written and promptly forgotten more that 30 years ago, now more than 40 years ago, when the world was young and so was I. And not surprisingly, you were interested, too. You had always wanted to hear stories about your daddy when he was at any age corresponding to your own.

You were 22 then, the same age as Jack when he joined the Navy. So I started writing "Jack in the Navy" stories, expanding on the tales in Jack's old letters, then sending printouts to you in San Diego, where you were a student at the University of California. Each letter began with a *Dear Folks* salutation and ended with a *Love, Jack* signature. For my initial writings, you and I started off with

the title *Dear Folks . . . Love, Jack*, but this was too awkward, too long for ready reference. Truncation resolved the matter. *Dear Jack* it became, and the book traveled both backward and forward in time, until it covered nearly 300 years of your American family history. It was never published. Who except you would want to read it?

I smile as I remember how excited you were when you discovered convincing proof of a Sellers family legend relating to your Great-Grandmother Jennye's scandalous 1908 love affair. Your discovery changed that *Dear Jack* chapter from mostly speculation to solid fact, and added several delicious details. As I write these words in my home workshop above our double garage, my eyes flick to a small oval portrait of teenaged Jennye, a tinted photograph taken a couple of years before she fell in love with a young rascal from the other side of Kentucky's Green River.

The lovers, especially the rascal, had to be careful. Jennye's stern-faced father, Wesley "Doc" Sellers, a farmer who preached Free Methodist fire and brimstone on Sundays, lurked somewhere, and he often carried a double-barreled shotgun. After hearing childhood bedtime stories about Jack and his grandmother, you claimed the little portrait of still virginal Jennye as your own, thinking she looked a bit like you, as indeed she did. You cherished it on your nightstand for most of your life, mute testimony of your attachment to a relative you knew only from my stories. Now the portrait sits on a bookshelf in my workshop, another of those family keepsakes that returned home when you died.

Chronologically, *Dear Jack* starts with Arthur Jackson Slayton, born in Virginia in 1705, your seventh great grandfather, a patriot recognized by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Slayton's grandson migrated into the "Dark and Bloody Ground" known as Kentucky, and his genes eventually mingled with those of the Sellers clan, from which Jack sprang in 1931. Your mother Yoshi, youngest child of the prominent Iizuka family of Japan's Komochi Mountains, gave birth to you in Louisville in 1967.

You were half Japanese, but you were a native Kentuckian like me. This journal, at long last, fleshes out the Japanese side of your family, and it even contains a few scandals of its own. How I wish you could help me once again. And how I resent the alcoholism that took your life at age 29!

Another explanation is in order here. I was Jack before you were born, and Jackson thereafter, because "Jackson Sellers" was more impressive as a byline, and writing was the way I made a living for you and your mother. Jack was rakish at times, even handsome, looking like a young Marlon Brando in the eyes of intrigued Japanese women. He was a youngster with wide horizons, while Jackson

was, and still is, staid and a bit boring, an old man with everything behind him. You loved Jackson but you positively adored Jack. You swiped photos of Jack from family albums, and Jackson didn't get them back until after your death.

From the very beginning I wrote about Jack in the third person, as though he were different from the father you had always known. For you the image of young Jack was never blurred by first-person familiarity with old Jackson. For me it was simply easier. One should always look upon his youth with fond contempt, but even an old man has pride. "I was a jerk." No, it is better to write "Jack was a jerk." And somehow the third person is funnier.

Old Tom, which grew out of *Dear Jack*, stands pretty much as it stood when you died. It focuses on the *USS Colahan DD-658*, a *Fletcher*-class destroyer in the Korean and Cold wars of the Fifties, when young Jack Sellers served aboard her. The manuscript looks like a book; it has 300 impressive pages, but it is not really a book. Too many unrefined segments that don't hang together, too many gaps that need filling. Several times you nagged me: "Daddy, when are you going to write the chocolate syrup story?"

Much of *Old Tom* is addressed, in one way or another, to you, the daughter Jack always wanted. So Jackson hasn't the resolve to finish it, now that you are gone, even though a bunch of old ex-sailors across the country have put up about $1,500 to finance publication. Oh, maybe I *will* finish it now that I am writing again, now that I have healed somewhat. We'll see. I could start with that silly chocolate syrup story that you found so amusing and Jack, back in the Fifties, found so embarrassing. It would be a good start or, more accurately, a good restart. Long stories such as *Old Tom* and this *Bittersweet Journey* manuscript are just short stories linked together. Write them, tie them together and you've got a book. Since I have referred to the chocolate syrup story here, and since you always wanted to read it, I will write it now, as I should have written it years ago, when you were still with me. The story is only a brief detour on my current journey.

It was 1957 and the USS Colahan was at sea as usual. Lieutenant Junior Grade Jack Sellers, the ship's communications officer, was transported by breeches buoy to another underway destroyer, so he could objectively evaluate the performances of radiomen, signalmen and technicians who did not serve directly under him.

Okay, I will answer your question before you even ask it: A breeches buoy was a canvas chair with no legs. Jack was strapped into it for transfer to the other warship. It hung from a pulley riding on a rope strung between two ships

steaming at 15 knots. Below Jack's dangling feet was a churning fury of seawater. As the two Fletcher-class destroyers, each measuring 76 feet longer than a football field, plowed along together, ocean waves collided with bow waves, and bow waves collided with each other. Frothy gray fingers reached up for nervous Jack as he was pulled across the chasm.

If either ship yawed toward the other, the line would slacken, and Jack would be dipped into the sea and pulled through it like a fisherman's lure, sputtering curses at the assholes who allowed him to get into this dangerous situation. But such transfers always — well, usually — went perfectly, because much care was taken by trained seamen and their officers. The worst that ever happened was wet trousers, and that was considered funny, not important, unless the trousers were worn by somebody important.

The ship's wardroom was full of strangers, albeit fellow officers. Jack, a guest in their midst, did a lot of talking at supper, because he was the focus of attention, a diversion from the at-sea routine. Which was flattering, but also distracting for this visitor on his best behavior. The meal drew to a close, and a steward served large scoops of ice cream to the 10 officers sitting around the long table. The ship's captain occupied his usual seat at the starboard end. A small can of Hershey chocolate syrup was provided, just enough for each officer to pour a swirl or two on his dessert. As a courtesy to the wardroom guest, the can was placed in front of Jack, who was yapping away.

Jack absentmindedly began decorating his ice cream with chocolate. But quickly the design became hypnotic, drawing him away from whatever wisdom he was imparting to officers who were only several months his junior. Was Jack an unconscious jerk? In his dessert bowl, dark syrup formed curly shapes against a vanilla background. Another swirl. A pause to admire effect. Then something compelled him to hide every little speck of exposed ice cream, which would destroy his creation, of course, but bring satisfying closure to this flight of fantasy. Eventually the scoop looked like a chocolate-covered tennis ball sitting in a pool of chocolate. The little can was very nearly empty.

"I've never seen anybody use that much syrup," said one ship's officer, snapping Jack from his trance. The officer was less reticent, less polite than his dumbfounded shipmates, all of whom were waiting to get their hands on the can, if this visiting chocolate hog would just leave some for them. Unlike Jackson, Jack could blush, and he did so, brightly, as he mumbled his apologies. The steward brought another Hershey can from the wardroom galley, and placed it on the table out of Jack's reach.

Did you laugh, Kei? Did I tell it well? You always preferred stories in which Jack got into a predicament of his own making. Jack's rare triumphs smelled too much like your mother's recollections of childhood perfection, so the triumphs got only peripheral attention in *Dear Jack* and *Old Tom*.

While you were still alive, *The Original Tomcat: A Fletcher Destroyer Goes to War* was completed. It chronicled the *USS Colahan's* adventures in the Pacific War of the early Forties, when the little ship ran with the "big boys" — the battleships and aircraft carriers that carried the massive conflict to Japan's very shores. This book was an outgrowth of *Old Tom*, the Navy volume I was writing mostly for you. A single chapter about the destroyer's World War II history grew and grew until it became a full-fledged book in its own right. *The Original Tomcat* was finished before its progenitor, *Old Tom*, was half done.

Now I almost resent this professional triumph, because it took me away from the *Old Tom* manuscript that most interested you, at a time when you were here to share my remembrances. But like you, I was proud of *The Original Tomcat* in those heady days, and I still am. The research and writing took about three years of my so-called spare time. There seemed to be plenty of time for everything then.

You rejoiced with me when the third edition of this self-published book, financed by members of the *USS Colahan DD-658* association, was selected for cataloging by the Library of Congress six months before you died. Also, the Pacific War book was put on display aboard the *USS Kidd DD-661*, a *Colahan* sister memorialized at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The *Colahan* herself lies at the bottom of the Pacific about 40 miles southwest of San Diego, a victim of Navy target practice. And, too, the book sits on the bookshelves of several institutional libraries specializing in naval history, notably the U.S Navy Memorial Foundation, East Carolina University and the Tin Can Sailors Association. Even the Lake Forest branch of the Orange County Public Library, where you once worked, has a copy. I inquired recently and found it had been checked out seven times in the past year. Not bad.

After your death I put out a fourth edition of *The Original Tomcat*, not because I felt like it but because so many of my shipmates were expecting the book and had paid for it. Anyway, the revisions were mostly done by the time the deputy San Diego County coroner called me on that awful Friday. This one I dedicated to you: "Yvonne Keiko Sellers, 1967-1996, who loved her daddy's stories." Your picture appeared on the copyright page. And this version, too, went into the archives of the Library of Congress, where it will survive between durable covers for 200 years or more, long, long after I join you in the darkness of eternity, or in

the brilliant glory of Heaven, whichever it may be.

It is now September 1999, almost three years since you died. Your mother and I will visit Japan for three weeks. You and Yoshi went there several times during your lifetime. I spent much of the first decade of my adulthood in that marvelous country, living and working as a naval officer, student and newspaperman, but I haven't been back in 34 years, before you were born. Always I stayed at home in California to earn the money to pay for the trips you and Yoshi made. Now I am going back, to see where it all began.

During the first two years of our grief over your death, we could not even bear the thought of going to Japan, where you have nine aunts and uncles and 11 first cousins, all of whom adored you. Their attraction was understandable. You were their beautiful and exotic American niece and cousin, a unique member of the Iizuka clan. You lived long enough to grow out of a cute but bland childhood and into a sparkling personality. You visited them in Japan. They visited you, one or two at a time, in America.

They were anguished, shocked, when you died. Now, after all this time, Yoshi and I are stronger, resigned, accepting of what fate has dealt both us and you. Time really does heal, to a tolerable degree anyway. The Iizukas, our Japanese family, will entertain us on this trip, and we will quietly, politely grieve together over the loss of you.

I expect to be treated very well in Japan. Not only am I your father, not only have I hosted most of the Iizuka family at our Lake Forest home, not only am I Yoshi's husband, but I am a newspaperman. In Japan a journalist ranks surprisingly high on the social scale, certainly above lawyers, who are considered mere technicians, merchants in effect. In olden days, *samurai* warriors and teachers stood first, farmers second and merchants last. Much has changed over the years, but merchants haven't climbed all that much.

Newspapermen in modern-day Japan are equivalent to *sensei*, teachers who contribute mightily to the public good. I am still a hairy barbarian, a *keto* to use the Japanese pejorative that equates to America's "Jap," but I personally enjoy the aforementioned mitigating circumstances, among the Iizukas if no one else. And I am a white Caucasian, the race that xenophobic Japanese prefer next to their own. You need not worry about your daddy in Japan. I will be all right, even when I go where *gaijin*, or foreigners, seldom go, even when I go where English-language "Japanese Only" signs are posted.

"You still have your memories," people say with kindness, not knowing

what else to say. But memories of you, for me, are a mixed blessing. Of course the house where you grew up has no shortage of reminders. There is a framed photo of you as a small child, looking as fresh and innocent as the home-grown rose into which you are sticking your pug nose. The photograph was taken by *Los Angeles Times* photographer Hal Schulz, who, like you, died too early.

"Bury her in flowers," commanded your Uncle Tsuneo, a powerful Japanese banker accustomed to getting what he wanted. He wired thousands of dollars for that purpose. Otherwise his impecunious brother-in-law, the barbarian who stole his favorite sister and somehow let his niece die, might not do things right. Tsuneo, just a couple of years older than your father, suffered a fatal stroke 10 months after you died, and we will commemorate the anniversary of his death on this trip, along with yours.

There is another framed photo. You are still a child but older, with slightly protruding teeth. The image predates the braces that made them perfect. *Oh God, Kei, you died before suffering your first cavity!*

There is still another photo, among still others. You look especially lovely in this one, a child-like woman, a brilliant smile and dancing eyes. Your elbow rests on a table near a chessboard. Your chin lies in a cupped palm. This exquisite photo will always haunt me. Blown up by my friends in the *Los Angeles Times* Photo Department, it was displayed at your funeral, and it was reproduced in the eulogy sent to relatives and acquaintances. And, too, it was chosen by an artist friend of mine, Russ Arosmith, retired art director of *The Times*, who painted a stunning pastel likeness that hangs in a large golden frame in our living room. Your eyes, the only brown ones in my all-blue branch of the Sellers family, follow me everywhere.

The talented Russ Arosmith is a veteran in newspapering, an old fart who came to the business before computers, a B.C. kind of guy with whom I most identify. Nowadays the typical newspaper artist cannot paint or draw at all, or at least not well enough to impress anybody. He doesn't even have a drawing board. Why give a drawing board and valuable newsroom square footage to somebody who can't draw? Instead he has a Macintosh, and the computer-generated graphics he produces for the world-class Los Angeles Times look very much like those published in the Podunk Gazette, which has Macintoshes, too.

I am an old fogy yearning for bygone days. After many years as a writer and editor, I became a manager of editorial computer systems, but my little office displays an irreverent sign: "Bring back the Linotypes!" Linotypes were Rube Goldberg hot-lead typesetting contraptions that served newspapers everywhere

for nearly a century before computers came along. In this high-tech age, virtual teenagers bat out valuable computer code that only they can understand, while an old fart like me, out of his technological depth, manages the processes that put the code to work in far-flung Los Angeles Times newsrooms. I am not denigrating my role. The young programmers couldn't do it.

Memories perish over time. With no one to nourish them, they slip into the great darkness of human history, seldom reemerging. I expected you to carry memories of me after I was gone. Your children, I thought, would remember me as a dotty old man who, almost unbelievably, was a vigorous young man in his writings, which you, of course, would hand down to them. Well, your prospective children died with you, just as my genes did, just as my self-centered fancies did, just as *I* did to a significant degree. I am left alone with my perishable memories, which, even if written in stone, cannot survive because no one will be interested. They will sink into humanity's genealogical morass.

But good memories abound right now, available for recall by the living, by those who knew you. Kei as a Cathy Rigby gymnast, Kei as an El Toro High School cheerleader, Kei as election manager at the University of California in San Diego, Kei as a straight-A student, Kei as a superb violinist, Kei as an unbeatable Scrabble opponent, and on and on. The good memories, however, do not come easily to mind. When my thoughts drift to you, as they often do, it is the final image of you, lying in your coffin, that unfailingly reveals itself, that unfailingly torments me.

On the morning of your funeral, I dreaded the prospect of that searing image more than I have ever dreaded anything, more than I will ever dread anything. Your mother was curiously happy that morning, four sorrow-laden days after we learned our only child had died. Yoshi had not seen you for more than two weeks, when mother and daughter blew kisses to each other as the daughter drove off to San Diego where she slipped away in her sleep, poor darling. Now Yoshi would see beautiful Kei-*chan* again. At Bloomingdale's we had purchased a pretty funeral outfit for you, something with a high neckline and long sleeves to hide the autopsy mutilations.

But I am more worldly than my wife, and I knew with doleful certainty that your corpse — no matter what we did or what the undertaker did — would not be beautiful in the eyes of either of us. I knew your vital spark was gone, and the beauty that life brought you was gone, too, and I was so afraid to see the husk that remained.

Oh God, there she is, I cried out to myself as I entered the chapel. I came

close, mute in despair. *Oh God!* I brushed my fingers across your cheek, the one with the dimple, and even though I knew what to expect, I was appalled at how cold you felt. My fingers, my entire being, remembered warmth, now grown chilly, forever lost. "Kei is not very pretty," said poor Yoshi, face to face with frigid reality. I would have died gladly for you, but one cannot make bargains of that sort with God or the Devil, more's the pity.

Perhaps someday, if I live long enough, I can get beyond that awful image and remember only the good things. I don't really believe that will happen. There is not enough time. I am already older than my father when he died, but time, leading inexorably to my own death, is my only hope.

Sunday, Sept. 26 — We are on our way aboard a Japan Airlines 747. It is just as intolerable as I imagined. Cramped seat, TV dinner, lousy movie viewed from an awkward angle, 11 hours of utter boredom. Jack would not have done it this way. As he did several times, Jack would have booked passage on a Japanese freighter, which offered a private stateroom, meals with the officers and a Japanese-style soaking tub. *Getting there is half the fun,* as Jack's generation believed. Sure, it took 14 days to steam from California's San Pedro to Japan's Yokohama, but so what? Jack had more time than money. Steamship accommodations were $275 oneway, compared to twice that for airfare, and this in the days when a dollar was really a dollar.

And aboard the freighter a well-educated son of dirt farmers could pretend he was a gentleman, very much like Somerset Maugham, the great writer who was fond of steamship travel in the Orient. Jack would pick up a mug of coffee from the ship's wardroom each morning, climb to the bridge, say *ohayo gozaimasu* to the officer on duty, and check the sea chart to see how many nautical miles had been covered in the past 24 hours. When landfall was finally accomplished, after two full weeks, he felt he had truly made a Great Circle journey of more than 5,000 miles.

Anyone unfamiliar with navigational principles might look at a map of the world and logically conclude that the shortest distance from California to Japan is a straight line stretching due west. Of course he would be mistaken. On our globe or any other, the shortest route from one location to another seldom leads directly east or west. It does so only if the two points happen to fall on the equator, which is the only parallel of latitude that constitutes a Great Circle. Likewise, the shortest route is seldom due north or due south, unless both points lie on the same meridian of longitude. If you steam or fly straight west from California,

you will cover 6,000 miles by the time you reach Japan. If you take the Great Circle route, you will go far into the northern Pacific, passing just south of the Aleutians, seemingly in the wrong direction, but the trip will be a thousand miles shorter.

There is something unnatural about high-speed flights to Tokyo. You board the plane in the afternoon at Los Angeles International Airport, and you chase the sun for many uncomfortable hours, almost keeping up with the damned thing. Sunshine lights the world outside the portholes, where darkness should be. Finally you land at Narita Airport in the early evening of the next day, Japan time. Your body screams that it is 3 a.m., that you are still wide awake for Christ's sake, while Japanese clocks claim it is only 6 p.m., dinnertime for most folks. If you are as ancient as I am, and even if you aren't, you are exhausted, wanting only to lie down somewhere and go to sleep. Never mind all the interesting sights around you, sights that old Jackson has not seen since he viewed them through Jack's young eyes.

Monday, Sept. 27 — We arrived at Narita International Airport just after dark. We lost almost a whole day, but we will get it back when we go home. Your cousin Mariko Iizuka, second daughter of your Uncle Hitoshi, met us at the airport. She had been vacationing and shopping in Hawaii and had arrived at Narita just an hour or so before we did. Mariko, a girlish 30-year-old who will get married in Osaka next March, paid us a visit in Lake Forest about 10 years ago, when we once again made an obligatory trek to Disneyland for the entertainment of a Japanese relative. Greeting her American aunt and uncle effusively, she handed Yoshi a tiny cellular phone on which Hitoshi, at home in Kichijoji, was waiting to say hello to his youngest sister.

Yoshi and I went straight to the Keio Plaza Hotel in Shinjuku, aboard an express bus that zipped along highways in the darkness. I couldn't see much except the lights of vehicles going this way and that. But the view from the bus brightened as we reached the outskirts of downtown Tokyo about an hour later. We moved deeper into the giant city. It all looked sort of like Chicago or Los Angeles. If I squinted my eyes, so I could not see the Japanese-language signs, it looked exactly like Los Angeles. Yoshi, excited to be back in her native land, became annoyed when I made this observation. *Jackson, it doesn't look anything like Los Angeles. It's much, much prettier.*

We were dropped off at the hotel with all our luggage, and they put us in a nice room on the 38th floor. In Jack's day there was nothing half that high in

earthquake-prone Tokyo. Nearly 40 years ago Jack's faint heart crawled into his throat when a minor quake struck this metropolis as he, a movie columnist for the *Asahi Evening News*, previewed a film on the top floor of a "skyscraper" that stood only 12 stories. The building swayed alarmingly. And now Jackson, still a coward, was ensconced more than three times that high in the same unstable city. *Don't think about it, old man. Trust technology, which has improved immensely since you were last here.*

Tuesday, Sept. 28 — Up early, but your mother takes forever to get ready, so it was nearly 10 before we got to breakfast in the hotel coffee shop, actually a good-sized restaurant on the ground floor. We were seated at a marvelous table next to a large plate-glass window overlooking a grove of trees. I casually inquired about the trees. What kind were they? Our waitress, a country girl who had recently come to the big city, brought us a neat list.

The question had been asked before. Yoshi translated: Maples, mountain cherries, wild azaleas, etc. But here's the point: That wouldn't have happened in any other country in the world. I can hear it now: "*Gee, I don't know. Hey, Charlie, what kind of trees are out there? Sorry, nobody knows*." Breakfast cost $50. We could have beaten that price on the streets of Shinjuku, but what the hell. It was our first day in Japan.

Your mother's sense of direction is hopeless. I can find more with a wet finger than she can find with a detailed map. I always think I know which way is north even when I'm wrong. Yoshi hasn't a clue, ever. We went looking for the apartment house where we lived when we got married 34 years ago. It was a stuccoed four-plex in Ebisu, next door to Shibuya, and it was pretentiously called "Yamauchi Mansion."

The apartment owner was a doctor named Yamauchi. We remembered him mostly because he held us to the letter of the rental contract when we moved out in late 1965. Jack had already returned to the United States, to Louisville, Kentucky, where the *Courier-Journal* was waiting to put him back to work, and where you would be born 14 months later. Yoshi was preparing to follow him.

Good thing, right? I couldn't have fathered you without her. My daughter, if she had come at all without Yoshi, would have been somebody else. Probably she would not have died. I should not think about these what-ifs. I have lost you, but I am glad I had you for a while, 29 years altogether. I don't want anybody else, even now.

As Jack settled into his writing and editing role in Louisville, a deposit of ¥40,000 was at stake back in Ebisu. That was big money in those days. We hadn't read the contract closely. Dr. Yamauchi had not only read it but written it. Since we were moving out one month short of the contracted 12 months, the good doctor kept our ¥40,000. We never forgave him.

Actually we were not looking today for the Yamauchi Mansion itself. We thought the old apartment house had been swept away in the wake of Tokyo progress, demolished to allow construction of the Yamauchi Medical Center, a multi-story structure within walking distance of the Ebisu train station. That was Yoshi's conclusion after a half-hearted effort to find the four-plex during a 1993 visit to Tokyo. The medical center was there; thus, the apartment house was not, she reasoned, and I had no reason to doubt her reasoning. The basic idea today was to take a photo of the center. *On this commercial spot, back in the Sixties, Jack and Yoshi once lived.* That was all we expected.

At first Yoshi couldn't even find the medical center. She took me through narrow alleys and only slightly wider streets. We found nothing recognizable. I was getting irritated. *How many times in the past four decades has this woman led me on wild goose chases? How many more times would she do it?*

My built-in direction-finder was squawking. I told her we were looking in the wrong area, but it's her damned country, not mine, so I kept following her, grumbling under my breath all the way. Finally, after I insisted on a close inspection of a posted street map, we stumbled on what we were looking for. There was the Yamauchi Medical Center, rising high on a major thoroughfare, and that was enough for Yoshi, who was tiring of the whole thing. *Take a picture, Jackson, and let's go*.

But something was wrong. I had not been here for 34 years, but I knew this was not the right spot. I dragged a reluctant Yoshi up the stairs, and we questioned a doctor and two nurses. We found that old Dr. Yamauchi was still practicing, but his middle-aged son, also a doctor, was running the business now. When the medical people learned what we were after, they directed us to a street two blocks away, and there, at last, was our two-story apartment building, now a place of business instead of homes for the working poor. Yoshi walked past it, but I spotted it right away.

While we were taking photos of the nondescript door leading to what used to be the apartment in which we had lived, a young fashion designer named Yayato Kuratomi came out. His card identified the firm as CODE Inc., Ebisu Parkside Corporation, distributor of unique clothing. We were allowed to enter and take a look around. The apartment serves as a warehouse now. "It's smaller

than I remember," Yoshi said.

In the spring of 1965, Jack and Yoshi threw a wedding party in this modest apartment. Most of Yoshi's family showed up, but they were not thrilled. Without even telling them, the family princess had married a hairy barbarian for Christ's sake, or, more appropriately in Japan, for Buddha's sake. The actual marriage at a Tokyo ward office cost ¥40, or 12½ cents at the exchange rate of the time. The American Embassy charged them 10 whole dollars to register their union.

Anyway, it was a *fait accompli* that could not be easily reversed. Jack was 33 and Yoshi 29, both finished with tiresome bachelorhood forever. Their wild oats had been sown. They would never look back with serious regrets. Unlike couples married in their early twenties, they knew what they were not missing. At age 29 Yoshi was at the peak of her beauty, with many vital decades ahead of her. You were just 29 when you died, unmarried, childless, a pallid corpse, with millenniums of nothing ahead of you. *How I hope the "nothingness" is something more than that! How I hope we will see you again.*

But my thoughts were not morbid as I entered our old apartment. Instead I flashed on a night when Jack and a British journalist were tipsy after closing up the last in a series of bars. *Hashigozake*, such bar hopping is called. The two young men were balanced against each other while removing their shoes in this small vestibule. "Jack?" queried Yoshi from inside the apartment, and she threw open the drapes in a playfully theatrical gesture. *Ta dah!* She had just emerged from a hot bath and was stark naked. Not even a tiny Japanese towel. Kei, you should have seen your mother when she was in her glorious twenties. The Limy surely did. When he left an hour later and thanked *yukata*-clad Yoshi for the hospitality shown to an unexpected guest, he grinned: "I hope to see you again."

I also remembered a time when Yoshi's sisters — Misao, Toshiko and Kazuko — showed up here. When Yoshi was born in 1936, her sisters were 12, 10 and eight years old, with Misao, the oldest, nearing her teens. Then and always, the three big sisters took a maternal interest in baby Yoshi, now Jack's wife. "Where's Yoshi?" the sisters asked. Well, she was where she often was, at a nearby beauty shop, having her long luxurious hair done. Jack didn't know the Japanese phrase for "beauty shop," but he knew the words for "hair" and "shop." Just a matter of putting them together, right? The women would catch his drift.

So Jack replied confidently, proud of his linguistic ingenuity: "Yoshi went to the *kami no ke no mise*." For a second or two the sisters were nonplussed. Then it dawned on them what Jack was trying to say in his pathetic Japanese. Polite as they were, they just couldn't help themselves. They collapsed in laughter. Dear Kazuko, the homely one, even rolled on the floor.

Japanese are often amused when *gaijin* try to speak their language, but some things are funnier than others, and Jack's phraseology was really, really funny. The incident became an Iizuka family legend, told and retold, and old Jackson, back in Japan after all this time, would hear Jack's tortured phrase — "*kami no ke no mise*" — more than once on this trip, with hearty enjoyment all around. Jackson just grinned on behalf of Jack, pleased to be a legend of any kind.

The Japanese language is difficult for someone who grew up in America's English-ingrained Ohio River Valley. The syntax seems forbiddingly unnatural, and the characters, especially the ideographs, appear to be nonsensical doodles. Jack was never very good at it, lacking the gene that makes linguistics easy for some people. He studied the language for a few months over a period of several years, and he could chat comfortably with Japanese bar girls, provided the conversations did not last long enough to get philosophical. And he could give directions to taxi drivers and make change at shops. That was about it.

For Jack, writing and speaking cogent English was hard enough, and much more pertinent to his work. His linguistic skills in Japanese were simply not equal to the task of communicating in a serious manner, and never would be. That's why, when life got complicated as he matured out of his happy-go-lucky bachelorhood, he had to go home, back to America, where English reigned, where he could interview the mayor or other newsworthy personages.

Kei, you studied Japanese and can appreciate Jack's difficulties here. Think about the way we use an English-language dictionary. It is simple for us natives of the English-speaking world. To learn the definition or accurate spelling of a word, we need only a single volume arranged in alphabetical order in 26 categories from A to Z. Our only problem is knowing how to get started if we have no written reference; that is, if we don't know whether the word is spelled "cat" or "kat."

To do the same thing, the Japanese need two volumes. The first is a phonetic dictionary arranged in the hiragana order that all Japanese learn as a childhood litany, just as we learn our ABCs. All across Japan the school kids are chanting: a-i-u-e-o, ka-ki-ku-ke-ko, etc. The other volume is an ideographic or kanji dictionary, a much larger tome arranged in an order that only Japanese and serious foreign scholars can understand.

Hiragana consists of 47 phonetic symbols that resemble in application the 26 letters of the Roman alphabet. Each hiragana character has its place in the Japanese alphabet, just as our letters go from A to Z in a specific order. But hiragana, important as it is in the Japanese language, plays only a peripheral role in

written Japanese. The big guys on paper are kanji — Chinese ideographs adopted and modified by the Japanese around 700 AD. There are 6,000 kanji, maybe more, surely more, and there are times when a Japanese must seek the precise meaning of one. And here he needs the second dictionary, a kanji dictionary.

I asked your mother to show me how the referencing is done. She identified a specific portion of an ideograph, then consulted a table in the kanji dictionary. This led to another page, which led to another page, which led to another page! And finally there it was. Now she knew the meaning of the kanji character and how to pronounce it within its context. It was a tedious process requiring much acquired knowledge. Japanese children must spend considerable time studying their own language, much more than their American counterparts.

We visited Arisugawa Park in Hiro-o next to Ebisu. A pretty lake is fed by a small stream. Ducks, cranes and pigeons populate this small but pleasant place in the center of Tokyo. A high percentage of foreigners with children visit the park, because many diplomats and their families reside nearby. The park was named after a prince of some sort who died at age 60 in 1895. This information came from a placard at a heroic statue monument showing the uniformed prince astride a prancing horse. His magnificent home was once located here. Those were good days, around the turn of the century, if you were born into the right family.

In early afternoon we ate lunch at a famous place in Azabu Juban, near Roppongi, the amusement area where Jack once played when he wasn't editing stories for *Pacific Stars & Stripes* or teaching English to Japanese students. The traditional noodle shop, named Nagasaka, looked just like numerous other Japanese restaurants in teeming Tokyo, but Yoshi assured me it was special and well-known.

Following my wife's lead, I ordered buckwheat noodles on a bamboo rack in a lacquered box, with *tempura* shrimp on the side. Yoshi, who for weeks and months had hungered for "real" Japanese buckwheat noodles, ate a huge amount of the stuff, then polished off half of mine, for which I was grateful. *How this 106-pound woman can eat so much has puzzled me for the 37 years I have known her*.

For me, the greatest thing about this restaurant was the prominent ashtray at every table. One can hardly smoke anywhere in California nowadays. The zealots in charge believe they and other non-smokers will live forever, while we smokers will die in agony sooner rather than later, and they are determined to save us from ourselves, whether we want to be saved or not. I'm a slow eater anyway, but I am especially slow when I can light up, as I could here at the Nagasaka restau-

rant. Yoshi smokes, too, but she inhales her food, so she is always finished eating before I am. “Let’s go,” she said to a husband who would prefer to sit and puff over a cup of hot green tea.

A rare thing this evening: An American from Kentucky was invited to a Japanese home for a formal dinner. It almost never happens, but of course I am part of the Iizuka family now, in a manner of speaking, and so it happened today. Your Aunt Yoko, widow of Tsuneo, lives mostly in her Tokyo home in Shinjuku, about 15 minutes by car from the Keio Plaza Hotel where Yoshi and I were staying. She also has a two-level apartment in Maebashi in Gunma Prefecture near Tsuneo’s Bank of Gunma headquarters.

At one time Tsuneo’s Tokyo house sat alone on a large lot with an impressive garden fronting the street. Then it stood as a traditional Japanese home — *tatami* floors, *shoji* doors and all of that. Now it is modernized, Westernized, with brick on the outside and hardwood floors on the inside. Also, a three-story, 12-unit apartment building has been built where the garden was. The apartments surely provide Yoko with considerable income on top of everything else Tsuneo left her.

Yoko, a couple of years younger than your mother, prepared a marvelous series of Japanese foods — *kaiseki* style, meaning that everything had its own little dish. Your great aunt, Yoko’s mother, Mrs. Yukie Hata, who will turn 90 years old on January 1, 2000, told of witnessing the fiery Tokyo earthquake of 1923 and seeing charred bodies stacked like kindling. The three “boys” were there — Ken Iizuka, 37, a police detective in Saitama Prefecture; Yasuki Iizuka, 36, a sergeant in Japan’s elite 1st Airborne Rangers, and Satoshi Iizuka, 27, who works for Northwest Airlines.

Ken, a rabid baseball fan, visited us last summer, and I took him to a California Angels game in Anaheim. Wonder of wonders, the hopeless Angels were victorious that night, 8-0, and Ken declared he had never seen such fine baseball. Then, after I arranged for this Japanese police officer to tour the Laguna Niguel sheriff’s substation and meet the captain in charge, he became almost absurdly grateful.

Yasuki was with us in Lake Forest last Christmas, his second visit, which inspired us to erect the first Christmas tree since your death. The paratrooper gave me a handsome Zippo lighter decorated with emblems from his military regiment and inscribed with *kanji* that can be translated as “The Finest Beyond Compare.” You always joked that Yasuki’s brother, Satoshi, with his round face and large eyes, looked like a *kokeshi* doll. He still does.

The boys had photos of you and your mother together in Japan, but Yoshi

could not bear to look at them — "Maybe later," she said — so I didn't see them either. The brothers are fine young men who seem genuinely fond of their American uncle. Yoko and Tsuneo did a good job of raising them. Yoko confessed, though, that she is a little worried because none of them are married, nor do they show much interest in taking the plunge. Ken and Yasuki have their own places elsewhere, but all three possess private rooms upstairs at their mother's house. Poor Yoko wants grandchildren.

A simple shrine in honor of Tsuneo sits on a table in the living and dining room. Under Yoko's direction, I lit an incense stick and struck a chime in his memory. Tsuneo was a good man who died too young, at just the time when he was making final preparations to retire from his job as CEO of the notably solid Bank of Gunma, which, unlike other banking empires, remained untouched as Japan's great economic "bubble" burst a decade ago. In an uncertain world, it often pays to be conservative, as your uncle certainly was.

Tsuneo was the eldest son of your late grandfather, Shigenobu Iizuka, and thus was the nominal and spiritual head of the Iizukas of Komochi Village in mountainous central Japan. His death was highly disruptive to the serenity of the surviving Iizukas — his one brother and four sisters — because the ancient Iizuka homestead, where your mother and all the others grew up, suddenly passed into the hands of Yoko, an outsider from the Hata family of Tokyo. All this would become clear later in the trip. It takes a while for me, a *gaijin*, the ultimate outsider, to understand the dynamics of a Japanese family.

A few months before you died, you gave me a video movie, "Pulp Fiction," with its appalling but fascinating morality. A cold-blooded killer named Vincent Vega, portrayed by John Travolta, explains in an opening scene that he has just returned to America from Europe. "They have the same shit we've got, but it's a little different," he says to a killer buddy played by Samuel L. Jackson. Likewise, Japan has the same shit as America, but it's a little different. Carpenter saws cut on the pull stroke, not the push stroke. Dogs go "wan-wan," not bow-wow. Babies are found in the crooks of trees, and storks have nothing to do with it. When you sneeze, someone somewhere is talking about you, and you don't require or expect a "God bless you."

And in Japan the Man in the Moon, for Christ's sake, transmogrifies into a Rabbit, not because the moon looks different but because Japanese see it differently. It is one of those intriguing cultural anomalies. Your mother sees the Rabbit first, as a Japanese should, and then, if she tries real hard, sees the Man that her husband keeps talking about. Same for me, except visa versa, since I am an

American primarily and a Japanese only by long association.

But you, Kei, among the three of us, could see the two lunar images almost simultaneously. You could flick back and forth between the Man and the Rabbit, bringing each into focus at will. It figured. You were half American and half Japanese. Your father showed you the Man in the Moon, your mother showed you the Rabbit, so you could see both equally well throughout your short life.

Let me tell you the best Japanese story I know. It's a true story that happened three centuries ago. Each time I return to Japan, I learn or see something that adds to this fascinating tale. My autumn 2003 visit was no different. In December, in bustling 21st century Tokyo, I walked the path of ancient, righteous warriors who, in 1702, took a well-protected lord's head in a vendetta still glorified in Japanese books, theater and television. But four years earlier, my 1999 journal already contained an overview of the story, which in time got refined into the account below. As always, my Japan journals, collectively entitled *Bittersweet Journey*, are addressed to you, my dead daughter, and when I mention Jack instead of Jackson, I am referring, as you well know, to the young man who would become your father. Jack was a boy you knew only from Jackson's writings, but you preferred him, as do I. If only he were as smart as I am.

Wednesday, Sept. 29, 1999: Yoshi and I visited Sengakuji Temple, where Japan's famous 47 *ronin* of Ako have been resting in peace for nearly 300 years alongside the tomb of Lord Asano. I had not been there since the early Sixties, when young Yoshi guided Jack to this small but popular temple in Tokyo's Takanawa district.

It is difficult to find only a few words to tell this epic Japanese story, which epitomizes *Bushido*, the "Way of Warriors" philosophy that defined the spirit of *samurai* for centuries, before and after the 47 *ronin* thrilled the nation with their vendetta. So I won't even try. I will let the words flow. I once thought I would write a whole book about it, but I got busy with things like marriage and fatherhood and making a living, so I never did.

My book, to be entitled *47 Warriors* or *47 Ronin* or something similar, would have told the tale in English to a fascinated Western world, as my youthful fantasies dictated at that long-ago time. My research — perhaps I should say Jack's research — was left behind when I departed Japan 34 years ago, caught up as I was in more important affairs. Jack would say the world lost a great book. Jackson smiles in fond contempt of his egotistical youth.

Kei, you know the story, because you heard me outline it in reference to my

decades-old Oishi Kuranosuke *hakata* doll, which you purloined as an attractive conversation piece for your San Diego apartment many years ago. Perhaps you liked the doll because it belonged to Jack, who was more interesting than Jackson. I retrieved the intricately decorated plaster-of-Paris figurine for safe-keeping when we closed your apartment several months before you died. It was too delicate to be put into storage along with the rest of your possessions.

Jack, Jackson and Kei's Oishi *hakata* doll, with its damaged feet.

Both feet on the 12-inch-high doll were broken in your care, but I repaired them as best I could, and the doll stands now in your old room at our Lake Forest home, complete with the long and short swords of the traditional *samurai* warrior of olden times. It is an idealized version of Oishi, patterned after the larger-than-life statue that rises majestically at the gate to Sengakuji Temple. In truth, Oishi was homely, even ugly, but his legions of Japanese fans prefer to see him as handsome, and thus he will always be.

Let's set the stage. It is almost 300 years ago, the 14th year of the peaceful Genroku era, or 1701 as Westerners calculate calendar years. The seat of national power is Edo, which will become Tokyo in about seven more generations. A *Shogun*, or barbarian-conquering generalissimo, rules the country, which has been unified and mostly peaceful for nearly a hundred years. His *daimyo*, or feudal lords, more than 200 of them, hold fiefdoms from one end of Japan to the other. All are *samurai*, members of the ruling warrior class, and all employ lesser *samurai* to protect their castle towns and administer the affairs of Tokugawa government. All of them, lords and retainers alike, pay ceremonial homage to the essentially powerless Emperor in Kyoto near Osaka.

West of Kyoto, about 385 miles from Edo, lies the sleepy Ako castle town ruled by the popular Lord Asano Naganori. His chief councilor, Oishi, is destined to become the primary hero of this tale, which eventually will be called *Chushingura*, as taken from the title of a famous and highly successful puppet play written in the mid-1700s. If we need a modern American analogy, this one might shape up thusly: Edo was Washington/New York, while Kyoto/Osaka was Chicago, and Lord Asano was mayor of St. Louis, silly as that sounds.

The Ako lord was called to Edo to participate in ceremonies involving an

annual visit by envoys of the Emperor. He was to take instruction from Lord Kira Yoshinaka, the grand master of ceremonies at the capital, and that was where the trouble started.

Every book about Japan must, at some point, make a tiresome explanation of Japanese proper names. Discerning readers like you, Kei, will notice my sudden switch to the Japanese style of rendering names. By tradition, family names come before given names. This is as true today as it was 300 years ago, or a thousand years ago for that matter. Your late grandfather, scion of the Iizuka clan in the Komochi Mountains, was Iizuka Shigenobu. Your mother, before she married Jack, was Iizuka Yoshiko. Your cousin, the Japanese paratrooper, is Sergeant First Class Iizuka Yasuki. Likewise, 300 years ago, it was Kira Yoshinaka, not Yoshinaka Kira. Throughout this book, I render the names of 20th century people in the Western manner — Shigenobu Iizuka, Yoshiko Iizuka, Yasuki Iizuka — while rendering the names of historical personages in the proper way. Tokugawa Ieyasu, who unified Japan 400 years ago and established the longstanding Tokugawa Shogunate, cannot be called Ieyasu Tokugawa. It just doesn't sound right, and I am too much of a Japanese to permit it in any book I write.

By all accounts, Lord Kira was a greedy peacock puffed up with his own importance. He was a *hatamoto*, a high-ranking *samurai* bureaucrat whose income was less than half that of the *daimyo* to whom he gave ceremonial instruction. He expected expensive gifts, bribes really, from lords who sipped from his cup of knowledge and thereby learned where to stand, what to do and what to say when the Emperor's representatives entered the Grand State Hall in Edo Castle, the very heart of Tokugawa Shogunate government.

Lord Asano, performing this rather onerous duty for the first time, was surprised, even shocked, to discover that another *daimyo*, younger and less wealthy, had bestowed on Kira gifts of enormous value. Asano was atuned to the imperial niceties of Kyoto rather than the political culture of Edo. He consulted with high officials. *Was such generosity expected of him? If so, he could easily afford it. He was just a country boy who wanted to do things right in the big city.* "No, no, no," he was told. "Government officials don't take bribes."

Politicians are the same around the world. They always deny culpability as they continue to do culpable things. So Asano, naive to the point of stupidity, gave the greedy Kira a box of dried bonito, a traditional gift of respect between equals. One would smile cynically if the consequences were not so tragic. In unsophisticated innocence, Asano had sewn the seeds of his own destruction, his house's

extinction and his most loyal soldiers' deaths.

Kira, spiteful in his disappointment, made Asano's life miserable. He ignored the Lord of Ako while showing elaborate favoritism to the young *daimyo* who had paid the expected bribe. When the frustrated Asano gritted his teeth and politely asked a question or two, he was answered with imperious scorn only slightly veiled as condescension. Finally, on the very day the imperial envoys were to arrive at Edo Castle, Kira issued one taunt too many, this one in the presence of the junior *daimyo*.

Ignited by embarrassment, Asano's bottled-up rage exploded. He drew his sword and slashed his tormentor. In petrified horror, Kira froze like a frightened rabbit, which probably saved his life. Any movement at this time surely would have been fatal. An angry *samurai* lord acting in defense of his dignity figured to be the last thing Kira would ever see on this earth.

Instead, as Asano tensed to deliver the mortal blow, he managed to jerk himself back from madness. The sight of the cringing bureaucrat, an obviously unworthy foe, brought him to his senses. He lowered his sword in the instant and certain knowledge that his grand life was over. He had drawn a weapon in anger at Edo Castle, even spilling blood. There was no going back, and he quietly and unrepentantly accepted his fate.

The *Shogun*, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, the fifth to hold the title since Tokugawa Ieyasu founded the dynasty, was outraged. The sentence was swift and sure. Death for Asano, abolishment of the house of Asano, confiscation of Ako Castle and all Asano lands. The lord would die, and his family and 300 retainers would be left in ruins. So decreed the *Shogun*, and so it would be. Asano was escorted to an Edo mansion to await execution that very day. He was transported in a net-covered palanquin like a common criminal.

After a short ceremony in which a government official solemnly sentenced Asano to *seppuku*, the lord was led to a garden, where all preparations had been made. This alone was a departure from custom. Never before had a *daimyo* been required to commit suicide in the open air. But it was not a time for protest. It was time to die, after only 34 summers. Asano calmly sat on rug-covered matting, surrounded by cherry trees in fading bloom. He asked for paper and a writing brush, and he composed his death poem.

Frailer far than the tender flowers
That are soon scattered by the wind,
Must I now bid a last farewell
And leave the genial spring behind?

The answer to his poetic question was yes. The next *seppuku* step called for Asano to take a dagger and stab himself in the belly, the center of one's soul as Japanese then believed. He was not expected to actually kill himself. As soon as honor was satisfied with the shedding of blood by his own hand, an executioner standing behind him would lop off his head with a long sword. But when Asano merely reached for the dagger, the executioner reacted prematurely, slicing off the lord's head before honorable blood could be spilled. It was the final, intolerable disgrace. Asano had not only been goaded into a criminal act punishable by death and loss of his estates, but his *seppuku* was botched.

Asano's retainers pondered the matter. With the death of their lord, they were now masterless *samurai*, or *ronin* as masterless *samurai* were called, and they had to abandon Ako Castle and scratch out livings elsewhere. The more they thought about it, the madder they got. Under the leadership of their chief, Oishi, they plotted revenge on Lord Kira, who still lived and enjoyed himself while their master lay in his tomb.

Lord Kira was no fool. He suspected as much. To throw Kira's spies off guard, Oishi divorced his wife and pretended to be a drunkard and womanizer, a worthless ex-*samurai*. On his orders, the swords of his loyal followers were allowed to get rusty, an unpardonable sin. *Samurai* from other clans, smug in their assumed superiority, figuratively and literally spat on the Ako soldiers. One of these scornful swordsmen would later kill himself in atonement before the tombstone of the Ako *ronin* he insulted. *Samurai* did things like that in those days.

The clay feet of our heroes always fascinate us. Their weaknesses, real or imagined, make them more human and we feel closer somehow. George Washington's alleged marijuana cultivation, Thomas Jefferson's slave mistress, Bill Clinton's succulent intern and Oishi Kuranosuke's blatant debauchery. Japanese historians still debate the latter. Was Oishi truly faking it when he drank and whored around while planning the avenging strike on Kira? Was it all a charade to lull the powerful lord into sleepy overconfidence, or was it simpler than that? Perhaps Oishi just loved hot sakè and golden geisha asses, and the vendetta, with death waiting at the end, offered a good excuse for indulging himself while he still could.

It was even suggested that the 18th century playwrights who fashioned the famous "Chushingura" puppet play nearly a half century after Oishi went to his grave were no different than their 20th century counterparts. Free at last to tell the story in the flimsy disguise of fiction, they quite naturally sought a commercial

success. Oishi's scandalous behavior would be more theatrically appealing if he were furthering the vendetta, rather than merely gratifying his primal urges. In Japan or America, if legend doesn't match history or common sense, go with the legend, which always rings true, especially if it has been repeated often enough. But in the end, what does it really matter? Around the wide world and through the human ages, military officers excessively fond of wine, women and song have distinguished themselves in battle. The character flaw, if that's what it is, does not relate to heroism.

In December 1702, during dark wee hours in snow-covered Edo, the loyal band of Ako *ronin,* now reduced to only 47, attacked Kira's mansion under Oishi's personal leadership. With their freshly sharpened and gleaming swords, they killed 17 of Kira's guardsmen, while sparing the women and servants. Although readily available, firearms were not used, because this was not the "Way of Warriors." Surprisingly, after this pitched battle in dark interiors and courtyards, all the *ronin* were still alive, although several were wounded.

The *ronin* searched the huge mansion and seized the cowardly Lord Kira found hiding in a charcoal shed, and summarily beheaded him. Carrying Kira's bagged head atop a spear, they crossed Edo's Sumida River and marched about six miles to Sengakuji Temple. They carefully washed the head at the temple's well. Then they presented the presentable head while kneeling before the tomb of Lord Asano, who had been dead and buried for a year and nine months. Some sobbed, unable to hold back their emotions. *Master, you have been avenged!* Immediately afterward, they surrendered to authorities and were lodged under house arrest at the mansions of various *daimyo* in Edo. As a precursor to the post-mortem reverence that would come, they were treated more like honored guests than prisoners awaiting sentencing.

Politically, the all-powerful Tokugawa Shogunate found itself in an unaccustomed semi-tough spot. As gossip does in every capital of the world, the news spread like wildfire in the city of Edo. And Edo was not a small city even then. Its population totaled well more than a million. People high and low saw the 47 *ronin* as heroes, admirably loyal to their wronged lord at a time when traditional values seemed to be crumbling. These men did more than mouth platitudes! They were *gishi*, or "righteous warriors," acting in the finest tradition of *samurai*.

In Shogunate circles and even common bathhouses, debates over the appropriate fate of Oishi and his soldiers were passionate. But after all was said and considered, authorities were left with the undeniable fact that a serious crime had been committed. A public official had been assassinated. So the 47 *ronin* of Ako

were sentenced to death.

One by one the *ronin* ceremoniously killed themselves, committing *seppuku* on a grand scale. *Life is light as a feather, duty is heavy as a mountain*. This *samurai* incantation was still recited more than 200 years later by *kamikaze* pilots flying dutifully to their deaths in attacks on American warships. All the Ako *ronin* died except a young man whom Oishi dispatched to report the victory to the beautiful Lady Asano and others of the dispersed clan. The warriors were buried in neat rows next to Lord Asano's Sengakuji tomb.

When the young messenger returned to the capital and announced he was ready to join his comrades in martyrdom, the government said "Forget it," because public feelings on the matter were running too high. *Let's get this affair behind us. Go away!* So the 47th member of the band lived to the ripe age of 82, honored throughout his long life. Today his remains lie elsewhere, but his tombstone stands proud with the others at Sengakuji. After all, he was one of the famous 47.

The museum at Sengakuji, next to the graveyard, contains clothing worn by the Ako *ronin*, statues of each of them, weapons, battle armor, letters and poems written by Oishi and others. In the cemetery itself, the tombs of Lord Asano and his lady rise large and prominent as befits their rank, and the smaller tombstones of Asano's loyal soldiers stand alongside in military order. Incense still burns, blanketing the monuments with wisps of pungent smoke. Flowers are still placed, especially at the corner tombs of Oishi, the admired 45-year-old leader, and his 16-year-old son, the youngest of the 47. And one *ronin* known for his fondness for *sakè* still has a fresh cup. All of this after three centuries.

Someone who doesn't know me well might think that I, an American with little direct contact with Japan for decades, would be required to do huge amounts of research to even outline the story of the 47 *ronin* of Ako. Actually not, or hardly not. The tale is very familiar to me, and not just because I did considerable research as a young man named Jack. The Japanese themselves never tire of the *Chushingura* drama with its huge cast of characters and intricate plot twists.

Each of the *ronin*, ranging in age from 16 to 76, has his own story to tell, and that story may focus peripherally on his wife and/or lover, his son and/or daughter, his mother, his father, or still other influences that might have pulled him away from fatal duty but did not. Many movies, television shows and books, recounting the vendetta from beginning to end, are produced in Japan for an eager audience. To this day, the famous *kabuki* play "Kanadehon Chushingura" is performed in Tokyo annually, beginning on December 14, the anniversary of Kira's beheading, and continuing until year's end. Since I am a Japanese by marriage,

much of this has rubbed off on me over the decades.

Fast forward to the spring of Year 2000. Kei, you didn't think I was writing the entirety of *Bittersweet Journey*'s Part I in 1999, did you? A book like this, chronological in essence as I explore your maternal homelands, inevitably draws ideas and information from numerous sources. As I was working on the book one Saturday night in Lake Forest in Year 2000, Yoshi called up to my above-the-garage workshop: "*Chushingura* is on!" So I stopped what I was doing, powered up the 25-inch TV set I inherited from you, and switched to Cox Cable Channel 12. There was the 43rd weekly episode of a series called *Genroku Ryoran*, or "Peaceful Blossoms in Turmoil," complete with English subtitles so that American ignoramuses like me could follow it.

The 47 *ronin* of Ako are approaching that snow-blanketed December night when they will take Lord Kira's head. The whole thing is Shakespearean in scope. I know what's going to happen, but I can't wait until next Saturday, and the one after that, and the one after that. We Japanese, even adopted Japanese like me, don't want the epic to end, but when it finally does, we are comforted by the certainty that another version will come soon.

There were only two times in Japanese history when *Chushingura*, or "Treasury of Loyal Retrainers," could not be told and retold. First, the Shogunate government of the early 18th century would not allow it, even when the story was related as fiction, because it threatened the established order. Second, General Douglas MacArthur, Japan's final "*Shogun*," banned it outright during the American military occupation after World War II, because it might threaten the desired postwar order.

It was said that a jingoistic Japanese rice farmer, predictably respectful of those in charge, gave his opinion of MacArthur the *Shogun*: "Emperor Hirohito couldn't have chosen a better man." According to the general's staff, the *Chushingura* tale glorified militarism and was feudalistic in its endorsement of such outmoded concepts as honor and loyalty. But despite all that, the story survives in the hearts of Japanese everywhere, and is told and retold still.

Your Aunt Hideko, wife of Hitoshi, stepped on a wayward screw when she accompanied us to a Kichijoji *sushi* shop tonight. The five-eighths-inch screw went right through the sole of her shoe, hobbling her. I tried to twist it out with my fingers, but it wouldn't budge. Later, a pair of pliers at Junko's house took care of the matter. Junko, 34, the oldest of Hideko's two daughters, gave first aid to her mother's foot.

We had a nice visit with Hitoshi and his family. Now that Tsuneo is dead,

Hitoshi is Yoshi's only brother. He is almost exactly my age, just two months younger. When Jack was a colicky baby in rural Kentucky, Hitoshi was born in the equally rural Komochi Mountains of central Japan, the second son and fifth surviving child of Shigenobu and Mieko Iizuka, your grandparents. The very last Iizuka offspring, your mother, joined the family four years later. She was found in the crook of a tree, as Japanese tell inquisitive children.

Hitoshi has been retired for several years, while I continue to toil away at the *Los Angeles Times*. He was a slick salesman in the truck division of Isuzu Motors, and eventually rose to division president. He is something of a dandy even today. Fashionable clothing is his signature. *I want you to dress like a gentleman, like Hitoshi,* Yoshi often says to her indifferent husband.

I last saw Hitoshi 20 years ago when he visited us for a few days in Lake Forest after a business trip to Detroit and other automotive hot spots. You, a 12-year-old, interviewed him for a school report, with Yoshi translating. The topic of your report was your uncle's boyhood experiences in Japan during World War II. He was 13 years old, as Jack was, when the Pacific War ended with Japan's unconditional surrender in 1945, and when American B-29 bombers stopped flying overhead.

Daughter Mariko, who greeted us at the airport two days ago, lives with her parents, Hitoshi and Hideko, in a two-story Kichijoji home adjoining a small public park. Almost all Japanese houses are two-story. Land is too precious for American ranch-style homes that spread their single stories all over the place. The parkland, sold to the City of Kichijoji by Hideko's father many years ago, confers a certain spaciousness to the Iizuka family property. Mariko is still single at age 30, working for a maritime insurance company in Shinjuku, but she will be married in Osaka next spring. Yoshi plans to fly alone to Japan to attend Mariko's wedding, leaving me behind once again. "It's a family affair," she explained. "Oh," said I, suddenly chopped liver.

Hitoshi picked us up at the Kichijoji train station and drove us through typically narrow streets and frighteningly narrow alleys. I admired his driving skills as he sped along without hitting anything. At his home, Junko's six-year-old daughter was practicing for my arrival. "My-name-is-Aiyako," she blurted in English as soon as I entered Hitoshi's sitting room. The darling little girl was much relieved. Now that she had uttered those strange words to a strange-looking *gaijin*, she could forget them, which she promptly did.

I met Aiyako's younger brother Yusuke when we retired to Junko's house to remove that stubborn screw from Hideko's shoe. The boy didn't know what to make of me, an old man with funny blue eyes who spoke gibberish. Hitoshi,

father of two girls and grandpa to another, adores Grandson Yusuke, his first male descendent, who was a long time coming. Older brother Tsuneo, by contrast, sired three sons, Buddha be praised, but he was denied the joy of a daughter, and death denied him even the prospect of a granddaughter. Maybe that's why Tsuneo was so fond of you, his niece, daughter of his youngest and perhaps favorite sister.

Your Aunt Hideko's younger brother, Masayuki Omino, along with his wife Tomoko, came over to greet us and bestow gifts. They live next door. Hideko and Masayuki's late father owned this entire parcel of Kichijoji land in suburban Tokyo, on which his son and daughter now make their homes next to the park he sold to the city for a good price.

The Kichijoji land sale stands in stark contrast to the habits of Yoshi's father, who often donated land and resources to the government in the war-torn 1940s, never even thinking about selling anything. To this day, Mr. Iizuka's civic generosity during the Pacific War and afterward inspires varying degrees of whispered scorn among his in-laws and some of his children, who might be even richer if it had been otherwise.

Masayuki and his wife are free spirits of sorts, much more adventurous and self-sufficient than most Japanese couples. They operate an exclusive coffee shop at their home, more as a hobby than anything else. Masayuki doesn't seem to work anywhere. He probably inherited an Omino bundle in the grand old father-to-son tradition. His sister Hideko, after all, was just a woman, and she would be taken care of, if necessary, by her younger brother. Japanese inheritances always follow the oldest testosterone.

While vacationing in California some years ago, the Ominos found their own way to our Lake Forest home in Orange County's Saddleback Valley, an impressive feat for most Japanese, who generally find themselves hopelessly lost outside Japan. Even so, another time, Yoshi and I had to go to their rescue. Masayuki and Tomoko, rich but thrifty, were stranded at Disneyland in the worst cut-rate rental car I had ever seen. We abandoned the beat-up lemon, and I drove them to Los Angeles International Airport, arriving just in time for their return flight to Tokyo.

Within easy walking distance of Hitoshi's Kichijoji home is the apartment house where Jack lived when he was a student at International Christian University in 1958-59. This was several years before he met Yoshi. Short of money as usual, he rented an eight-mat, second-floor kitchenette apartment with a toilet down a polished hallway and a public bathhouse down the street. Windows looked out on a spreading cherry blossom tree and a sea of blue-tile roofs. It was Jack's

first Japan visit as a civilian, after he got out of the Navy and finished up some postgraduate work at Indiana University.

A young Japanese woman named Momoko, shapely and very pretty, took care of him. She cooked for him, did laundry for him and loved him as he attended classes, taught English and launched a magazine. He had known her since his Yokosuka days, when he was a naval officer aboard the USS Colahan. She followed him to Tokyo's Kichijoji, hoping for an endless relationship that never happened. To Jack's mild credit, he suffered with guilt when he left her in tears.

During a childhood visit to Evansville, Indiana, you saw a large framed oil painting in your grandmother's back bedroom. It depicted a kneeling figure in kimono, a Japanese woman who was not your mother. She was Momoko, Jack's long-ago lover. The portrait was a surprise gift from Momoko, who had conspired with an artist whom Jack met on the freighter that carried him to Japan.

The artist, an American abstract painter, was responding to the seductive call of the Japanese islands, much as Jack was doing. His goal was to steep himself in Japanese culture and painting techniques. Aboard the steamship and afterward in Tokyo, usually over large bottles of Japanese beer, he passionately defended his inclination toward abstraction in the face of Jack's stubborn contention that abstract painting was the last refuge of those who could not draw recognizable pictures. Streaks and blotches were not Jack's idea of art. In the decades since, Jackson has mellowed somewhat, but not by much.

Momoko told little white lies to Jack so that she, dressed in kimono, could slip secretly across Tokyo and pose for the painting. The artist, donating his time and talent, was motivated not only by his friendship with Jack but by a desire to show him that he, like the "real" artists in Jack's reactionary noggin, could do conventional work as well. The finished portrait was quite good, all in all, but Jack didn't think it looked like the lovely woman he knew, which confirmed his suspicion that the artist had spent too much time on blotches.

You and my present-day friends, knowing Yoshi, can easily understand why this ornately framed portrait, handsome as it is, resides today in your Aunt Faye's Evansville home, now that your grandmother is gone, and not on a wall in our Lake Forest house. It would take a more tolerant wife than Yoshi to countenance a prominent daily reminder of her husband's old flame. Some things are best left behind.

In retirement, Hitoshi arranges tours for the older folks in his Kichijoji community, so he was pleased to help us get reservations at Kamikochi, the acknowledged "Yosemite of Japan." The task was not as simple as it sounds.

Yoshi and I wanted to stay at the popular Kamikochi Imperial Hotel mountain lodge, a Western-style structure that guards a spectacular river canyon in western Nagano Prefecture.

Starting at midnight on the minute when the calendar turned to March 1, Kamikochi reservations were accepted for the entire season, up until November when heavy snows closed down the Japan Alps wilderness resort. Within a mere two or three days, the Imperial Hotel and most other Kamikochi lodges were booked solid. On our behalf, Hitoshi started telephoning at the stroke of midnight last spring. Two hours later, after swearing at numerous busy signals, he got through and made arrangements for us. Yoshi and I will check into the exclusive and expensive Kamikochi Imperial Hotel a week from now, and we will relay Hitoshi's regards to the hotel's manager, with whom he has had dealings before.

Thursday, Sept. 30: When I want to impress someone with my ability to speak the language of Japan, I say "*Ishi bashi wo tataite watarimasu*." It slips off my tongue with ease because Jack once embedded it solidly in memory so that *he* could impress people. The phrase literally means "Knock on even a stone bridge before crossing," but it is best translated idiomatically: "Look before you leap." Japanese are always surprised I know this common expression. Today I learned another saying that I like even more. It was used by a middle-aged woman serving as our guide on a "Dynamic Sunrise Tour" of Tokyo. The saying was *Ichi go ichi e*, meaning that everything is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, that nothing once enjoyed or endured can be recreated exactly. So enjoy the moment, always, *always!*

I appreciated the wisdom in those four pregnant words, but I could not thoroughly appreciate today's experience of traveling by bus to various Tokyo places, even if it was a once-in-a-lifetime happening. I wasn't feeling well. Too much gold-flaked *sake* last night. I blamed my brother-in-law Hitoshi, who kept filling my cup. But that, too, was *Ichi go ichi e*.

The bus took us to the usual places, including the Tokyo Tower, a replica of France's Eiffel Tower built when Jack was a student in Japan in the Fifties. [Check date, Jackson.] The top of the tower provides a splendid view of the sprawling city. The tour's climax was a Sumida River cruise. We steamed under all the famous bridges of Tokyo, including the Ryogoku bridge that the 47 *ronin* of Ako crossed, carrying Kira's head to their master's tomb. The Ryogoku is modern now, concrete and steel like all the others, but it still has the same name it had 300 years ago, when wooden planks and supporting timbers were good enough. [Ryogoku bridge? No, the *ronin* crossed another, I think.]

The tour boat's last stop was Asakusa, which offers the ambience of old Edo. Your mother and I were hot and semi-exhausted. The humidity was high, even this late in the season, and I was mopping myself with a handkerchief, a gift from Junko. We dropped into a small shop for a strawberry *kakigori*, a flavored shaved ice dish. In more than three decades in America, poor Yoshi has occasionally sought out the American equivalent, seeking a nostalgic taste from her childhood. Always she was disappointed, but this *kakigori*, in the heart of Old Japan, was just right, marvelously refreshing, and nobody cared at all when we lit up cigarettes.

Yoshi is seen as a foreigner in her native land. Japanese somehow sense she is not one of them. While we were in Asakusa, a rickshaw hustler approached her, and in broken English he offered a sightseeing tour with English commentary. He didn't see me, lurking behind as usual. This kind of thing happens often. Yoshi doesn't look American or European, of course, but with her Roman nose and long, straight legs and Western manners and dress, she doesn't look Japanese either. Shop girls compliment her skill at Japanese — *Nihongo ga jozu desu* — and they ask her where she is from. "*Amerika kara*," Yoshi says, because America is her home and American has been her nationality for almost a quarter of a century. And then she tells them she grew up in Japan before marrying that *gaijin* over there. *Ah, that explains it*.

Maybe this is true for everyone who leaves his homeland and stays away. Some years ago I visited Evansville, which lies on the banks of the Ohio. I grew up there, within sight of my native Kentucky across the wide river. My spiritual roots cling stubbornly to the rich soil of the Ohio River Valley and the faint footprints of my youth.

"Where are you from," a stranger asked.

"California," I replied.

"Ah yes, I was sure you were not from around here."

Back in 1962 — *God, 37 years ago!* — Jack was working as a general assignment reporter and movie columnist for the *Asahi Evening News*, an English-language subsidiary of the giant *Asahi Shimbun.* His favorite hangout was Manos Russian Restaurant in Shibuya, up a narrow stairway near the train station. It was owned and operated by a Greek-American known as Charlie Manos, a burly, mustashioed and friendly man.

Charlie's surname was not really Manos. Instead it was a Greek name that sounded like the Japanese word for medicine, *kusuri.* A long-time resident of Japan, Charlie wore a handsome ring with a *kusuri* ideograph design. But for

the sake of simplicity and to avoid confusion in the minds of his customers, he answered to the name Manos, identifying himself with his popular restaurant.

For one reason or another, the Manos bar and restaurant attracted an international clientele — foreigners living and working in Tokyo, tourists who had seen temples until they were sick of them, American military personnel looking for girls or simply seeking a watering hole with a Western flavor. And of course there was a coterie of young Japanese women, mostly family black sheep who, again for one reason or another, were attracted to Western men, much to the dismay of their tradition-laced parents, if indeed their mothers and fathers even suspected that their tender offspring were associating with hairy barbarians.

A strikingly beautiful girl caught Jack's eye. Occasionally she would make an appearance at Manos, and she was always the center of attention. Jack might be eating borscht in a booth, conversing with friends, and he would find his eyes flitting to the crowded little bar where this intoxicating young woman was perched on a stool, perfect legs crossed, surrounded by fawning men, chatting in English with surprising skill, showing off with cosmopolitan elan. To Jack, she seemed unapproachable, haughty in her grandeur, a gorgeous butterfly whose persona caused other winged creatures to grow pale. Difficult to catch, impossible to mount in Jack's personal trophy case.

She was Yoshiko Iizuka, 26 years old, an Aoyama University graduate working as a tourist guide. Highly proficient in English, she was usually assigned to English-speaking *gaijin* groups — British, Australian, Canadian, American. The tourists often wished to deviate from the tour, to see a bit of Japanese nightlife, and Yoshi would take them to Manos, where she received cozy kickbacks from Charlie.

But it was not just business that brought her there. She enjoyed the place. It appealed to her rebel nature. She was the spoiled youngest child of Shigenobu Iizuka, scion of a Gunma Prefecture *samurai* family, and she had been educated in Christian schools and tainted, some might say, by Western culture.

Jack learned later, much later, that Yoshi had noticed him, too. She had watched with disapproval as Jack dallied with a young hoofer of shady reputation, an ex-Las Vegas showgirl. And why wouldn't she notice him? Jack was a 30-year-old newspaperman with cleancut features and a dazzling smile, tall enough in Japan, even at 5-foot-8, to look down with blue eyes into the brown ones of curious Japanese women . . . an eligible bachelor, a former Navy officer, a rather well-known member of Tokyo's cohesive international community, where, seemingly, everybody knew everybody else. This was Jack's second civilian sojourn in Tokyo, following three lengthy military visits to Yokosuka, the huge Navy base

down the Tokyo Bay coast. By this time he was an "Old Japan Hand" whose association with the country stretched back seven years.

But Jack and Yoshi might never have come together if Jack had not dropped into Manos for a late lunch on a day when he was scheduled to attend a preview screening of "The Hustler," a new movie starring Paul Newman as a pool shark. There were no other customers that early afternoon, but Jack, who liked to read and eat in isolation, a bad habit inherited a few years later by Jackson, didn't care. In this bustling capital city, he found solitary contentment in nooks and crannies, often in Frank Lloyd Wright's old Imperial Hotel, within easy walking distance of the *Asahi Evening News* offices, which at that time were tucked beneath the railroad tracks near Yurakucho station. On this day he would find respite in the empty Shibuya restaurant, alone with his thoughts and whatever book he was carrying around with him.

Then, when he least expected it, a gift from the gods washed onto his deserted island in the midst of teeming Tokyo. Yoshi, enticing as always, came in, suddenly accessible. There was no one except Jack to interact with. She was wearing a light wool two-piece dress, moss green.

Well, hello, they said, changing their lives forever.

Kei, you cried when you read an early version of this Jack-meets-Yoshi story in "Dear Jack." I was touched by your tears, but I am sure you know that your father, sitting at a computer in his workshop in 1999, could not possibly remember what your mother was wearing on a particular day, even a special day, in 1962. He could not do it after 37 days, much less 37 years, and he would have trouble after 37 hours. But your mother remembers, and I am willing to take her word for it, although even she must contend with memory neutrons that bounce this way and that. Maybe, she admits, the moss green outfit was not donned until she accompanied Jack to "The Hustler" screening that evening. Or was the screening the next evening, not that night? That's the way memory goes.

But this was not a whirlwind courtship. Jack and Yoshi met in June 1962, and they would not marry until March 1965 when he was 33 and she was 29. Nearly three years of getting to know one another, of parting and reunion, before starting out together on a lifelong path. By the time they were married, Charlie had moved the Manos restaurant to Akasaka, a more lively section of Tokyo, and a few years later he opened a second Manos in Asakusa, where Jack and Yoshi stood today, near the famous Kaminarimon Gate with its humongous paper lantern, where lovers meet.

Kei, did you admire this transition from the past to the present? You were a good writer and could appreciate such techniques. My techniques are no better than those of many, but they are effective in conveying my thoughts without too much confusion, and that's what a writer always tries to do.

After all those years Jack and Yoshi were nearly unrecognizable, especially 67-year-old Jackson, but they were still in love, despite everything that had happened, most especially your death. Yoshi, anguished over the loss of her only child, blamed Jackson for being too permissive. If he had fully supported her strict Japanese notions of how a young woman should conduct herself, you would still be alive, she believed. And Jackson in his guilt could not thoroughly absolve himself. In his mind, he had violated the 11th Commandment, proclaimed on a tablet that Moses missed on Mount Sinai. *A father must take care of his daughter, keep her safe, until she no longer needs his protection.*

If something bad happens in our lives, surely it could have been avoided if things had been handled a little differently. Your father was still flagellating himself, while stoically enduring occasional barbs from your tearful mother. *You killed Kei!* It was a cruel allegation that hurt. But in the end, each other was all Jackson and Yoshi had now, and all they would ever have, and they were somewhat sadly, somewhat bitterly making the best of it, one lonely step at a time.

Since we were in the neighborhood, we decided to drop into the Asakusa Manos. It was not the actual restaurant where we met, but the name offered pleasant associations to a time when we were young and everything was before us. The place was easy to find because Yoshi had a map showing the locations of popular Tokyo restaurants. Since she can't make heads or tails of even a crystal clear map, she handed it to me, noting once again that I was still good for something.

I led her up a little alley and found Charlie's No. 2 restaurant. Unfortunately it was closed until 5 p.m., still a couple of hours away. But Yoshi beat on the door and the manager came out. She chatted with him for a while and learned the news. Charlie Manos died about eight years ago, five years before you did, and the two restaurants were now operated by his in-laws. *Too bad,* we said politely. Nobody's death really shocks us anymore. We went on our way.

At a tiny cutlery shop behind Kaminarimon Gate, we purchased an expensive kitchen knife that promised the precision of a *samurai* sword. The shop owner put a keen edge on the blade. He used a natural sharpening stone that looked very much like the one given to me, many years ago, by Dr. Hideyo Takai, your uncle by marriage to your Aunt Kazuko. The doctor owns and operates a

large medical clinic in Shibukawa.

The doctor's gift stone simply amazed me. I was already familiar with artificial Japanese water stones and their ability to put a marvelous edge on a set of fine rosewood-handled chisels that Yoshi bought for me at a Ginza tool shop on an early trip to Japan. But Dr. Takai's gift, a natural stone mined near Nara, gave those same chisels a mirror bevel the likes of which I had never seen. It figured, actually. The doctor used such water stones to sharpen his surgical knives, which required levels of sharpness well above that of mere woodworking tools. I will thank him in person when I see him in a couple of days.

Friday, Oct. 1: During Jack's early visits to Japan, when he was communications officer of the *USS Colahan* in the Fifties, the Japanese wanted no contact at all with anything nuclear. If the U.S. Navy allowed a nuclear-powered warship to enter Yokosuka, hordes of screaming Japanese would protest at the gates to the naval base, and would sometimes keep an annoyed and randy Lieutenant Junior Grade Jack Sellers from getting his ashes hauled.

The Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs were still fresh in their minds. But even more on their minds, as the years passed, was prosperity and the whole business of raising themselves from the devastation of World War II. Now, in 1999, there were 51 nuclear power plants scattered across the main islands of Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu and Hokkaido, and perhaps 20 more plants were on the drawing board. They provided 37% of Japan's electricity. The nation's general prosperity probably wouldn't have been possible without them.

Yesterday, in Ibaraki Prefecture northeast of Tokyo, Japan suffered its worst nuclear accident so far. Believe it or not, workers mixed uranium by hand in stainless steel buckets to save time and meet deadlines. The ensuing nuclear reaction exposed more than 400 people to radiation. One man died, and another would die later. It was feared that easterly winds were carrying the radiation to neighboring Tochigi Prefecture.

This morning Yoshi and I journeyed to Tochigi, to visit Haruko Nakamura, a friend who once lived in Mission Viejo near our California home. Nobody was concerned about yesterday's upwind nuclear accident. The government had announced that everything was under control, that there was no danger. Japanese, always respectful of authority, believe what their politicians tell them. That is their strength, that is their weakness.

Kei, you never met Mrs. Nakamura, and she saw you in the flesh only once, when you lay in your coffin, but she shed many tears over you in sympathy for Yoshi, a longtime close friend. She and her husband moved back to Japan a year

or two ago. They live now in a handsome house in Utsunomiya, with their three dachshunds, while their son works as an architect in Portugal and their daughter as a translator in the United States. Haruko's husband, Yasuhiro, is a top executive of an international bakery equipment firm.

We had only a few hours to spend with Haruko. She took us to a traditional *tofu* restaurant called Gassan, or "Moon Mountain." A maze of polished hardwood hallways was flanked by *shoji* doors opening into private *tatami* dining rooms. Happily, for me at least, our low table spanned a sunken area in the floor, so I could sit comfortably on the *tatami* with my old legs in the "normal" position.

The appetizer was a five-bean salad. I don't mean five types of beans mixed together. I mean *five* beans, arranged by size on a narrow dish. The biggest was a purple flower bean, the largest bean I had ever seen, about the size of a silver dollar. Next came a large white butter bean, then a small butter bean, then a striped tiger bean, finally a little soy bean.

Since Haruko's husband's employer owned the land on which the restaurant sat, the staff was highly responsive to her wishes. Yoshi had told her that Jackson didn't like *tofu*, which was not exactly true. *Tofu*, which looks like plain yogurt, is simply tasteless unless something tasty is put on it. But when this piece of customer intelligence reached Gassan management, it was translated thusly: *Mrs. Nakamura has an American guest who cannot eat tofu and other Japanese things such as raw fish.* So initially I was served milk *tofu*, which is just as tasteless as the soybean kind, and slices of cooked duck instead of tender raw tuna and other delicacies from the sea. When they learned I love raw fish, just like true Japanese, they brought me a serving, and I even got to eat some delicious soybean ice cream for dessert.

At one point, nature called, and I padded in slippers down the hallway to a restroom. It looked like a restroom, and indeed it was one. There was a washbasin with mirror. There was a booth containing a Japanese-style toilet. But there was nothing I could recognize as a urinal. The low-lying Japanese toilet in front of me was designed for squatting, and any man, even a short one, who stands upright and urinates into it will splatter his slippers and trousers. I was about ready to take that risk when I spotted a potted plant against the wall. It was a cylinder that rose about two feet high and appeared to have ferns growing out of it. There was no sign of a flushing mechanism. Could this possibly be the urinal I was seeking? *What the hell*. I used it. Also to my relief, the potted plant flushed automatically. Clever folks, these Japanese.

Saturday, Oct. 2: In the fall of 1965, as Jack was preparing to return to the

United States, he gave a small present to a 10-year-old girl. It was an American dollar, and the little girl was Reiko Aikawa, the youngest daughter of Yoshi's middle sister Toshiko. The kid was a cutie pie, and she was the very first of Jack's Japanese nieces and nephews to call him *ojisan*, or uncle. Jack was pleased. Hence, the little gift.

Today, as Jackson entered a crowded Buddhist temple in the Komochi Mountains of central Gunma Prefecture, a number of people rushed up to greet Yoshi's American husband. Among them was an attractive 44-year-old woman who introduced herself as Reiko. She was now a highly successful real estate sales manager for the giant Mitsui conglomerate. She was unmarried, by choice, because she liked it that way, and because she was too independent by nature and income to appeal to macho Japanese men. For fun in her busy life, she goes skiing at beautiful high places around the world. Like Jack long ago, Jackson was pleased with her.

From her billfold Reiko pulled a dollar bill, the one Jack gave her 34 years ago. At her request, Jackson signed it: "Uncle Jack." Several times in the course of our Gunma journey, as we encountered new members of the family, I attempted to tell this charming story in my clumsy Japlish, but Yoshi always stopped me. They had already heard it.

The day was especially busy. It took us to your mother's homelands between the Tone and Agatsuma rivers in Gunma Prefecture. The town of Komochi Village, where Yoshi was born, stretches along the western bank of the Tone. This river, the Tone, belongs to Yoshi. She owns it in a metaphysical sense, just as I own Green River, which runs a mile or so from the Western Kentucky hills where I was born.

It was Kentucky's Green River that failed to keep your great-grandmother and her lover apart. Lovely Jennye and handsome Harry rendezvoused on her side of the river in this early 20th century scandal. With Jennye as the eager prize, Harry would have swam the narrow river if he had to. Never mind "Doc" Sellers's shotgun, although it was the shotgun, or the threat of it, that caused Harry to skedaddle when Jennye became pregnant. They say Jennye loved Harry for the rest of her life.

When breezes are soft and skies are fair,
I steal an hour from study and care,
And hie me away to the woodland scene,
Where wanders the stream with waters of green,
. . . To breathe the airs that ruffle thy face,

And gaze upon thee in silent dream.

"Green River," **William Cullen Bryant***, 1794-1878*

Of whatever nationality and whichever generation, we are possessive of the geological features surrounding our childhood homes. That is why the twin peaks of Southern California's Saddleback Mountain, rising above Lake Forest, belonged to you. Kei's mountain, we can call it, even though the "mountain" constitutes two separate peaks named Santiago and Modjeska. When you spotted them in the distance, on your way up from San Diego, you felt you were home again.

Yoshi's Tone River, of all the many in Japan, carries the highest volume of water and thus can be called the biggest. The river runs southeast through the Kanto Plain and splits to create Tokyo's storied Sumida before emptying its remaining waters into the Pacific on Honshu's eastern coast. My Green River can only claim to be the deepest of the Ohio River tributaries — 90 feet deep at the old Wrightsburg ferry landing and still counting, as they say, because the measuring device was too short to touch bottom. This depth, along with reflected hues from riverbank foliage, gives it "waters of green."

Where the Agatsuma spills into the Tone lies the small city of Shibukawa, which boasts of being the geographic center of Japan's 1,000-plus islands. A mathematician once figured it out. The city's annual *Heso* Festival celebrates the distinction. *Heso* means "navel," the approximate center of the human body, the universal symbol for the center of anything.

Everybody shows up at the Heso Festival in clothing designed to show off his or her elaborately decorated belly button. "Vulgar," sniffs your aunts, but it sounds like fun. I want to go, although I have gained so much weight in recent decades that my navel is an ugly outie bearing no resemblance to Jack's cute innie. The trouble is, the Heso Festival takes place in July, and your mother, to whom I leave all travel arrangements, can't work it into our vacation schedule until maybe 2002 or later.

Our next trip to Japan will come in the autumn of 2000, and the next in the spring of 2001. This will complete my journeys through Gunma Prefecture, your maternal homelands. And this will conclude my research for this book. But as long as I am alive, I will write to you. Now you see everything through my poor eyes, which still shed tears for you. So in a summer not too far away I will tell you about the Shibukawa Heso Festival that you didn't live long enough to see.

The belly button of Japan is the home of your Aunt Misao and Aunt Kazuko, your Uncle Toshio and Uncle Hideyo, and a whole gaggle of your cousins. When Yoshi was a child, Shibukawa was her "big city." For Komochi Village's rural residents, it was the nearest "real" town. Once, during the wartime hardships of 1945, little Yoshi walked the five miles or so to Shibukawa with her mother, to get badly needed dental attention, complaining all the way. Your mother's complaints, about which you know more than a little, go back a long way.

Packed buses, too full to stop, kept passing them by. The Shikishima train stop lay just across a Tone River bridge, and a train ride to Shibukawa would have taken only a few minutes. But trains, also packed, ran sporadically due to feul shortages. So Mrs. Iizuka and nine-year-old Yoshi walked the whole way. They crossed the bridge anyway, because that side of the river offered more natural protection from marauding American aircraft. By that time Tokyo had been devastated by bombs, and the American barbarians occasionally flew overhead in Gunma Prefecture, bombing and strafing the belly button of Japan. When the painful dental work was done and Yoshi had stopped crying, mother and daughter trudged back home to the foothills of the Komochi Mountains.

Your mother's teeth have never been very good, while mine, thanks to your American grandmother's genes, have always been quite solid. My father, son of the beloved Jennye and the scoundrel Harry, wore dentures from the age of about 40, while I, until just a few years ago, enjoyed 32 healthy teeth — the 28 that childhood always gives, plus the four that wisdom usually brings. Then an old wisdom tooth, beyond repair, had to be pulled. Too bad. It is the only physical part of me I have lost. I even have my tonsils, which must be good for something, although doctors say they aren't. Oh wait, there was that little piece of flesh that was surgically removed when Jack was circumcised at age 30 by a Tokyo urologist.

"Watashi no ochimbo wo kittekudasai," said Jack to the doctor, who spoke no English. The words literally meant "Please cut off my honorable penis." This polite imperative was not taught in Japanese language schools, nor was it the precise and safe way to ask for a circumcision. Jack's limited linguistic abilities allowed no subtleties. But with the help of pictures painted in the air, and other hand signals and gestures accompanied by grins and nods, the doctor understood that Jack wanted to lose his foreskin, nothing else. The "Dear Jack" story that came out of that experience amused you more than any other. As you know, your mother's teeth are beautiful today, but only because she spent thousands of dental dollars to make them so. No doubt, you got your fine teeth from my side of your

family.

My big city, away back then, was Evansville, to which my poor little Kentucky family fled during America's Great Depression, when 25 cents an hour for seven 10-hour days a week in a furniture factory was good pay for my father, who had four mouths to feed. When Dad became careless with exhaustion and lost two fingers in a wood-working machine, they gave him $300 for them. "The luckiest thing that ever happened to me," he said years later.

The money for the fingers was just enough, in 1937, to buy a small lot on Evansville's upscale East Side. If you owned land in those desperate times, President Roosevelt's Federal Housing Administration would finance construction of a home — in our case, four rooms and a bath, heated by a coal stove sitting in the living room. Mortgage payments were $18 per month. Thanks to those mutilated parental fingers, little Jack and his younger sister Faye went to the best schools in the city, and Jack eventually enrolled at Indiana University in Bloomington, becoming the first in his little branch of the Sellers family to get a college education.

The Komochi Mountains rise from the banks of the Tone and Agatsuma, embracing Yoshi's Komochi Village. The Iizukas once owned large parcels of land inside and outside the wide "V" formed by the two rivers. Whole mountains belonged to the family, even a huge area known as "Big Cedar Forest," the timber of which Yoshi's father donated to the Japanese government during World War II. In the postwar Fifties he gave his youngest daughter, your mother, a foothill mountainside in "Big Cedar Forest," but he had to take it back when he got into financial trouble.

The Iizukas, whose family ideographic crest can be translated as "Many Mountains," were prominent in the Komochis for hundreds of years, dozens of generations. When Kueji Temple in these mountains burned to the ground 400 years ago — a couple of decades before the American Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock on the other side of the world — it was mostly Iizuka money that rebuilt the imposing structures. Kueji Temple, halfway up a mountain on the outskirts of Komochi Village, was to be the first stop on our schedule today.

Gunma Prefecture's capital, Maebashi, lies only a dozen miles downstream from Shibukawa and the Komochi Mountains where the Iizukas once flourished. I had heard that Maebashi's population was roughly equal to the 150,000 of Evansville, so I was not surprised when I took my first look this morning from the sixth floor of the Gunma Royal Hotel, where your Aunt Yoko put us up. Across the Tone River was a strangely familiar sight. A city with only a few buildings

rising as high as 10 stories crouched on the banks of a river. *Ah, it even looks like Evansville, except the Ohio River is much wider than the Tone*.

Later, when Yoshi awoke, I learned I was looking the wrong way, toward a mere Maebashi suburb. A more impressive skyline was available on the other side of the hotel. But when I got straightened out and saw the real center of Gunma Prefecture government and banking, where brother-in-law Tsuneo's Bank of Gunma was headquartered, I found little to change my mind. From a bird's-eye or sixth-floor perspective, Maebashi and Evansville looked much alike.

Yoshi's banker brother died here in the Maebashi apartment he shared with his wife Yoko. The widow still lives in her Maebashi home when she is not staying at the main Tokyo house. In October 1997 she arrived at the apartment and found Tsuneo unconscious in a downstairs bedroom. After suffering a stroke, he was bleeding profusely from mouth and nostrils. He lingered for a few days in a hospital, but he was brain dead, so the plug was pulled. And that was the earthly end of your Uncle Tsuneo, who 10 months earlier had "buried" you in flowers.

Funny thing at Kueji Temple: Nephew Yasuki chauffeured his American aunt and uncle to the temple's front entryway, where Hitoshi and Yoshi immediately got into a brother-sister argument. As the only surviving son of Shigenobu Iizuka, Hitoshi was trying to do things right at this memorial service for his older brother, dead for two years. After playing second fiddle all his life, he was now the man in charge.

Yoshi looked lovely in a black outfit accented by her mother's necklace of large uniform pearls, which are much admired by the Mikimoto jewelers who occasionally restring them in Dana Point down the California coast from our home. But she was also wearing a floppy felt hat, and this offended Hitoshi's sense of what was appropriate for the occasion.

"You can't wear a hat in this holy place," Hitoshi said.

"Of course I can," Yoshi replied, and the bickering escalated from there.

Yoshi, a longtime Christian: "I wear this hat at my own church. God doesn't care where I wear it."

Hitoshi: "That's different."

Yoshi, finding a clincher: "Empress Michiko wears a hat when she visits temples."

Hitoshi, weakly: "That's different, too."

Yoshi's sisters, always supportive of their baby sibling, chimed in from the temple's doorway: *The hat is cute, Hitoshi. Leave Yoshi alone*. So he backed down, which is probably what he has done his whole life in confrontations with his contentious little sister. I don't have much better luck with her myself.

Defeated by the women, Hitoshi turned his attention to me, a more malleable subject, a *gaijin* eager to be instructed in this strange place along the mountainous spine of central Japan, where foreign faces hardly ever appear. He told me how to sit on a cushion in the large *tatami* room that opened onto the elaborate accouterments of the Buddhist temple. *No need to sit on your legs like a woman. Just sit cross-legged like me.* Also, he told me what to do when the incense box arrived in front of me. *Put three pinches of incense into the smoldering center of the box, then place your hands together in prayer and bow your head.* "Good," he whispered when I performed well during the bell-ringing, drum-beating service conducted by a monk who chanted Buddhist babble.

Somewhere within this huge temple complex, in a ledger or scroll of some kind, is my name, standing stark against all the Japanese names going back for centuries, and yours is probably here as well. You and I are Americans, but your Japanese grandfather was diligent about recording such family matters. Long ago, before or shortly after you were born, Mr. Iizuka wrote to us in America, mentioning in a brief by-the-way sentence that he had placed the name "Jyaku Seraasu" in the Iizuka family records at Kueji. After all, this was the American husband of his youngest daughter Yoshi.

Kentucky-born Jack Sellers was an Iizuka now, whether anybody liked it or not. Appropriately his name was rendered in *katakana*, the Japanese syllabary reserved for foreign words that are seldom written in ideographic *kanji*. Yoshi promptly forgot this routine piece of fatherly intelligence, but I didn't. As an outsider I was flattered to be included in formal Iizuka family history. The memory of it stuck with me for more than three decades.

When I learned we would be visiting Kueji Temple on this trip, I bragged: "My name is registered there." Yoshi pooh-poohed the notion. "Yoshi, your father put it there," I insisted, a little peevish. "All members of your family, for hundreds of years, me included, are listed at Kueji." She did not recall this, and what she does not recall cannot possibly exist. As she saw it, I was getting old and forgetful and remembering things that never happened.

But when the matter came up in Tokyo a few days ago, brother-in-law Hitoshi confirmed I was right, or at least that Mr. Iizuka might very well have done what he said he did in the letter only I remembered. Hitoshi's daughter Junko needed certain documents when she got married some years ago. Was her blood as true blue as that of her husband-to-be? Was she really descended from noble *samurai*, without a trace of the despised *Eta*, who look just like everyone else but have animal-slaying butchers or leather tanners in their lineage? The Asami family, proud progenitor of Yasuhiro the bridegroom, wanted to know, just

as the Iizukas, equally protective of Junko, required certification of her chosen man.

Japanese are more snobbish than the British. At high social levels, love doesn't really count, unless love happens to come to couples who are deemed suitable for each other. So Hitoshi and elder brother Tsuneo inquired at Kueji Temple and were amazed when they were provided with everything their daughter and niece required to marry the love of her life. Family records went back hundreds of years, plenty far enough, since *samurai* titles were not abolished until the 1870s. The last updates were made by Mr. Iizuka just prior to the years-long illness that led to his 1987 death.

Hitoshi and his sister Yoshi laughed about it, amused that a family outsider, a *gaijin* like me, knew more about this remote Iizuka genealogical treasure trove than they did. *My goodness*, I said in mild exasperation, *I simply listened to your father*.

Back in the early Forties, the trek to Kueji Temple was scary for little Yoshi. Holding the hand of her father, mother or big sister, she moved through a forest of incredibly tall cedars with moss-covered trunks, then up a long series of stone steps leading to several spooky gate structures protected by demon statues. Her older brothers and sisters feigned fright just to see baby sister Yoshi's wide-eyed reaction. Even today, nearly 60 years later, your mature and sophisticated mother feels uneasy on those steep steps approaching the family's old temple, where the demons still stand guard. Childhood fears, justified or not, never completely die.

For many generations, even centuries, the Iizukas were plantation owners in the *Gone With the Wind* style of the American South. No slaves, of course, but plenty of sharecroppers who tended the crops and bowed low to the master in the big house on the hill, to whom they delivered money for his purse and foodstuffs for his kitchen. Like Scarlett O'Hara but younger, your mother watched her pleasant world turn upside down after a great war was lost to American barbarians. *Demokurashi*, or "democracy," an alien concept defined by General MacArthur's carpetbaggers, came to Komochi Village.

Redistribution of Iizuka lands between the Tone and Agatsuma rivers was vigorously administered, perhaps because the masters on the hill, Ginai and Shigenobu Iizuka, father and son, your great-grandfather and grandfather, had strongly supported Japan's military aggression in the past decade, making patriotic donations of staggering value, including enormous lumber resources from Gunma's historic "Big Cedar Forest." Or perhaps the decimating redistribution

simply stemmed from the fact that the Iizukas were the biggest landowners in the Komochi Mountains. Anyway, sharecroppers became landowners themselves and eventually sent their children to the same fine universities attended by the Iizukas. As their lands melted away, the Iizuka family slipped into a genteel status in which there was more good breeding than money.

Even today, a half century later, born-on-the-hill Yoshi resents this topsy-turvy situation and yearns for the grandeur of the past. Across the Tone River from Komochi Village, near the Shikishima train station, lies sizable acreage once owned by the Iizukas. Shortly after the war, MacArthur's reform policies shifted ownership of this land to the farmers who worked it, which was bad enough from the family's perspective, but then, decades later, came salt for Iizuka wounds.

With the help of modern technology, a hot spring burst to the surface on that side of the river, spewing sulfur water and steam from deep volcanic caverns. Considering the Japanese preoccupation with therapeutic bathing, it was like striking oil, or even better. *Onsen* facilities were constructed for a populace who cannot immerse themselves too often and are eager to pay for the pleasure. "Peasants got rich!" exclaims Yoshi, voicing the unthinkable.

But don't cry for me, Argentina. The six Iizuka children did pretty well for themselves. Four of them, counting Tsuneo's widow, fall into the millionaire class. Misao married old money; Kazuko and her doctor husband made money the old-fashioned way, lots of it, at a hospital they own in Shibukawa, and the two boys, Hitoshi and Tsuneo, not only married daughters from well-to-do families but reached executive suites in Japanese transportation and banking. Only Toshiko and baby sister Yoshi lost their hearts to handsome publishing company men who achieved success and comfort in their careers, yes, but never got rich. One smiles. The smartest of the sisters, Toshiko and Yoshi, wound up with the least money.

And all six Iizuka offspring received good educations, despite Mr. Iizuka's postwar financial difficulties. Tsuneo, smart as a whip, went to Tokyo University, the Harvard of Japan, while Hitoshi, less studious but more affable, graduated from second-level but still highly respected Waseda University, roughly equal to America's Princeton. Yoshi, a black-sheep Christian by the time she left high school, studied English literature at Aoyama University, Japan's finest Christian educational institution. The three oldest girls — Misao, Toshiko and Kazuko — received the equivalent of a finishing school education, two academic years beyond high school, as was generally appropriate for young women from prominent Japanese families in the 1940s and earlier.

The old “plantation” house and a so-called gate house, both rising two stories on the bank of a stream, still stand at the Iizuka compound in the low-lying Komochi Mountains. Yoshi and I, along with other members of the family, visited the Iizuka homestead today after the memorial service for Tsuneo at nearby Kueji Temple. Tsuneo’s ashes lie alongside those of his ancestors in the Iizuka cemetery just down the hill.

In Yoshi’s childhood days, the compound included several other structures that are now long gone. There was her grandmother’s house, which was physically attached to the main house. There was a second “treasure house,” supplementing the one in the thick-walled gate house. There was her grandfather’s *kendo* practice and demonstration studio that spanned the stream running alongside the property. But in the end, today, only the two buildings survive, both about 250 years old, quite ancient for basically wooden structures in moist Japan. Tokyo architectural students make field trips to see them, much as their American counterparts visit the much younger Houmas plantation house near Baton Rouge in Louisiana.

Some 20 years ago Mr. Iizuka got into trouble with Japanese government authorities. A burglar burrowed into the gate house’s treasure room and made off with a number of Japanese swords, several of which were 400 years old. By most definitions, the ancient swords were priceless. One of them was a sword that Mr. Iizuka once gave to Yoshi. When he discovered she had allowed a spot of rust to develop on the fine blade, he took it back for safekeeping, very much as I retrieved, from your San Diego apartment, Jack’s old Oishi Kuranosuke *hakata* doll with its broken leg.

The theft was reported to the police, but the resultant investigation centered mostly on Mr. Iizuka himself, who did not have permits to own such weapons. The poor man not only lost his family’s *samurai* treasures but had to pay a substantial fine. Things just never seemed to work out for your grandfather.

[The wood-burning *ofuro* where Yoshi scrubbed her father’s back. The well that supplied drinking and bathing water. Later, there were pipes that carried water to the Iizuka compound from high on the mountain. The toilets requiring “honey dipper” service, similar to Kentucky outhouses. The latter stoically made do without the honey dippers. Kentuckians simply moved their outhouses to different spots when the trench got full. The Iizukas had electricity in the Thirties, while the Sellerses in Kentucky were still using coal oil lamps.]

Yoshi’s childhood *nagaya* has become *Higurashi-An*. That simple sentence

requires considerable explanation. When your mother was a little girl in the 1930s and ’40s, she lived with her parents and sisters in the *nagayamon* that guarded the sprawling Iizuka family compound outside Komochi Village. Her brothers, Tsuneo and Hitoshi, stayed in the big house a stone’s throw away. *Nagayamon* means “long gate house,” an architectural concept unknown to the Western world. *Gaijin* like you and me must envision a long two-story house with a “driveway” running through the middle of the first floor. This was the gate house in which your mother grew up. Beyond the wide entryway leading into the Iizuka compound lay a garden fronting the big house. Only the wealthiest families possessed these *nagayamon* structures, just as only the affluent in America have guest houses.

In Japanese architectural circles, the Iizuka gate house is considered unique, or at least quite rare. Unlike others across the nation, it rises from the bank of a stream, with the stream-side end dropping down to provide a cellar of sorts only a few meters above the flowing water. Most *nagayamon* structures, if they have survived at all, rest high and dry. When little Yoshi referred to her home within the compound — the actual place where she lived and ate and slept — she said *nagaya*, or “long house,” to differentiate it from the big house and other buildings that collectively constituted her *oheya*, or home.

A Japanese black pine on the bank of the stream, next to the *nagayamon*, looks today just as it did when Yoshi was a little girl nearly 60 years ago. *Exactly?* I was skeptical. *Yes, exactly*. Which should not have surprised me. Our Lake Forest home has five Japanese black pines that look exactly as they did a quarter of a century ago, and they may look the same after another quarter of a century, when I’m 92 and Yoshi is 88.

Why was Yoshi living in the gate house and not the big house? Well, it was a practical matter within this extended family. Her father and the feminine side of his family — his wife and four daughters — fit nicely into the gate house, but there was not enough space for the two boys. Tsuneo and Hitoshi had rooms in the big house, along with Grandparents Tori and Ginai Iizuka and several live-in servants. Yoshi’s personal maid, Yuki, lived nearby. You probably remember your mother speaking of Yuki, who still lives, now well into her eighth decade. Some years ago Yuki sent Yoshi a few handmade holiday decorations that beautified our Christmas trees.

Yoshi’s grandfather, born in 1869, was a *kendo* master as well as master of the mansion. *Kendo* is a Japanese martial art in which long sticks substitute for swords. He lived mostly at his second home in Maebashi, down the Tone River, with his longtime mistress, who produced two or three offspring whom the legiti-

mate Iizukas don't talk about. But Ginai Iizuka would show up for a few days each month at the Komochi Village compound, where his *kendo* studio bridged the stream and offered a splendid site for demonstrations. When he was there, he dined in solitary splendor in one room while the rest of his family dined in another. His estranged wife, your Great Grandmother Tori of the Inokuma family, stayed mostly alone in her attached house, poor woman.

The Iizuka family's masters, men such as Ginai and Shigenobu, and even my brother-in-law Tsueno in his final years, did not treat their wives as one would hope. It is almost a Japanese tradition. As a Japanese man reaches success, becoming powerful in his career and community, with "romance gray" in his hair, he often finds himself a young mistress, a status symbol of sorts, and his wife, when she discovers it, suffers in humiliation.

If this "Bittersweet Journey" manuscript is ever published, the Iizuka family won't like it much. And if it is not published, I can't possibly send printouts to them, much as I might like to. The journal is too honest for face-conscious Japanese such as the Iizukas of Komochi, who abhor the very notion of their family skeletons parading in public. In this book, there is too much "honne," or honest reality, and not enough "tatemae," the façade that Japanese show to the world. But you once told me: "If you can't tell the truth, don't write anything at all." This wise advice, from the mouth of a babe, came after I had written a "Dear Jack" chapter about Jack's six months of impotency around 1960.

It was a funny piece. Jack, who had recently abandoned Momoko in Japan and felt deeply guilty about it, simply could not perform sexually. A doctor friend gave him harmone shots in the buttocks. Nothing helped. "Why me, Lord, why me?" moaned Jack in self-pity. "I don't know," boomed a Voice from above. "There's just something about you that pisses Me off." An old joke, still funny.

At the time, Jack was a highly eligible bachelor, a star reporter for the Evansville Press, with bylines appearing often on Page One. He was tooling around in a brand-new 1960 Austin Healy sports convertible, pearl white with black leather interior. He had everything except a white scarf fluttering from his neck, and sometimes he even had that. Beautiful girls were climbing into his bed more than ever before or since, but when they turned to him in expectation, he was laughably ineffective.

A shapely waitress at Evansville's Hotel McCurdy coffee shop snapped Jack out of it. She simply didn't believe his across-the-counter tale of sexual woe. All the men she knew, every last one, stood erect before her charms. Jack was just concocting a ploy to get into her popular panties. But what the hell, he was cute.

So she accompanied him to his apartment one night and, with smug satisfaction, proved that boys and girls could still have fun. The silly smile left on Jack's face came only partly from her steadfast conclusion that he had staged the whole thing.

When I wrote about Jack's frustration and ultimate salvation, and then sent the manuscript to you in San Diego, I felt uneasy. Had I gone too far? You were my tender daughter and perhaps I shouldn't be this frank with you. Certainly Yoshi would have disapproved if she had known about it. But you reassured me when I expressed reservations: "Why do you feel that way, Daddy? I'm a grown woman. If you can't tell the truth, don't write anything at all."

Ginai Iizuka, your great grandfather, was a lucky man. Descended from *samurai* who once ruled the land, he matured during a time when his heritage protected him, when all was a continuation of what had always been, and he died at age 74 in 1943 before everything was lost. He never had to worry about making a living, because tenant farmers routinely brought money and rice to the Iizuka compound. He was a dignified gentleman with huge handlebar mustaches, impeccably dressed in Japanese-style clothing, and he was a nationally recognized expert at *kendo*, the martial sport to which he devoted most of his time.

When the grand old man came home to Komochi Village from the *kendo* school he operated in Maebashi, where young kimonoed men in face masks learned the art of swordfighting, wielding long bamboo sticks instead of actual swords, he cleared his throat loudly in the garden between the *nagayamon* and the main house, near that everlasting black pine. This was a signal for the entire household to assemble at the doorway to greet him.

Yoshi's father bowed him into the house, with the rest of the family lined up on their knees, foreheads nearly touching the floor mats. Little Yoshi was permitted to ignore these orchestrated formalities. "Hi, Grandfather," she yelled, running to him. Stern-faced Ginai didn't smile much but he was pleased with his spoiled granddaughter, and usually he had a piece of candy for her, just for her, not for anybody else.

[Shigenobu Iizuka, Yoshi's father, and his postwar problems. A ham company failed, then became successful after Mr. Iizuka was frozen out. Mieko Iizuka, Yoshi's mother. When she visited Jack and Yoshi in Tokyo, everything in their apartment magically became spic and span. Jack loved her. When he wrote letters to her from America, using simple *hiragana* instead of difficult *kanji*, she always declared that Jack's letters were more informative than Yoshi's.]

Yoshi was born in the gate house in 1936 on a cold, snow-covered day, or maybe she was born in the nearby big house at the Iizuka compound. She doesn't know for sure. [Kazuko says it was the gate house.] But certainly she was born at home, just as Jack was, four years earlier, in a clapboard-covered log house in Western Kentucky. Hospital deliveries were not common in rural areas in those days, either in Japan or America.

Your Aunt Yoko has done a marvelous job in carrying out your Uncle Tsuneo's wishes. Six months before he died, Tsuneo approached his old friend Hagime Araki with an idea that had been forming for years. He would bring the scattered Iizuka family together again, creating a nostalgic focal point for them. The *nagayamon*, or gate house, which protects the big house in the foothills of the Komochi Mountains, would be restored and modernized. The Iizuka cemetery lies only a hundred yards or so down the hill. When the brothers and sisters came to pay respects, along with their sons and daughters (all except you, the first to die) and even their grandchildren, they would have a suitable place to spend the night or freshen up or cook a meal.

Now, after considerable expense — more than $300,000, I'm told — the gate house is just lovely, and the original axe-hewn beams still hold it together. Considering how much has been done, the price can be considered cheap. Much of the labor and even some materials were donated in respect for Tsuneo, an important man in Gunma Prefecture, just like his father and grandfather.

Those magnificent beams fascinated me, and I inspected them closely. They spanned the large top-floor "family room." Yoshi grew up with them, so they were dismissively familiar to her. But I had never before seen such beams. They dipped and curled massively about seven feet above the polished hardwood floor, following the natural grain of the tree trunks from which they were made. The artisans who fashioned them in the middle of the 18th century could have produced symmetrical and perfectly squared beams like those turned out on modern machinery, but they didn't, and probably would never have dreamed of it. Symmetry, mostly a Western architectural concept, was not desired here.

A window in this very room was the one from which little Yoshi was pushed by her mischievous brother Hitoshi. You remember the story. Yoshi, about five years old, fell 15 feet or so and lay briefly unconscious on the ground below. Poor Misao, Yoshi's 17-year-old sister, ran through the house screaming "Yoshi *shinda*! Yoshi is dead!" Which chilled the heart of Mrs. Iizuka, Yoshi's mother, whose first-born child, a son named Nobatoshi, died as a toddler. Even in old age Mrs. Iizuka shed tears over her lost son, just as your mother still cries for you.

Was *another* child lost? But of course little Yoshi was all right and nine-year-old Hitoshi was very sorry. An incident that might have been tragic mellowed over the years into an amusing childhood story often recalled when the family gets together.

One can debate whether Yoshi or Misao was the prettiest of the Iizuka sisters, but the matter really boils down to cultural preferences. If the two women could be reconstituted as 20-year-olds and placed side by side for comparison, Western men would choose your mother without hesitation, while Japanese men, viewing females through different lenses, would prefer Misao's porcelain beauty. As people have acknowledged through the ages, beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. Young Misao was seen as *Gunmakomachi* by those who beheld her, meaning she was *the* standout beauty of Gunma Prefecture in their eyes.

Your Aunt Misao has a fascinating World War II story to tell, but I am fuzzy on the details and it is unlikely I will ever learn more. The Iizuka family never talks about it, and my only source, my wife Yoshi, regrets that she even mentioned it to someone like me. What was she thinking of? This guy puts everything he knows on paper! She forbade me, on pain of something or other, from inquiring about it among my in-laws. "Don't poke around," she warned her husband, whose entire journalistic career was built on poking around.

Well, okay. I refrained from "poking around" on this trip to Japan, and I promised I won't do so on subsequent trips, but I am compelled to tell the story anyway, as much of it as I can reconstruct. "Never let the facts, or the lack of them, stand in the way of a good story," we journalists sometimes say, but we smile when we say it because we don't really mean it. Just be aware that this account of your oldest aunt's first marriage surely contains mistakes and comes entirely from the fading memory of your 63-year-old mother, who was just shy of 10 years old when the tale unfolded.

As the oldest of the Iizuka children, Misao was the first to marry. In 1944, while the Pacific War raged, she was 20 years old as ages are calculated nowadays. At the time, Misao would have said she was 21, because Japanese babies were considered one year old at birth. In the very prime of her classical beauty, she married into a prominent Gunma Prefecture family. Her husband was a young Army officer. Her father-in-law was the Japanese colonial governor of a province in what is now North Korea. The new bride accompanied her husband across the Sea of Japan to the Korean peninsula. She was the first Iizuka in modern times to go overseas. It must have seemed like a grand adventure, something to write home about.

Poor Korea, hanging like a penis from China's continental belly, has always been a tempting target of conquest. Ambitious and powerful neighbors can never resist, and Korea may be the most invaded country in the history of the world. By the time Misao arrived there, the peninsula had been a Japanese puppet state for 34 years, the victor's prize after turn-of-the-century wars with China and Russia. Everything of vital importance was controlled or managed by Imperial Japan. Life was exceptionally fine for the Japanese colonialists and their families. Prices were ridiculously low and Korean servants stood ready to answer every need and desire.

All came crashing down when the atomic bombs were dropped in August 1945. Japan surrendered its home islands to the Americans and its North Korean and Manchurian territories to the Russians. Misao's husband and father-in-law, both high Japanese officials, were shipped off to Russia or maybe only to Manchuria. Either way, poor Misao was on her own, herded with other Japanese dependents into a detention camp. She tried two or three times to escape but was always caught and brought back.

Then Misao made a final attempt, betting everything she possessed on this one. She gave all her fine clothing, all her jewels and almost all her money to former Korean maids in exchange for transportation to the south. With face darkened to disguise her identity, she either rode a horse or traveled in a horse-drawn wagon until she was reasonably safe in South Korea. She was safe in the sense that she was clear of the Russians, but she still faced a Korean populace with no love at all for Japanese.

Misao was a tender young woman without protection in a world gone mad. And there was a long way to go, and her only chance to get home was by foot. She joined a stream of Japanese refugees treading south. Always south, toward Pusan or some other port where she might find a ship to take her across the Sea of Japan and into the embrace of her family at Komochi. The trek continued for weeks, even months. Little food could be found. Babies, left at roadside by exhausted mothers who could no longer carry them, cried until they died, as strangers with averted eyes passed them by.

Eventually Misao found the crowded refugee ship of her tormented dreams, and arrived back in Japan in early 1946. Malnourished to just this side of death, she fell into the arms of her mother, Mrs. Mieko Iizuka, who herself was sick from worry over the fate of her firstborn daughter. An abortion was quietly performed and a divorce was quickly obtained.

Her youngest sister, Yoshi, believes to this day that Misao's Korean pregnancy was legitimate, stemming from a final union with her husband, before the

Russians hauled him away. Her American brother-in-law, lacking Yoshi's sisterly loyality, doesn't believe it at all. The time frame does not support such a charitable conclusion. Misao traded her beauty for survival on the long, harrowing march down the Korean peninsula, or was raped. In the end, the bastard child of a stranger was unwanted by Misao and the other Iizukas.

Years later, at age 30, Misao married into another prominent Gunma Prefecture family. Her bridegroom, Toshio, was 11 years older, a schoolteacher from the Hatori clan, only slightly long in the tooth, a good match. In social status, the Hatoris were much like the Iizukas, but their land holdings, for reasons that defy logic but suggest politics, were hardly touched by MacArthur's land redistribution policies. Anyway, they held onto most of their property while the Iizukas were losing theirs. Today, at age 76, Misao lives contentedly and comfortably at the handsome Hatori compound in Shibukawa, honored by her sons and grandchildren, still classically beautiful.

Perhaps the old Iizuka gate house in the Komochis of Gunma, now refurbished to perfection, air-conditioned and centrally heated, can best be described as a mountain cottage, or even a villa. It rises three stories as viewed from the stream that flows alongside, and it is surrounded by "*matsu*, *take, ume*," a litany that held special significance for Mr. Araki, Tsuneo's hand-picked project manager. The words mean "maple, bamboo, plum," the most common trees growing at the compound, and together they constitute a trinity that promises good fortune. Mr. Araki uttered the phrase several times — "*matsu*, *take*, *ume"* — as he led me across a small bridge and up the opposite bank of the stream, to the edge of a *konyaku* field, where I could get a different perspective. Above the *nagayamon*'s roof, in the far distance, rose the Akagi mountain range, the most prominent geological feature of Gunma Prefecture.

The widow Yoko chose *Higurashi-An* as the name of the restored gate house. When I learned that *higurashi* meant "cricket," I was briefly disappointed, because "Cricket Villa" didn't seem appropriate. Then I was told that *higurashi* can also be translated as "cicada," which sounded better to my American ear but was still not quite right. And finally I discovered the word *higurashi* evokes in Japanese minds the image of cicadas singing in early evening. *Ah, an elegant connotation at last, fulfilling Yoko's declared intention.*

Yoshi, impatient with the constant translation chores imposed on her by an ignorant husband, said: "Just call it 'Sunset Villa' and forget about it." But I won't do that. I'll use the Japanese name. I am looking forward to spending time at *Higurashi-An*. I can imagine myself reading a good book, or maybe even writ-

ing one, while sitting on the deck overlooking the stream and sipping *ocha* or something considerably stronger. I am an Iizuka, too, right? This was what Tsuneo wanted, right? But my personal dream would be shattered.

My favorite writer is Patrick O'Brian, the 85-year-old author of the Aubrey/Maturin series of early 19th century British Navy seafaring adventures. When you died I was reading the eighth of the 20 books he has written so far. The last two were published after your death. You considered buying me an O'Brian book for Christmas in 1996, but you could not be sure I had not already acquired it, so you bought me a pair of Evans fuzzy-wuzzy leather house slippers instead, replacements for the worn-out slippers you had given me on a previous Christmas.

Two weeks after your funeral, I sadly opened the last Christmas present I would ever receive from you, and I wear those slippers still, and will wear them forever, no matter how often they must be repaired. In the weeks following your death, I read all the rest of the available O'Brian books, while sitting in front of a crackling fireplace in our library. The books saved my sanity in those trying days after you left me, and they are still linked, in my mind, to you, although you never read a single one of them. You preferred Orange County author ????. [What is that guy's name?]

On Halloween night of 1996, just six weeks before your death, I was reading O'Brian in my library. Yoshi was tending the season's first fireplace blaze. You were accommodating the trick-or-treaters in the adjacent foyer. I heard a squeaky little girl's voice threaten tricks if she didn't get treats. I also heard a man's voice, surely that of her father. He was keeping watch over his daughter in the darkness. The little girl accepted several pieces of candy from your basket. "Say thank you," the father prompted, and she did so. Then she added, in an unexpected boast: "I'm a daddy's girl." You laughed, and replied: "I am, too." My heart melted for the ten-thousandth time in the 29 years of your life.

Among his fans, O'Brian is legendary in his determination to present obscure 18th and 19th century nautical terminology without explanation. "Ignorance of the cross-cat harpons is not necessarily fatal," he says. "Explanation of them almost certainly is." In this journal I feel the same way. What difference does it make if you or any reader doesn't know what konyaku is? Konyaku was growing in the field to which Mr. Araki led me at Higurashi-An. Okay, just this once, and maybe a few other times: Konyaku is a vegetable from which a stringy, slimy noodle is made. It allegedly cleans one's intestines. The gelatinous noodles often show up as a sukiyaki ingredient, much favored by Japanese, only grudgingly eaten by foreigners like me.

[Osamu Aikawa and wife Toshiko, Yoshi's 2nd oldest sister. Daughter Reiko Aikawa, unmarried, 44 years old. Daughter Masako (two sons, 25 and 22). Like her younger sister Reiko, Masako enjoyed visits with her Uncle Jack and Aunt Yoshi in Ebisu, and she, too, called Jack *ojisan*, or uncle. What is Masako's married name?]

I was asked to make a few remarks at Tsuneo Iizuka's memorial luncheon in a large banquet hall at a Komochi Village hotel. Each sentence, as I delivered it, was translated by my soldier nephew, Sargeant Yasuki Iizuka, Tsuneo's middle son. Each of us held a cordless microphone so that the audience, made up of bankers, friends and relatives, could hear us.

My name is Jackson Sellers. I am an American, a newspaperman, a manager of computer systems for the Los Angeles Times, a major newspaper in my country. I may not look like someone who should be speaking here today, but I have been Tsuneo's brother-in-law for 34 years. This is my first visit to Gunma Prefecture. I came here with my wife, Yoshiko Iizuka Sellers, Tsuneo's youngest sister. Nearly 40 years ago I saw Yoshi for the first time, and I thought she was the most beautiful and interesting woman I had ever seen. I still think so.

I first met Tsuneo a few days after Yoshi and I were married in 1965. He and his father, Shigenobu Iizuka, were concerned. Could I, a gaijin working for a small English-language newspaper in Tokyo, take care of her? They were uncharacteristically blunt about it: "How much money do you make?" I was young, just getting started in my career, and ignorant enough to think I was pretty well paid. I had not yet learned that newspaper publishers are parsimonious the world over. So I told them, proudly. Their faces fell. They were obviously unimpressed. [Laughter from the audience here.]

I have reason to believe, to know for certain, that Tsuneo came to like me over time. The fine watch I wear today, the leather belt that holds up my trousers, the automatic camera that I brought with me to Japan — all were gifts from Tsuneo, my brother in law. And I treasure the many kindnesses his lovely wife Yoko and his three fine sons — Ken, Yasuki and Satoshi — have shown me. I am honored to be here today.

Jackson Sellers
Komochi Village
October 2, 1999

An American who adheres to his own customs at Japanese functions treads a social minefield. He won't get killed or crippled but he probably will suffer mild humiliation in the wake of his cultural blunders. Kisses, for example. Not the unsavory mouth-to-mouth ones, inappropriate everywhere at social gatherings, but sideway pecks on the cheek. It happens all the time in America and Europe. A man encounters a woman at a party. "Hello," he says, "I haven't seen you in ages. You look lovely." And he brushes his lips against her cheek, a pressing of flesh between friends, much nicer than a handshake.

But here in Japan a bow from the waist reigns as the accepted greeting in such cases, with the depth of the bow graduated by degrees according to the social standing of the interacting acquaintances. It is all too complicated for a Kentuckian like me. Handshakes do happen in Japan between a Japanese woman and an American man, but they are mere concessions to Western manners, delivered without enthusiasm and with no real feeling on the woman's part. A kiss, even a glancing one, almost never happens in public.

Several times, when I forgot myself, I aimed for a cheek and kissed an ear as my female target instinctively turned her head to avoid my unwanted gesture, and then, almost instantly, she would recover enough to pretend that this *gaijin* custom was really okay for a sophisticated woman like her. The distaste was faint but perceptible to this poor foreigner, a lock-step prisoner of his own Western society.

But Mrs. Misao Hatori was delightfully different. "Kiss me right here," she said at the memorial luncheon, tapping her cheek. *Bless her kind heart, because that was just what I wanted to do*. She was petite and elegant, 76 years old but still beautiful. I kissed her. Her cheek was smooth as silk, and soft as a powder puff. This was my oldest sister-in-law, whom I admire for her determined escape from war-devastated Korea more than 50 years ago. How I wish I could ask her about that! But Yoshi won't let me. *Don't poke around, Jackson*. My admiration must remain a secret. Misao does not know I know, although she surely suspects. I cannot believe she would be offended if I asked a question or two. On second thought, maybe she would. *Oh, well . . . . Forget about it, Jackson. Content yourself with a good story written on hearsay and speculation.*

Toshiko and Osamu Aikawa, parents of Reiko, the niece who treasured Jack's dollar-bill gift for 34 years, gave me an envelope that obviously contained money. They suggested I buy a silk tie or something else that would fit into our baggage without taking up too much space. Osamu is a retired printing company executive, and I relate to him because I, too, am engaged in publishing, and

because we stand together as middle-class oddballs among millionaires.

In her schoolgirl years, your Aunt Toshiko was seen as the smartest of Yoshi's three sisters. She was a scholar, but also an athlete, a runner in regional track meets. She could have been beautiful, too, but she wasn't interested in the face creams that preoccupied Misao and, later, Yoshi. She impatiently stuck unadorned clips into her hair, not for enhancement but to keep strands out of her face while she did the physical and intellectual things important to her. As a scholastic and athletic champion, she rose to stardom in high school, becoming the idol of young girls who slipped puppy love notes to her.

The envelope from Toshiko and Osamu held five crisp ¥10,000 notes, or about $550 where I come from. I suppose somebody in Japan would gladly sell me a tie for $500, but even the finest silk tie is worth no more than $50, sort of like a piece of ass. *Are you shocked by my abrupt crassitude, Kei? No, I heard you chuckle*. So I gave the money to Yoshi and it evaporated along with other funds that paid for this expensive trip.

Sunday, Oct. 3: Yoshi and I are off on our own in Nagano Prefecture, just next door to Gunma. *Finally!* No relatives to guide us and take care of us and intrude upon us. We like it that way, aging children that we are. On a bullet train from Takasaki to Nagano City, we ate sushi, drank green tea and smoked cigarettes in our seats along with almost everybody else in the car. At Nagano we boarded an express train for the final leg to Matsumoto City, the most famous feature of which is Matsumoto Castle, a stronghold in the Tokugawa Shogunate that ruled Japan for 264 years. I would like to see it.

But we are not interested in military history on this personal odyssey. We came here to admire Japanese nature, engage in Japanese bathing and eat Japanese food. The agenda was set by Yoshi before we left America. Matsumoto will be a mere stopover to mystical Kamikochi, our scenic mecca. Anyway, that's how Yoshi feels. Oops, she just changed her mind, coming around to my way of thinking. We'll go see the old castle this afternoon. After all, she decided, one *cannot* visit Matsumoto without laying eyeballs on Matsumoto Castle. What would people say?

[Views from the train: Many rice fields. Harvested bunches of rice plants, tied at the roots and draped over horizontal, waist-high poles, so they can dry out before the final grain harvesting. Grape vines sagging on trellises. Apple trees, lots of them. Nagano Prefecture is famous for its apples. Some apples were "bagged" while still ripening on the trees, to protect them. These are the ones that

cost five bucks each at fruit stands.]

[Matsumoto and the castle. Our climb to the top of the tiered structure. A 450-year-old hitching stone for salt-packing cows in the middle of town. Interesting story. Nagano, like Gunma, is landlocked. When Matsumoto was engaged in warfare with one of its seacoast neighbors, salt was humanely allowed in. This hitching stone, preserved today at a busy intersection near the castle, was neutral ground for trade with the enemy. An elderly gentleman explained this to me, with Yoshi translating as usual. Young people don't know anything.]

Monday, Oct. 4: We took a little local train from Matsumoto to Shin Shima Shima, a suburban addition to Shima Shima. *That is not a repetition typo, much as it looks like one*. The name of the main town is Shima Shima and the *Shin* makes it "New" Shima Shima. Shin Shima Shima is the end of the line, the gateway to fabled Kamikochi. But the town's name, as rendered here, must be seen as a translation accommodation to my English-speaking audience, accustomed as they are to clearly delimitated words. Japanese don't see the name as three words. To them it is simply Shinshimashima, all run together.

Many times over the years Yoshi has become annoyed with me on this matter. "Is that one word or two?" I would ask. As a "slotman," or newspaper copy desk chief, I often had to deal with such concerns. *Boyfriend* (solid) or *boy friend* (two words) was a professional consideration, just one of many. After years of such work, I joked that my tombstone would say *Here Lies Jackson Sellers. One Word or Two?*

The Japanese language offers no such dichotomy. *Everything* is run together. One-syllable particles are used to identify nouns and objects. Yoshi has gotten tired of delivering this linguistic lecture to a forgetful husband who should know better by now. To Japanese, the question "One word or two?" has no rational meaning.

From Shinshimashima we rode a packed bus to the Kamikochi Imperial Hotel. I sat on a pull-down seat in a narrow aisle, which placed me shoulder to shoulder with passengers on each side. Heavy summer rains and swollen streams had washed out portions of the road, and construction work was going on. One long stretch offered only oneway traffic. Buses and other vehicles going in and out of Kamikochi had to wait their turn. The trip took nearly an hour, but it didn't seem that long. The scenery was gorgeous.

The hotel, when we finally reached it, looked just like what it was, a large, expensive mountain lodge. It was surrounded by tall trees and located a short dis-

tance from a river. I was the only *gaijin* staying there. Western ambassadors from Tokyo embassies occasionally showed up for a few days of rest and relaxation, but almost never an American peasant like me. On our first day of hiking along the Azusa River, a Japanese woman who passed us was overheard saying in wonderment, "Americans come here, too!" Her tone indicated she wasn't happy about it. In her mind, this was a holy place for "Japanese Only."

But, hey, it was a European man, a *gaijin*, who "discovered" Kamikochi. He is recognized with a statue near the lodge. [What's his name? Maybe he was an American. I've forgotten. Look it up, Jackson.]

Foreigners, mostly Europeans, are the acknowledged "discoverers" of Japanese wildernesses. An oversimplification? An exaggeration? Sure, but not by much. Until relatively recently — let's say the early 20th century — Japanese seldom ventured off well-beaten, age-old paths, unless they were forced to stray to get somewhere fast. Why go? Nothing was there except bears and bandits. Only gaijin, who came to Japan in droves after the 1868 Meiji Restoration, were crazy enough to travel where there was nothing but rushing water, dense forests, impenetrable bear bamboo fields and snow-covered peaks. Japanese liked the comforts of low-lying towns and cities. Vast regions in the interior of their country held no attraction at all.

And so today, in wilderness areas across Japan, foreigners are recognized in statues and memorials as men who discovered some of the most beautiful scenery in the world. That is strange, says this American. Suppose a Japanese naturalist were the patron saint of California's Yosemite, rather than John Muir. Strange indeed. But Japanese seem to think nothing of it. What difference does it really make? The world is one, Japanese say, even if people like themselves are surely more equal than others.

[Kei's Pond, Myojinike, so perfect that even Yoshi could not claim it. We gave it to you. Here, salty *iwana* fish are eaten head and all. Not bad.]

Tuesday, Oct. 5: Still in Kamikochi. While relaxing on the Azusa riverbank and admiring picture-perfect scenery and rushing water, we ate a huge Japanese pear, a gift from Mrs. Nakamura. The common word for pear is *mizunashi* but this one was a *nijusekinashi*, meaning it was developed in the 20th century. It was much larger than its ancient cousin, and it cost much more. Even the Imperial Hotel chef who cut it up for us was surprised at its size. Very juicy and tasty, the best pear I have ever eaten.

I'm sorry, but there is a sameness to mountain forests and rivers, whether one is tramping through them or alongside them in either Japan or America. As President Ronald Reagan once said, "If you've seen one tree, you've seen them all." Me, too. I am more interested in culture and history than nature. While I trudged with wilderness-loving Yoshi along Kamikochi's Azusa River, which looks much like Yosemite's Merced — incredibly beautiful, both places, but boringly the same — I kept thinking of all the really fascinating things in the Japanese towns and cities we had left behind. So I won't rhapsodize here on the Kamikochi landscape. Dear American reader, just envision California's magnificent Yosemite, if you have been lucky enough to visit it, and you will know Kamikochi without me telling you about it.

On one lonely hiking trail, we ran into a troop of seven or eight Japanese monkeys with bright red faces and bright red asses. On sighting us, all but one of them disappeared into the chest-high bear bamboo on each side of the little dirt road, taking detours around Yoshi and me, who might possibly be dangerous. But the group's boss monkey calmly inspected us, contemptuously dismissed us and imperiously walked on by, picking up his timid followers a safe distance down the path.

Wednesday, Oct. 6: We took a local train from Shinshimashima to Matsumoto, then an express train to Nagano, then a local train again to Yudanaka, and finally a bus to Shiga Heights in northeastern Nagano Prefecture, where we checked into the Shigakogen Hotel. The place seemed spooky. We had stumbled into an old hotel building that was being phased out. The new hotel awaiting us was not nearly as interesting as the gloomy one. Old things often have more appeal. While waiting for the universal 2 p.m. check-in time, Yoshi and I walked around Maruike, or "Round Pond," which lies just down the hill from the hotel, across a winding road. Here in Shiga Heights, each of numerous large ponds feeds the one below it. *Beautiful, so beautiful.*

Oh Kei, how I wish you could be alive and with us and seeing all this. You often complained that we took you to enchanting places such as Yosemite when you were too young, before you were old enough to appreciate them. I regret that, and would do it differently if I had a second chance. It was Yosemite where I introduced you to your first hot fudge sundae. You were five years old, reluctant to try something new and strange-looking, something your mother had not

placed before you, but you loved the sundae of course. As an adult you held no memory of that landmark childhood event. Only your father remembered. Sad. We are healing from the loss of you, darling, but we will never heal completely. Our wound is too great.

Thursday, Oct. 7: I awoke to sounds of rain, heavy drops, echoes from my youth. *Hey, Jackson, you just wrote a haiku poem! It is even close to the required 17 syllables. All it needs is formatting and italicizing. What do you say, Kei? Am I an unconscious poet, too?*

Yoshi is disappointed. The rain threatens her plans to venture into forests and commune with Japan's Mother Nature. But I'm not sorry. I am still sore from exertions at Kamikochi. Hanging around the *onsen* pools today would suit me fine, lazy tourist that I am.

But rain or not, we headed up to the nearly deserted Shigakogen National Park. We caught a bus near our hotel to take us higher in the mountains, to the Suzurikawa skiing complex, where we rode a mountain lift to the vicinity of the Forty-Eight Ponds hiking trail. Somebody up here likes us. The rain changed to very light blowovers with not enough moisture to get us wet. And we were suddenly happy. We were almost alone in this marvelous and popular place. Few others considered the weather good enough for the trip, which gave us, the more hearty souls among beauty seekers, a solitude we otherwise would not have enjoyed.

Three years after you died, happiness comes like an old friend, long absent but much welcome. While living and breathing, with no pain at all, one cannot avoid happiness entirely, even the guilty kind. Happiness is the normal state of man as he travels the valleys and peaks of this green earth. And it shows up more frequently than despair, thank the merciful Lord, or thank Mother Nature, or thank Somebody.

Our first stop was Shibuike Pond. The initial ideographs in the pond's name are the same as those for the word *shibui*, which has no exact translation in English. But the Japanese people — me, too — always recognize something *shibui* when they see it. The closest I have ever come to pinning down the English definition is "understated elegance," if a noun phrase can define an adjective. Anyway, this was surely a *shibui* pond, beautiful without being overwhelming. At the far edge, several trees had turned to autumn colors, and those hues were reflected in the pond's mirrored surface, until a quiet sprinkle briefly speckled the

water and blurred the image, adding even more texture to the scene. Yoshi quickly claimed the place. From now on, this would be *her* Japanese pond, Yoshi's Pond forever.

Farther along the Forty-Eight Ponds trail, we came to *my* pond, hereafter to be known as Jack's Pond, as christened that day by a grinning Yoshi. Its name is Hyotanike. The word *hyotan* means "gourd." The pond itself is shaped like a couple of gonads. Well, I'll buy that. If you turn a heart symbol upside down, it now looks like gonads, right? Hyotanike is a handsome if slightly rugged spot on this attractive earth, and I am pleased to make it mine, just as I am pleased to think of Kamikochi's perfect Myojinike as yours. When we go back to Kamikochi someday, we will revisit Kei's Pond and think of our lost daughter, and we will surely come back to Shigakogen to see our ponds, too, until we can come back no more.

Friday, Oct. 8: The 10-year-old boss monkey of Jigokudani Park in Shiga Heights has a wise face and a regal bearing. He is the chief of 240 Japanese monkeys that live in an unfenced canyon and tolerate the people who come to see them. His name is as royal as he is. He is Ryuo X, meaning "Dragon King," the 10th with that name to wear the crown. Until several years ago, his kingdom consisted of 300 monkey souls, but then a challenger, also in his prime, emerged with a following of some 60 dissidents. The powerful Ryuo made short work of the upstart, and the defeated wanna-be king fled into the mountains, taking his splinter group with him.

There, the mountain monkeys somehow scratch out a living, while Ryuo's larger group lives in comfort along a canyon stream where food is dumped daily by human caretakers, where specially constructed hot spring pools are available for bathing pleasure. Nothing would prevent Ryuo's troop from leaving, too, but they don't, for obvious reasons. In wintertime, when snow falls, these monkeys can be seen sitting contentedly up to their necks in steaming water, with half-inch-thick snowcaps on top of their unprotected heads. They know a good thing when they see it. Let us hope the little band of outcasts in the mountains found one or two natural hot springs to brighten their otherwise hard-scrabble lives.

I was surprised to see monkeys swimming in the pools, rather than just relaxing in the sulphur water. I saw one baby monkey swim underwater for almost 10 feet, all the while picking grain from the bottom. They could only do a dog paddle, but they did it well. This raised the thought of a monkey doing a breast stroke, like a champion human swimmer, a funny image. I smiled.

Ryuo X stayed close to the park's chief caretaker, Mr. Sogo Hara, who dispensed the food — apples, soya beans and barley. Of course the boss monkey

got much more than his share. None of his subjects would dare steal from him, and thus he was a bit chubby. Mr. Hara invited Yoshi to sit next to Ryuo. *Kei, you have to know your mother, as you certainly do, to fully appreciate what happened next.*

If Yoshi spots a smidgen of lint on a sweater, she's compelled to pluck it off. As we entered the park, we were warned not to touch the wild animals, but when Yoshi saw a little grain husk marring Ryuo's otherwise pristine coat of hair, she did what comes naturally. She reached out and brushed it away. Ryuo spun around and looked sternly into Yoshi's face, poised to react if he saw an enemy's eyes. You see, we had also been warned not to make eye contact with the monkeys, because they see this as a sign of aggression. Somewhat to my surprise, Yoshi showed the presence of mind to look away from the Dragon King, who, satisfied that an inferior had simply made a mistake, forgave her.

A taxi took us on winding mountain roads to Manza in neighboring Gunma Prefecture. Taxis, although expensive, often make sense when lengthy railroad backtracking around a mountain range offers the only alternative. *Strange*. I felt I was going home, back to Gunma, your mother's homeland, where *Higurashi-An* awaits my eventual return. For us, Manza was a mere way stop between Shigakogen and Shibukawa, where tomorrow we will reunite with your aunts, Kazuko and Misao, and their husbands. Then comes a two-day stay at an Ikaho spa.

Manza is the place where your mother collected butterflies and plant samples when she was a schoolgirl, thereby winning an all-Gunma first-place prize. As a little girl yourself, you got tired of hearing about that. It was a feat difficult to emulate in more populous Orange County, California, and you were compelled throughout your life to match your mother's childhood accomplishments. *Why does that sadden me?*

We checked into the Hotel Juraku, which sits 1,800 meters above sea level in the upper foothills of Shirane Mountain. It is the highest Japanese inn in Gunma Prefecture. And of course it is an *onsen* hotel with marvelous hot spring pools. We were assigned to an eight-mat *tatami* room with a low table in the center, plus a two-mat carpeted area with Western coffee table and chairs next to a bay window. Out the window, bear bamboo flowed into a crevice from which rose a mountaintop covered with spruce, pine and white birch. A plume of vapor spewed from the side of the mountain, marking the spot where our bathwater was being heated as it flowed through ancient caverns in close-enough proximity to molten lava.

Saturday, Oct. 9: We took another taxi to Shirane Mountain to see a dead lake, the most sulfuric lake in the world. [Name?] It was a crater lake, emerald green, or sickly green, depending on your viewpoint. Nothing grew or lived there. I thought the whole thing ugly, but there was a solid stream of people trudging up the mountain to see it. Don't ask me why. *It's unique in all the world*, Yoshi explained. That's it, I guess.

We continued by taxi to Kusatsu, where the smell of sulphur was supposed to be pervasive. It smelled okay to me, at first, but my sense of smell has never been acute. *Too many cigarettes?* We checked our bags at the bus station. We had two hours to roam the town. At Yubatake, a plaza in the center of town, sulphur water bubbled up. It stank here all right, although one quickly got used to it. Plaques naming famous visitors surrounded the plaza pool. Prime Minister Takao Fukuda, a friend of Yoshi's father, came calling in 1979.

[Fukuda was the "omiai" go-between for Tsuneo and Yoko. When was that? Explain "omiai." See Yoshi's Louisville Courier-Journal article.]

Kusatsu's Yubatake Plaza is what's called a "cooling pool." The water, as it spews up from deep inside the earth, is too hot for bathers. Exposure to the cooling air for a minute or two as the water tumbles down a series of plaza steps makes it just right for pumping to nearby *onsen* hotels, where Japanese tourists and rare foreigners sink into it with audible sighs of pleasure. *Ahhhh*.

With an hour or so remaining before we caught our bus to Naganohana, we walked to Sainokawara Park, which featured several hot spring gushers and a couple of monuments that once again commemorated foreigners who, long ago, officially certified the health benefits of these waters. Hot sulphur water literally rose from the gravel under one's feet, and ran off into the nearest pool, eventually emptying into a stream that stretched to God knows where.

Yoshi could not resist the solicitations of the many food stand vendors. She bought almost everything she sampled — *fukinoto*, *sanshonome*, dried lilly flowers, *gobo*, sweet chestnuts and flower beans. The latter is a notable product of northern Gunma Prefecture. The bean is just like the monstrous one I sampled in an appetizer at Utsunomiya's "Moon Mountain" restaurant as a guest of Mrs. Nakamura, Yoshi's friend. I don't know how we will transport all this stuff back to America. Maybe the gifts we brought with us, left behind, will create enough room in our luggage for the things we take home, but I doubt it.

[Kazuko Takai, 71. Husband: Hideyo Takai, 75. Son: Atsushi Takai, 45, and his wife Nobuko. Daughter: Megumi. Misao Hatori, 76. Husband: Toshio Hatori, 87. Sons: Osamu Hatori, 43, with wife Misako and three children, Yuki, 10, Kiyotaka, 13, and Yusuke, 8. Hiroshi Hatori, 45 (brain damaged as a boy, loves jazz, oldest son but not the Hatori heir).]

Terrible news upon our arrival in Shibukawa: Dr. Hideyo Takai, Kazuko's 75-year-old husband, suffered a stroke and cannot join us at Ikaho. He is the brother-in-law who sent me that excellent water stone for sharpening of my wood-working tools. We visited him in his hospital room, but the poor man couldn't talk. I told him how much I appreciated the stone. I'm not sure he understood me. Damn this earthly life anyway, which ends much too soon. Maybe he will recover. His son Atsushi and his daughter Megumi, both medical professionals, say he will.

Sachiko Fukuda and three assistants greeted us at the main entrance of The Fukuichi in the Ikaho spa, which lies up a mountain from Shibukawa. Mrs. Fukuda, vice executive officer of the elaborate and expensive hotel, welcomed Yoshi and me as members of the Iizukas of Gunma, with whom her family has a special relationship. Her husband's sisters were frequent visitors at the Iizuka compound in Komochi Village in the old days. Yoshi and I were accompanied by Kazuko, Misao and Misao's husband Toshio, while Kazuko's husband, Dr. Takai, lay in a Takasaki hospital.

Toshio is 87 years old, an amazing gentleman involved in many pursuits when he was younger — botony, music, schoolteaching, to name just a few. He married your Aunt Misao several years after her dreadful experience in Korea. As a botanic dilettante he once discovered a wild Japanese orchid and was allowed to name it. And to be crass about it, Toshio is quite possibly the richest man in Gunma Prefecture, certainly the largest landowner and taxpayer. Decades ago the Japanese government appropriated one of his mountains for a highway project, paying him a pittance for it. He is still annoyed about that.

But it was Tsuneo Iizuka, dead for two years, who was the main reason we got royal treatment at The Fukuichi. As CEO of the Bank of Gunma empire, Tsuneo threw much business to this famous *onsen* hotel, and he is still remembered fondly by management and staff.

A paper lantern, or *andon* as Japanese call it, identified our first-floor luxury suite as belonging to "Jackson and Yoshiko Sellers," the letters neatly rendered in English. Several other *andon* lanterns in this exclusive wing were inscribed with the appropriate *kanji* for the names of the Japanese occupants of

smaller suites. Higher up, on the ninth floor, this guy "Jackson Sellers" — surely an obscenely wealthy *gaijin* — also possessed a magnificent private dining room, where breakfast and dinner would be served to his fortunate guests.

My "guests" at The Fukuichi were the people who were paying for everything. The cost for Yoshi and me was $2,000 per night, or $4,000 in total since we were staying two nights, paid in full by my rich in-laws. *"But meals are included," explained Yoshi when I expressed surprise at the high cost.* For two days I would live the life of a high-ranking *samurai* pausing with his lady and entourage on a long journey to Edo. Like Lord Asano of Ako, I might lose my head, but everybody does sooner or later. *Ichi go ichi e*. Everything is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, something to savor.

The suite itself, The Fukuichi's very finest, was shockingly spacious, the most luxurious hotel accommodations I ever expect to enjoy. There were four rooms, plus Japanese and Western toilets and a Japanese-style bath with soaking tub. The main room measured 14 *tatami* mats! I counted them. And that didn't include a wide *tokonoma* with an antique *kakejiku*, or "hanging scroll," all of which complemented an extravagant flower arrangement. Nor did it include an alcove where Yoshi could put on her makeup while kneeling on *tatami* before a dresser with no legs.

A *tatami* tea room, useless to us but very pretty, graced the center of the suite. Stone steps ran through a hallway to a sitting room equipped with a large-screen television set. This hallway featured a *kakehi*, a Japanese garden decoration normally found outdoors. A delicate stream of water flowed from a small bamboo pipe into a hollowed-out stone basin. The entire suite looked out onto a sweeping deck and a private garden designed to appear much larger than it really was.

The kitchenette offered a fancy bottle of fine Japanese whisky. I pounced on it, and poured myself a beautiful amber drink over rocks. Then another, and another. Eventually the pretty bottle became a dead soldier, sitting empty and forlorn on the coffee table in the sitting room. Yoshi snapped a picture at that point. There I was, dressed in *yukata* and *hanten* coat, looking as drunk as I really was. I drink more than I used to, before you died. Solace from a bottle? I guess so. Since I am a longtime ulcer patient, it may be the death of me.

Well, everybody dies of something. You died of "hemorrhagic pancreatitis due to chronic alcoholism." That's what your death certificate says. Your pancreas ruptured and you bled to death internally. When I telephoned you that December 13th morning, to see how you were, the family friend with whom you were staying in San Diego relayed your message that you would call me later. You

didn't know you were going to die. Like all youngsters, you couldn't even conceive of it.

"There can't be anything really wrong with me, Daddy," you said just weeks earlier when I urged you to see a doctor. "I'm only 29 years old." But within two hours of my unanswered call to you on that fatal morning, you were dead. You died in your sleep, which is the best way to die if one has to. No woman wants to die with her fancy boots on, to die fully aware of what's happening to her. Life drains away. Afraid, so afraid. I am grateful, as you should be, that you were spared that.

Shortly after lunch at The Times that day, I received a call from a San Diego "deputy." I thought he was a deputy sheriff. It did not dawn on me that he was a deputy coroner, always a messenger of death. "A woman named Yvonne Keiko Sellers has been found . . . ." Oh God, let it be "injured" or "sexually assaulted" or anything but "dead." Such desperate prayers can race through a father's soul in a split instant. But it was "dead," marking the end of your life at age 29 and the beginning of mine without you.

As a newspaperman I've had plenty of experience with alcoholics. In the early days of my career, drunks were common in newsrooms everywhere. Many were quite talented, all were unreliable, unless they were "recovering" from their so-called disease. Stories about them were mostly funny, not fatal. "Sheldon didn't come back after dinner. We found him curled up on the table in the news conference room." Shaken into tentative consciousness, old Sheldon would stagger back to the copy desk and write the best headline of the night.

If they are not happy-go-lucky, as some actually are, alcoholics make themselves and everyone around them miserable, but they don't die as you did, or usually not. The American Medical Association recognizes alcoholism as a disease, but I don't see it that way, never have, never could, never will. If alcoholism is a disease, then so is drug addiction. But society's stance on this issue is that one is and one isn't. The death of my daughter does nothing to change my mind.

Your friends told me you drank too much, but you denied it to your dying day. "Daddy, I don't drink any more than they do." Maybe not, but your friends are still alive. Am I angry with you? Yes, but now the gripping question for me is "why?" My alcoholic acquaintances, wise with personal experience, tell me I will never know the answer. Since I dismiss "disease," considering it only a socially acceptable explanation for dear ol' Uncle Charlie's heavy drinking, they are probably right.

Sunday, Oct. 10: In a taxi hired for the day, Misao and Kazuko took us to

Haruna Shrine in the Haruna Mountains near Ikaho. On foot we traversed long paths and steep steps. Misao's octogenarian husband Toshio, too feeble for this sort of exertion, returned to Shibukawa to water his exotic plants, a few of which I sent to him from America more than 20 years ago. At first I labeled the packages "rare plants" on customs declaration forms, honest to the point of stupidity. Plants, rare or otherwise, are often confiscated by customs officials. My bundles went through the mail okay, arriving intact, but Toshio, older and wiser, suggested that "fruit cake" might be safer. So subsequently I mailed "cakes" to him.

Haruna Shrine is an incredible 1,300 years old, built snug against the base of a mountain outcropping that looks from a distance like a huge statue of Buddha with head bowed over tiny worshippers. Yoshi prayed here, at this infidel place, even though she is a hardcore Christian. Her rationale is that all gods are connected in some manner. I agree, if gods exist at all. She prayed for the welfare of the Japanese people, and for the three of us — you, me and herself — "in the name of Jesus Christ, amen." Then we tossed coins into the collection box. It works for her, and it even works for me, the spiritual barbarian among us.

Religion is not very important in modern-day Japan. The concept of life after death is vague to the point of nonexistence, but everyone seems to sense a postmortem spiritual existence that may not differ much from the Christian notion of Heaven. In general, births and deaths are recognized within a Buddhist context, and weddings are conducted under Shinto auspices. Shintoism is a native, nationalistic and pantheistic religion that sees everything in Japan, down to pebbles on the beach, as sacred, with the sun above as the highest deity. The Iizukas are Buddhists, if they are anything at all, with the notable exceptions of Yoshi, a Christian, and her sister Kazuko, who married into Dr. Takai's Shinto family.

The four of us, actually five since the taxi driver was invited along, ate lunch at a popular Ikaho-area *soba* restaurant named Mizusawa, famous since Tokugawa days. Many people were lined up to get in, but we had reservations, so we walked past the waiting peasants and were immediately seated on a *tatami* dining platform. A bowl of fat white noodles, or *udon*, was placed before me. *Sigh. I am not a noodle man, but I ate the stuff anyway. It's not too bad really.* Mrs. Fukuda of The Fukuichi had called ahead to order a *tokubetsu* dish for us, a long tray of vegetable specialties.

The surviving Iizukas of my generation — namely Misao, Toshiko, Kazuko, Hitoshi and Yoshi, the offspring of the late Shigenobu and Mieko Iizuka — are smart and sophisticated people, but they are klutzy at the same time.

Mundane life perplexes them, and I, an American with a down-to-earth mind, am amused by this, as indeed they are, to give them self-denigrating credit. For many years I have dealt with charmingly scatter-brained Yoshi. I am an experienced Iizuka observer.

Today both Misao and Kazuko were carrying ostrich-skin purses, each costing $8,500, if you can believe that. *The rich are different from you and me,* as American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, immortalizing the obvious. Misao went off to the Mizusawa's restroom and came back distressed. She couldn't get her purse latched. She and her sister Kazuko puzzled over the matter. The latch was conventional. A little gold tab was designed to fit into a slot, then swivelled to secure the purse.

I could have helped my sister-in-law, but I was sitting at the other end of the table. From a distance, I looked for complexity where none existed. So I didn't immediately understand Misao's simple problem. Kazuko finally figured it out. The tab was turned the wrong way, and the slot would not slip onto it. Both Misao and Kazuko erupted into embarrassed, mouth-covering laughter, quickly joined by Yoshi and me. *The Iizukas are all alike*, I said in Japanese, shaking my head in decades-old resignation. The sisters giggled in acknowledgment

My wealthy sisters-in-law took us shopping in Takasaki, the biggest city in Gunma Prefecture. "Buy anything you want," they said as we entered a department store. Yoshi picked out a $1,000 string of black pearls. I was more greedy. I chose a $1,600 Seiko gold watch, 18 karats instead of the pedestrian 14. When a Japanese suggests a shopping trip, always go, whether you have any money or not. You, Kei, learned this lesson very quickly on your trips to Japan. Japanese are generous to a fault when it comes to their families.

The elderly sisters were cute as they paid for our purchases. With a department store credit card, Kazuko covered the entire $2,600 bill, plus tax. Misao reimbursed her sister with cash, down to the exact yen. She peeled off ¥10,000 notes one after another, and ¥1,000 notes one after another, and then she dug into her change purse for coins. "*Hanbun hanbun*," I said, smiling at them. "*Yes, always half and half*," the sisters agreed.

Monday, Oct. 11: Gunma women are *tsuyoi.* They have strong personalities. Everybody says so. Long ago, when times were hard, many women in Gunma Prefecture took up silk-weaving to supplement the meager earnings of their menfolk. In time they prospered and became the major breadwinners for their families, pushing the men into the background and effectively emasculating them. So goes the story, related all over Japan. Gunma women are *tsuyoi*, domina-

tors of men. It is mostly myth, of course, but myth with a powerful grain of truth, sort of like the legendary beauty of California girls. Your mother, my wife, is a Gunma woman, and whether she is truly strong or not, she is stuck with the reputation, as am I, the husband of a *Gunma no onna.*

Akagi "oroshi" is what Japanese call a strong storm that whips down Gunma's Akagi mountain range and into the Kanto Plain. It is sort of like the Santa Anas that occasionally come from the American desert. I asked a Japanese friend. Suppose I said in Japanese: "My Gunma wife is like an Akagi oroshi." It would certainly get a good laugh, he said.

There is another phrase — "karatsu kaze" — that also means strong winds and seems to be associated with Gunma women. I'll look into that.

Because Yoshi is my wife, I endured and, if the truth be known, enjoyed a certain amount of good-natured kidding in the *onsen* baths at Shima today. Shortly after we checked into the Yamaguchi-kan in the mountains of northwestern Gunma Prefecture, Yoshi and I donned *yukata* and slippers and padded off to the hotel's public bathing pools, women on one side, men on the other. Buck naked, with washcloth strategically draped, I headed for the men's *rotenburo*, or outside pool, which overlooked the small but vigorous Shima River flowing between forested mountain slopes. A dozen Japanese men were soaking in the steaming sulphur water. With my lilly-white skin, hairy limbs and *gaijin* features, I immediately became the focus of attention. In all my travels in Gunma Prefecture on this trip, I never once saw a *gaijin* face other than my own in mirrors.

One man, Toru Saito, editor in chief of a monthly photo magazine published by Soka Gakkai International, recognized me from Ikaho, our previous stop. He viewed me, a *Los Angeles Times* "editor," as a professional compatriot. I explained I hadn't worked as an editor for many years, that I was engaged in journalistic technology now. I could just as easily be working for a bank, I said. But my explanation seemed to make no difference to this working photojournalist. He, too, was vacationing at the finest *onsen* hotels in Gunma Prefecture, and I, at this time and place, was a *gaijin* he could relate to.

A little English here, a little Japanese there, and Mr. Saito and his party soon discovered that my wife was a Gunma woman. *Ah, so desu! Tsuyoi ne?* A little English here, a little Japanese there, a few gestures, and they told me how to handle her. *Beat her everyday until she finally sinks to her proper place*. Much laughter within this cozy fraternity of very clean men.

Your Aunt Yoko has stayed at Yamaguchi-kan many times, often with her

husband Tsuneo, who, by the way, died exactly two years ago on October 11, 1997. The Iizukas are well-known here. The *onsen* hotel's madam, the beautiful and famous Kumiko Tamura, is Yoko's friend, and when Yoshi and I, Iizuka relatives from America, showed up, we were most welcome.

That evening, after a second bath, we gathered with other *yukata*-clad guests for a *Taiko* drum show plus songs and dances by Madam Tamura. A half-naked entertainer beat a huge drum to punctuate his sing-song chants and ancient stories. Yoshi found the performance nostalgic and even spiritual. I found it unbearably loud, so I excused myself after a while and headed for the bar lounge, seeking a gin and tonic and a little peace and quiet.

But I was shanghaied as soon as I entered the bar. My afternoon friends from the bathing pool, the ones who had joshed me about Yoshi the *tsuyoi* wife, pulled me into a large booth and began plying me with *shochu*, which has become fashionable in recent years. In Jack's day in Japan, *shochu* provided a cheap way for the lower classes to get drunk. Made from the dregs of *sake* or sometimes from sweet potatoes or almost anything else that will ferment, it has the potency of vodka and once was quite inexpensive. Now they package this tasteless stuff in a fancy bottle and sell it for ¥10,000, or about $90. Jack didn't like it then and Jackson didn't like it now. But that it can do the job, neither Jack nor Jackson would deny.

Three very young women from Shibukawa had been hired to entertain Mr. Saito and the other vacationing gentlemen. I could hardly get a cigarette from my pack before three lighters burst into flame in my face, each held by a charming girl eager to please an honored guest of her clients. Promptly at 10 p.m., as was verified by a glance at my handsome new gold watch, the girls lined up in front of us, sang a little farewell ditty of some sort, bowed low and said good night. They had to catch a bus and then a train to take them home to belly-button Shibukawa. No money changed hands, so they must have been paid in advance. I made a little joke about women who go poof at the stroke of 10, two hours before Cinderella's midnight. Everybody laughed.

Yoshi came in and joined us. She was in awe of the beauty and talent of Madam Tamura, who had just sang and danced at the conclusion to the show outside the lounge. And she was slightly miffed at me for missing the madam's performance. But then, reverting to the personality that had entranced Jack long ago, she proceeded to charm the pants off my hosts, who to a man were struck by *her* mature beauty.

Finally Yoshi excused herself and headed upstairs to her *futon*, warning me, in a parting shot, not to drink too much. When she was out of sight, my grinning

and drunken new friends put their forefingers to their foreheads in the universal sign of the devil. *Gunma no onna wa tsuyoi, Jackson*. I asked for another drink. *Make it a double. What Yoshi doesn't know won't hurt her*. Everybody laughed.

Tuesday, Oct. 12: Morning in Shima. A taxi took us up the road along the Shima River to an old shrine with a thatched roof. A hike in the woods along the river. A brief stop at a coffee shop. Refreshments at Yamaguchi-kan, compliments of the management. Then we caught a bus to the train station. An assistant hotel manager went to embarrassing lengths to see us off. She kept yelling "*Arigato gozaimasu! Domo arigato!*" and waving vigorously as the bus pulled away. To my surprise, she even chased after us for about 50 yards. "*Arigato gozaimasu!*" Some of the bus passengers smiled as I registered astonishment.

A train took us to a town near Gunma Prefecture's western border. A mountain range lay between us and our goal, Karuizawa in Nagano Prefecture. No trains went that way, so we took a bus, which turned out to be nicer than a train anyway. We were the only passengers for most of the trip over the mountains and down to Karuizawa, a resort community that foreigners "discovered" in the 19th century. This was a big contrast to the packed bus that took us from Shinshimashima to Kamikochi last week. When we reached the town, a taxi delivered us to the Mampei Hotel, the oldest and most famous of the Karuizawa hotels.

Yoshi and I have decided that the Mampei will be our personal hotel whenever we visit Japan. Its ambience — a mixture of Western and Japanese cultures in a wooded setting — suits us fine. After all, we as a twosome reflect that same mixture. We will stay there at least a couple of days on each trip to Japan.

Karuizawa lies in Nagano Prefecture, but it is within walking distance of Gunma Prefecture, forever our primary focus. Yoshi, a Gunma patriot, sees the town's Nagano location as a gerrymandering mistake of some sort. A little geographical toe embracing the charming community sticks into Gunma, where it really belongs, she thinks. "When I was growing up, I thought Karuizawa was part of Gunma," she says. "I was surprised to learn it wasn't."

[Crown Prince Akihito, now Japan's emperor, met his Michiko on a tennis court near the Mampei Hotel in the early Sixties (late Fifties?).]

We declined when asked if we wanted a French dinner in the Mampei Hotel dining room. After two weeks in Japan, we were tired of both French and Japanese hotel dinners. There is a certain sameness in those cuisines. French dinners, in Japan anyway, are fish with white sauce and meat with brown sauce.

Japanese-style dinners always center on *nabemono* — strange things in a little crock pot, or in a special paper container, as was the case in Ikaho, cooked by a candle-like device that burns just long enough to bring the dish to a boil. Clever people, these Japanese, but we wanted something else.

So we sought out a *yakitori* shop in an alley in the so-called Ginza area of Karuizawa. We ate charcoal-grilled chicken nuggets, chicken innards, squid, *gyoza* and other delicious things. And there was something new for me: You know those bits of cartilage at the top of chicken legs? Well, if you remove them, along with smidgens of meat, and deepfry them, you've got *kori-kori yakitori*, crunchy and satisfying. I had never eaten that before.

But what I *really* wanted in terms of *yakitori* was what Jack ate at Japanese *yomise*, or roadside night stands, when he was a poor student in the late Fifties, and again when he was a poor newspaperman in the early Sixties. The ingredients in those days, cooked on skewers over charcoal, were not chicken at all, but pig guts and other swine innards.

Yoshi says some uncouth Japanese, mostly old folks like me, prefer pig *yakitori* to chicken *yakitori*, but they must go to Shinjuku back alleys and other out-of-the-way places to find such low-class but now-expensive fare. Essentially I have always been low-class, and I take a certain pride in liking what common folks of my generation like. At least Jack felt that way. Jackson, more affluent, mostly hungers for something that once upon a time tasted good, regardless of price. Nowadays he yearns without hope for the skillet-baked crackling cornbread that his grandmother Jennye made for him after a hog butchering in Kentucky. Cracklings were little bits of fatty pigskin. Will he ever taste such delicious things again?

Wednesday, Oct. 13: First full day in Karuizawa and one more to go. We have learned that you should never stay only one night in a Japanese hotel or inn. Check-in is 2 p.m., check-out is 10 a.m. Not enough time to do much, especially if you are travel-tired on arrival, which is likely.

We went shopping on Karuizawa's Ginza-*dori*. Yoshi bought some clothing she considered cheap. I doubt the frilly things were really bargains, but it made her happy, so it was okay with me. We also bought an *omiyagi* for you — a wall mask of a beautiful girl's face incorporating a violin in its design. It will hang in your old room near your urn, so you can see it.

This journal is weird, undoubtedly morbid, addressed as it is to a young woman who died three years ago. Alas, my audience of one cannot see or read

anything offered or written, no matter how carefully crafted it is. Here I am, sitting on a bench at a shopping arcade in the mountains of Japan, with ichi-go-ichi-e experiences waiting all around, and what do I do, while my wife shops? I write to my dead daughter, fussing over the syntax as though it really matters.

I miss you so much, Kei. I was more alive when you were around. Everything seemed to have a purpose then. Through you my life expanded in my middle years — from age 35 when you were born to age 64 when you died. My autobiographical and genealogical scriblings took on a life of their own, again through you and your very existence.

Even mundane home improvements, such as the floor-to-ceiling birch bookcases I built in our library over a period of months, held a significance that went beyond the needs and desires of your parents, because this was your house, too, and you would live in it after we were gone. "My father built those bookcases when I was a little girl," you would tell guests when you were a mature hostess. Now I am not much interested in those things, although I do what must be done, for Yoshi's sake if not my own, but only after she has nagged me.

Right now, while we are in Japan, the library's oak floor is being replaced. It was damaged last month when a hot water pipe under the slab sprang a leak. Our old cat Cleo discovered this. ("Is your cat for hire?" the plumber asked.) As you know, Cleo always seeks her place in the sun within the house, moving from room to room, from one sunny spot to another as the day progresses and the sunshine shifts to different windows. One morning we found her curled up contentedly on the library's hardwood floor, just in front of my leather-topped desk. She had found a warm spot where there was no sunshine.

Directly below, under the concrete slab, hot water was leaking into the subsoil, and it was seeping up through miniscule cracks to warm the oak flooring. It was nice for our 14-year-old pet but highly destructive to the tongue-and-groove flooring I installed in 1979 when you were 12 years old. Twenty years ago! I was but a lad of 47. Even then, it was no small task installing a large oak-plank floor, but it was a labor of love and hope, a joy at the time.

Now, at age 67, I have neither the time nor energy, nor the motivation, to do it again. Bob Bussinger, our across-the-street neighbor for 30 years, will do it for us while we are away. He is much younger than I am, an ubran cowboy who won the world's fast-draw championship three years in a row. Anyway, the insurance company is paying for the whole thing, so why should I replace the floor myself, even if I were so inclined? You are not here to say, "Yes, it is beautiful, isn't it? My father installed it . . . ."

We stopped at a coffee shop and got directions to Kumobaike Pond, nicknamed "Swan Lake" by foreigners who were unimpressed with its elegant real name, which translates as "Pond in the Clouds." It is the only big pond in Karuizawa. We walked around it. A pleasant little hike.

A taxi carried us to Usui Pass at the peak of the mountain that rises above Karuizawa. A shrine, Kumanojinja, sits there. The Gunma-Nagano boundry runs straight through the middle of the steps leading to the shrine. You stand in Nagano, but a single step carries you to our beloved Gunma. A few shops and restaurants operate along the street fronting the moutaintop shrine. Each offers a marvelous view of forested mountains. For centuries this was the main route between Gunma Prefecture and Nagano's Karuizawa. The Mampei Hotel, where we are staying down below, got its start from the heavy traffic over this well-beaten path. Travelers going and coming needed a rest stop, just as they do today.

Thursday, Oct. 14: We took a bus to Onioshidashi Park in Gunma Prefecture, about 40 minutes north of Karuizawa. Black lava rocks stand in surrealistic shapes, all originating from a 1783 eruption of nearby Mount Asama, which towers 2,560 meters above sea level. *Onioshidashi* means "Devils Pushing Out." When Yoshi was a little girl, her father brought her here to see the "strange rocks."

She treasures the memory. It was a rare excursion in which daddy's-girl Yoshi was away from home and alone with her father, Shigenobu Iizuka of Komochi. Often, since she was the youngest of the bunch, she was left behind as Mr. Iizuka took his older children on mountain hikes and picnics. But this time, at Onioshidashi, there was only Yoshi and her dad, and she saw many large black stones shaped like devils, coughed up from the bowels of the earth 153 years before she was born. Today she had come to see them again, and to show them to me, as her father had shown them to her.

Very interesting, I said sincerely, but I was more intrigued by the *samurai* museum at the Onioshidashi Park visitors center. It held the most extensive collection of *samurai* and *ninja* relics I had ever seen. Few foreigners show up here, so there was nothing in English to explain things to dumb me. But the museum manager kindly took me under his wing, with Yoshi translating.

The museum is devoted to the weapons, clothing, artifacts and images of the *samurai* warriors who 400 years ago ruled a vast area in what is now Gunma and Nagano prefectures. The dirks and other razor-sharp weapons that elite black-garbed *ninja* wielded in their stealthy assassinations look as deadly under glass as they surely did in the last moments of an emeny's life, if the unfortunate victim

saw them at all. *Ninja* were the spearheads of regional armies in those days, sort of like the scouts and point men of modern military units, except *ninja* got really close and personal, often leaving a sleeping soldier or government official with a slit throat and half open eyes that would never again see anything.

A large portrait of warlord Sanada Yukimura is displayed here. He looks as fearsome as he undoubedly did during his lifetime, four centuries ago, when he and his father, Sanada Masayuki, carved out a huge mountain fiefdom for themselves and fiercely defended their holdings. Yukimura ruled western Gunma Prefecture and the southern portion of Nagano Prefecture. This was long before Mount Asuma's devils "pushed out" at what is now called Onioshidashi, where Yoshi and I stood today.

If the Komochi Mountains in central Gunma, where your ancesters lived, were not an actual part of Yukimura's domain, they certainly fell under his considerable influence. Komochi and eastern Gunma constituted a border state, sort of like Kentucky in the American Civil War. Its people pledged allegiance to a northern warlord, but they also hedged their bets, bowing almost as low to the powerful Yukimura at his Ueda castle in the nearby southwest.

A century of internecine warfare was coming to an end. A general of peasant origin, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a little monkey-faced warrior whom many Japanese still consider the greatest man in their history, had virtually finished the job of unifying the nation under a single governmental authority. His successor, Tokugawa Ieyasu, completed the task, once and for all, by winning the great Battle of Sekigahara in the year 1600. This effectively guaranteed that Japan would stand as one entity, not a nation of warring clans. Ieyasu became *Shogun*, and his Tokugawa Shogunate would rule Japan for more than two and a half centuries, until Emperor Meiji — Hirohito's grandfather and the current Emperor Akihito's great-grandfather — regained power in 1868 after another historic battle.

Ieyasu was known as "The Badger" even in his lifetime. Badgers are shrewd and tough, and Ieyasu certainly was that. In the Western world the fox is seen as the correct analogous animal to apply to such military personages as America's General Robert E. Lee ("The Gray Fox") and Germany's Field Marshal Erwin Rommel ("The Desert Fox"). Japanese see the fox the same way as Westerners — *sly, smart* and *sneaky* are characteristics that come to mind — but Japanese, more strongly than we, attribute feminine characteristics to this animal, making the appellation inappropriate for a tough warlord like Ieyasu. Thus, it had to be a badger, not a fox, who played skillful politics after Hideyoshi's death and then emerged victorious in the all-important battle against dissident clans at

Sekigahara.

Kei, it is difficult to write fluidly about Japan. Explanatory footnotes are always intruding themselves into this manuscript, whether I, the writer, like it or not. Ieyasu was called the "Badger" *Shogun*, yes, but Japan has no badgers as we Americans know them. "Badger" is simply the best translation we can devise for the *tanuki*, a squatty fox-like creature unrelated to either the Japanese fox or the American badger. The matter is not a linguistic problem for Japanese historians. No explanations are necessary. The victor at Sekigahara 400 years ago was Japan's *Tanuki Shogun*, and everybody in Japan knows the *tanuki*'s reputation for cleverness.

"The Battle of Sekigahara was just as important as the Battle of Gettysburg," said Yoshi, surprising the living hell out of me. I didn't know she knew enough about the American Civil War to even draw the comparison. Maybe she listens to me after all. Yes, the Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863 was a turning point for America, and it served almost the same national purpose as Sekigahara in Japan.

If Major General George Pickett's famous mile-long charge had succeeded in routing federal forces on Cemetery Ridge, as General Lee fervently hoped, the United States today might be divided in half, with the Confederacy in the South and the downsized Union in the North. Political boundries around the world are never preordained. Usually they are drawn by the sacrifices of men long ago, just as they are certain to be redrawn by men not yet born.

Early in this journal I referred to a television series that recounted the dramatic story of the 47 ronin of Ako, captioned in English. When the Chushingura tale was finished, Cox Channel 12 offered the equally fascinating story of Shogun Ieyasu and the Battle of Sekigahara. The battle was fought 400 years ago near Nagoya, about halfway between Tokyo and Osaka.

The TV series was entitled "Aoe: Tokugawa Sankei." The word "Aoe" refers to the triple-geranium crest of the Tokugawa family. "Sankei" means three generations — in this case, Ieyasu himself, son Hidetada and grandson Iemitsu, the first three Tokugawa shoguns.

One tends to think only of swords and spears and horses in Japan's wars of 400 years ago, but the Japanese, always "up to date" in the Western technology of killing people, also had rifles and cannons, and that's why 8,000 soldiers died at Sekigahara. In truth, thousands more died. The Tokugawas, like victors through the ages, minimized their own casualties while generously counting the fallen enemy. The riflemen on both sides, actually blunderbuss-men, would seem to hold

the advantage in such a melee, but think about it. If they missed with their one-shot loads, or even if they didn't, surviving spear carriers would chase them down before they could reload. I would choose a spear in that situation.

Ieyasu's final drive toward full unification of Japan was not as smooth as it sounds here. He faced serious threats even after he won the Battle of Sekigahara and forced the Emperor to make him *Shogun*. Most of all he feared Yukimura, the tough mountain warlord from the area lying to the northeast of what is known today as the Japan Alps. And his fears were justified.

Yukimura's father got along well enough with the low-born Hideyoshi, but the son had bones to pick with Ieyasu, the peasant general's high-born successor. The son plotted revenge on the "Badger" *Shogun* who had defeated his father at Sekigahara. Never mind that the father, Sanada Masayuki, was just one of many warlords who unsuccessfully rose in revolt and then survived as one of the "outside" *daimyo,* as opposed to "inside" *daimyo* who had always supported Ieyasu. Never mind that Ieyasu, only five years after Sekigahara, "retired" as the Tokugawa *Shogun* in favor of his son Hidetada. Ieyasu was still alive, still the big boss, and that was enough for the vengeful Sanada Yukimura.

In 1615, during the summer campaign of the Battle of Osaka, Yukimura and 3,500 of his ferocious soldiers were engaged in battle with Tokugawa forces a few miles from Osaka Castle. The besieged Toyotomi clan, with whom Yukimura was aligned, had pulled together a ragamuffin army of 50,000 *samurai* and *ronin* to face Ieyasu's 100,000 soldiers. Suddenly Yukimura broke through the battle line. He and his mounted warriers, followed by spear carriers and other foot soldiers, raced toward Ieyasu's lightly defended headquarters at Tennoji Temple. If he could kill the hated *Shogun* Ieyasu, the battle and probably the entire war would be won for the Toyotomis.

Yukimura almost pulled it off. Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa regime that ruled all of Japan except for this upstart Toyotomi enclave in Osaka, came to believe he was finally defeated, so he made preparations to commit *seppuku*. In the nick of time, a messenger theatrically rushed in: "Wait! Victory is ours! Sanada Yukimura has been killed!" The threat to Tokugawa rule, now without effective leadership, faded away, and Japan was united in peace for more than two centuries. It was another bloody turning point in Japanese history.

The severed head of the fallen Yukimura was delivered to Ieyasu, who, still shaken by his embarrassing close call, refused to even look at it. He had seen enough of this disloyal *daimyo*. "Feed it to the dogs," he ordered.

Look, this didn't really happen. The "Feed it to the dogs" quote is fiction. I lifted it from the "Aoe: Tokugawa Sankei" TV series. At my request, a Japanese professor (good friend Shozo Usami) asked the author of the series, James Miki, if there was any historical basis for the scripted incident. Miki admitted that he had invented the whole thing as a dramatic ploy.]

On the way back to Karuizawa from the lava fields, Yoshi and I stopped for lunch at a crossroads restaurant, then hiked a mile and a half through the woods, along a sunken path that God knows how many people have tramped over the centuries. We reached an amazing waterfall on the Nagano side of the border. Shigaito Falls, it is called. *Shigaito* means "White Thread."

In my decades on this earth I have admired numerous waterfalls, but nothing that matched this one. The water came straight out of the mountainside. I kid you not. There was no stream or river feeding this falls. The water simply poured out of a mountain. Very unusual. From a crisp stone ledge stretching 50 yards around one side of a huge pool, the water fell about 10 feet, like thousands of white threads. It was very cold. There was no hot spring here. This was the source of the Ukawa River, which flows down the mountain to Karuizawa and runs near our Mampei Hotel.

Friday, Oct. 15: We checked out of the Mampei and walked to the Café L'Opera coffee shop in downtown Karuizawa. As a nicotine-starved Californian, I *adore* Japanese coffee houses. Great coffee and *haizara*, or ashtrays, everywhere. At this one, on this morning, there was Johann Sebastian Bach music, which I can take or leave, but Yoshi is partial to anything classical.

Music has always been background stuff for me. You, a music student at the University of California in San Diego, shared an appreciation of classical music with your mother, not so much with me, because I, as you well knew, possessed a dullard's ear for it. You were a skilled classical violinist. I would sit between you and Yoshi at an Orange County Performing Arts Center concert, my lovely daughter on one side, my lovely wife on the other, and I would marvel, as I strived to stay awake, that mere sounds could bring tears to the eyes of both of you. "It's so pretty," you inadequately explained. A dumb beast sat among angels who could hear things he could not.

Since your death Yoshi seldom listens to the music that once stirred her. It reminds her of you and makes her sad. Me? I am affected by lyrics more than sounds, so I cry, too, or at least choke up, when I hear "Give Thanks," the last

hymn you sang when you attended church with us just weeks before you died. You were a Christian, like your mom.

"And now let the weak say 'I am strong'
"Let the poor say 'I am rich'
"Because of what the Lord has done for us
"Give thanks"

You wept at the church, knowing down deep that you were in trouble but refusing to admit it. My heart weeps now, too late. Perhaps I could have helped you, even saved you, if I had known what you were dealing with. It was only days later when I learned that demon wine had a grip on you. And then I misjudged, thinking there was enough time to deal with the situation. There wasn't.

We rushed back to the hotel, collected our stored baggage and took a taxi to the Karuizawa train station. We boarded an express smoking car to Omiya in Saitama Prefecture, then changed trains to Shinjuku in Tokyo. To kill time until the 2 p.m. check-in at Tokyo's Century Hyatt Hotel, we sought out a $10 coffee shop near the station. Big *koi* and smaller fish swam in a rocky pond next to our table. American coffee was good enough for me, but Yoshi preferred cold green tea with green syrup for sweeting. It didn't matter what we ordered. Everything cost ¥1,000, or about 10 bucks. We were back in the big city with its especially big prices. Our 17th-floor Century Hyatt room overlooked Shinjuku Central Park, a grand view.

That evening we hosted your Aunt Yoko for dinner in Tokyo Harbor aboard the *Vingt et Un* cruise ship. It cost $500 for the three of us. Departing from Hamamatsucho, we went under the Rainbow Bridge and took a swing around Tokyo Bay. Elegant dining was the attraction because you couldn't see much in the darkness, although the lights of Tokyo were pretty. The whole thing took about three hours. It was a new experience for Yoko and she was pleased. Afterward, on solid ground again, we stopped for beer at a *yomise* night stand selling both *yakitori* and *oden*. A small crowd of drunkards welcomed us as we ducked beneath hanging curtains and took seats on benches. A couple of them were foreigners. Just like ol' times for Jack, who still walks this earth as Jackson.

Saturday, Oct. 16: A subway, a train and then another subway to Tsukiji, the world's largest fish market. It is oyster season and I am hungering for them, so we are going to eat some, along with other fresh stuff from the sea. We ate lunch

at a *sushi* shop called Sushisei in Gyogai Ichiba, Tsukiji's "outside market." The *sushi* was great, but no oysters, dammit.

Later we attended a Chinese dinner in a private room at the Dai Ichi Hotel in Kichijoji. Attendees were Hideko and Hitoshi, Mariko, Junko Asami and her husband Yasuhiro, and Yoshi and me — all of Hitoshi's immediate family, minus the two grandkids, plus us, his sister and brother-in-law. Junko was annoyed with Yasuhiro, a busy orthopedic surgeon. He had gone to the wrong Dai Ichi Hotel, the one in downtown Tokyo, and had arrived late for the Kichijoji dinner. The alcoholic toasting beverage was *raochu,* a Chinese liqueur that must be sweetened, otherwise it tastes terrible. Stir in a few sugar crystals and it is quite good.

But a funny thing: Our dinner host, Hitoshi, poured *raochu* from a pot into everyone's small glass, and we sweetened it in anticipation. *Kompai* all around, clinking of glasses, bottoms up. And then we were puzzled. It was only Chinese tea, not *raochu.* Hitoshi had grabbed the wrong pot from the center of the table. His wife Hideko scolded him. I laughed along with everybody else. It was still another example of the Iizuka klutziness I knew so well. Only your Uncle Tsuneo, admirably self-controlled throughout his life, didn't seem to possess this charming family trait.

At Hitoshi's Kichijoji home, which we visited again tonight, there was a magnificent 150-year-old black pine *bonsai*, a hand-me-down from Hideko's late father. With a thumb as green as Yoshi's, Hitoshi lovingly cares for the miniature tree, and takes pride in it, as he should. Twenty years ago Hitoshi instructed me and Yoshi on how to prune the eight-foot black pines at our California home, and they still look good, thanks mostly to Yoshi's gardening skills, not mine.

Hitoshi and Yoshi's father, Mr. Iizuka, purchased *bonsai* plants often during his lifetime, and he fussed over each one, pruning it, training it, watering it. But everything Mr. Iizuka touched died. More Iizuka klutziness. *I smile again, fondly*. Hitoshi also showed me some plants descended from the Northwest American rarities I acquired for your Uncle Toshio many years ago. Botanist Toshio propagated the alien plants in his Shibukawa greenhouse and gave specimen samples to his Tokyo brother-in-law, who tends them still, recognizing *your* father as the source from which they sprang.

Sunday, Oct. 17: Fried oysters for lunch at Yoko's Tokyo home. *Finally!* Yoko knew I was hungering for oysters. I hadn't eaten a single one in our travels in inland Japan, far from the seashore. Nephews Ken and Yasuki left early in a car to transport our luggage to Narita Airport. One of the bags was borrowed from Yoko, to accommodate all the stuff we had acquired in the past three weeks. Yoko

accompanied me and Yoshi on an express train to the airport. It was time to go home, back to America.

As I left Yoko's house I silently bid a fond farewell to her toilet, which was equipped with a "Toilet Master" seat similar to many I had enjoyed in the past three weeks. This is an unsavory subject, but I don't care. To me, toilet paper has always been only a slight improvement over the corncobs and Sears, Roebuck catalogs of Kentucky outhouses when I was a boy. No matter what is used, one is clearly rubbing feces into tender skin. A Japanese "Toilet Master" makes toilet paper altogether unnecessary.

The device looks like an ordinary Western toilet seat, but it has an electronic control panel attached. The seat is always pleasantly warm when you sit down. After finishing your business, you push the appropriate button and a gentle stream of lightly heated water is directed precisely onto your ainus, cleaning it as nothing else can. Push another button and your oshiri, as Japanese call it, is blow-dried to perfection. The only thing that surprises me is that there is no button to issue a puff of aromatic powder. Maybe no one has thought of this. I've got to have one of these marvelous gadgets at my Lake Forest home. They cost around $1,200.

The trip to the airport was a total disaster. It was even embarrassing. For nearly an hour Yoshi and Yoko engaged in a heated argument as strangers all around blatantly kibitzed or simply listened while pretending not to. Personal characterizations — *cold-hearted*, *self-centered*, *hammer-head*, *jealous*, *insensitive* — were hurled back and forth in our train booth as I sat there dumbfounded.

Both women were tight-faced in anger. They were quarreling as only family members can. What was this all about? Well, it seems that Yoko, after brooding silently for weeks and even months, had finally voiced opposition to Yoshi's plan to make Yasuki the heir of her American "fortune," now that you, our only child, were dead. Yoko did not like the idea at all, and would never, never change her mind. Was she a widowed mother fearing loss of control over a son who would own substantial property in America? Was she a fair-minded sister-in-law concerned over the prospect of Jack's estate going to someone other than his two American nephews, Michael and Guy? Damned if I know.

Yoko asked me what I thought, but she didn't find in me the ally she expected. I responded in English, since Yoko's English is much better than my Japanese. I explained that there were certain realities here. I am four actual years older than Yoshi, and as a poor human male I am eight additional years older biologically, which means I will surely die before she does — *just as Tsuneo died*

before you, Yoko. When that happens, Yoshi will own everything — *just as you own Tsuneo's much larger estate*. Then, after my death, Yoshi can then do anything she wants — *just as you can now*.

If perchance I outlive Yoshi and become an ancient bachelor, then of course I will do exactly what *I* want with *my* property and the funds still remaining from my modest estate. That's the way things work. So I am content with Yoshi's plan to keep her/our money in *her* family and not mine. Even if I were against it, that's how it would probably turn out.

Kei: When you died, your mother was left with nobody except me in her freely adopted but still foreign American homeland. I might live another 20 years, but even that amount of time, quite adequate for me, was not enough for Yoshi, who expects to reach 90-something, just like her father. For her, this glorious prospect is 30 years away but quite attainable.

Me? With my poor genes I simply live for the moment and the near future, grateful for both, while Yoshi takes the long view on everything. She feeds me vitamins and minerals and insists I eat my vegetables in an almost pathetic attempt to keep me healthy and alive. Who will take care of her when her husband's ashes join her daughter's in your old room, when my death portrait is displayed next to yours? Our warm home will be cold then, while Yoshi still lives, alone and shivering.

A great notion came to her. Not a satisfactory solution exactly, but an insurance policy of sorts. Yasuki Iizuka, her nephew and mine, would help her if anything happened to me. When she dies, Yasuki will make all the final arrangements, disposing of the three Sellers urns — yours, mine and hers — in some appropriate manner, perhaps even transporting them to Japan for internment at the Iizuka cemetery in Komochi Village. And then Yasuki will take possession of Yoshi's handsome Lake Forest home and her sizable funds, or whatever is left.

Why Yasuki, the middle son, instead of Ken, the oldest of Tsuneo's boys? Well, yes, Yasuki is the second son and Ken is the first, but that was exactly the point in Yoshi's Americanized mind. The oldest son gets everything in Japan, and Ken will get everything when his mother dies, just as Tsuneo got everything when Mr. Iizuka died. Why not leave a small fortune to the second son of Yoshi's oldest brother? The thinking here was more Western than Japanese.

None of this is imminent. Nothing will happen until Yoshi dies in 30 years or so, when Yasuki, 36 at the moment, becomes an old man like me. So one wonders why it is such a big deal now. Hell, 62-year-old Yoko might be dead by then, although I wouldn't bet on it. Her longevity genes are just as formidable as Yoshi's. Her mother, still going strong, will be 90 years old on January 1. Most

likely, Yoko is more concerned about *now* than *then*. Her son Yasuki, already partial to America, might gravitate even more to his American aunt if he were Yoshi's heir. This, in Yoko's mind, probably constitutes a personal threat. But in the end, who really knows what anyone thinks? People always disguise their true feelings with cloaks of self-virtue.

Sunday, Oct. 17: After a tail-wind flight of only nine hours, we arrived back in California on the same day we left Japan, thereby regaining the day we lost when we flew west three weeks ago. The library oak-plank floor that Bob Bussinger installed while we were away looked great. A huge pile of mail was waiting on the foyer table, gathered daily by Andy Yamashita, who took care of things while we were away. Andy, a Japanese-American student at the University of California in nearby Irvine, played the organ at your funeral almost three years ago.

The stacked mail provided a shocker for me. My boss, Philip Jordan, who had rescued me from Editorial Systems obscurity, raising me to a senior analyst level, was canned while I was traipsing through the mountains of Japan. It was Phil who championed my Japan trip at a time when *Los Angeles Times* management thought I should stay on the job to help guarantee that no Y2K problems arose when the calendar turned to Year 2000. Tom Kuby, whom I have known and respected for nearly 20 years, became my new boss. During this trip I steadfastly refused to even think about *The Times*, but now I was back home, and I began thinking about it again, even though I had a couple of vacation days left. Our jobs make fools of us all.

My first task, the next morning, was to get Cleo out of jail. She had hardly been outside the house since she came to us as a flea- and mite-infested throwaway kitten 14 years ago. Now we, her collective mother, father and protector, had left her miserably alone in the Lake Forest Animal Clinic for 22 whole days. I was concerned about her. She is the only cat we've ever had that really likes me, and I, a sucker for anyone or anything fond of me, always responded with affection, which made her love me even more.

Often Cleo is the first to greet me when I come home at night, meowing pitifully and insistently until I scratch her head and ears and otherwise pay attention to her. Yoshi, who feeds her and tends her litterbox and even provides an electric heating pad on cold nights, is irked that the cat prefers me, since I do nothing to deserve it. Cleo's love can't be explained, as love often can't.

Cleo was skin and bones when I brought her home. We had left a case of Fancy Feast cat food for her at the clinic when we departed for Japan, but the

veterinarians decided Cleo would live longer if she ate a special diet she didn't like at all. *To hell with that*. We put her back on her Fancy Feast food, and she filled out again after a time. Doctors and veterinarians are all alike. They seek to prolong life, without thinking too much about quality of life, which envitably includes eating and drinking things not good for us. Yoshi and I want old Cleo's last meal, whenever that happens, to be an enjoyable one.

Several weeks after we returned home, your Aunt Yoko visited your Aunt Kazuko in Shibukawa. She was there to seek a million yen, or about $10,000, from the Iizuka sisters to defray the considerable cost of furnishings for *Higurashi-An*, the place where all of them were born. Tsuneo's estate had already covered more than $300,000 worth of renovations at the old gate house, but the widow felt his estate should not carry the full burden of furniture and bedding and household equipment, which Iizuka family members would be using as they visited the family homestead and nearby cemetery.

The sisters agreed, but deep down, all these Iizuka women — Misao, Toshiko, Kazuko and Yoshi — were so accustomed to their big brother looking after their interests that they could not cheerfully abide his widow taking on that family role. Trouble was brewing. The Iizuka gate house, along with the "Big House" that still sits at the old Komochi Mountains compound, was their spiritual home and always would be, even if a *real* Iizuka no longer owned it. They had grown up there, and Yoko hadn't.

This declaration was defiantly stated, among themselves, although none of the women, in my *gaijin* opinion, has the gumption to make it so, even if their only remaining brother, Hitoshi, asserted himself and fully supported them. *Like me, Hitoshi mostly wants peace in the family, which makes him, like me, look weak in the eyes of those who are more contentious*. Possession is nine-tenths of everything, and Yoko now legally possesses the Iizuka compound, which she sees, appropriately enough, as the heritage of Tsuneo's three sons, who, after all, are true Iizukas themselves.

Then, following this discussion of *Higurashi-An* finances, Yoko spent two hours trashing your father and mother, mostly your mother, the primary focus of her ire. Yoshi didn't treat me right, Yoko opined to her sister-in-law. Yoshi slept at the hotel, leaving to me, her aging husband, and to Satoshi, Yoko's youngest son, the task of transporting heavy luggage to Yoko's Tokyo house so that Yasuki, her middle son, could take the stuff to Maebashi, our next stop. Yoshi gave me a chocolate that had been dropped in the dirty street! Yoshi required me to tote bags like a beast of burden! Yoshi borrowed money, without my knowledge, to finance our Japan trip!! Yoshi was fiscally irresponsible, "just like her father." Yoshi and

Jackson were *Amerika kojiki,* or American beggars. If Yoshi came to Mariko's wedding in Osaka next spring, Yoko would not attend.

It was all so petty and unfair and appalling. The initial spat between Yoko and Yoshi, centering on Yoshi's notion of making Yasuki her heir, had escalated to a point from which there was little chance of a friendly return. My lingering hopes of spending a few weeks of my golden years at *Higurashi-An*, which Yoko controls now that Tsuneo is dead, were completely dashed.

As for Yoko's personal digs at us, I say emphatically that Yoshi never mistreated me in Japan. To the contrary. We helped each other in the sometimes exhausting process of moving heavy bags through train stations and on/off buses, and Yoshi went to considerable trouble to pack the heaviest of the luggage at our current hotel and forward it to the next, so I would not have to lug it. She knows, better than most, that I am not the man I used to be.

The "dirty chocolate" story stemmed from an incident in Laguna Beach when Yoko's eldest son Ken was visiting last summer. The three of us — Yoshi, Ken and I — went to a ridiculously expensive candy shop, where Yoshi purchased a number of boxes as gifts for Japanese relatives. While she was at it, she bought a single piece of rich chocolate for her husband, who was loitering and smoking outside. *Kei, you will smile here in fond recollection*: Fumble-fingered Yoshi dropped my treat on the shop floor, quickly picked it up, put her finger to her lips as a sign to blabbermouth Ken that he should keep her little secret, then gave the chocolate to me. I nibbled it contentedly as we wandered on. Hell, I would have eaten the candy even if I had known it was dropped. The damned thing cost at least four bucks.

Yoko's tirade against Yoshi didn't sit well with Kazuko, always protective of her youngest sister. And there was that cold remark about Yoshi and Kazuko's father being fiscally irresponsible. Where did Yoko get this notion? Maybe it came from the last years of Mr. Iizuka's life, when he was pretty much tapped out. His expensive health care had to be provided by Tsuneo and Yoko. The daughter-in-law, widow of the Iizuka heir, perhaps resented the old man's public generosity in his flush years, which reduced his estate to little more than two aging houses on the outskirts of Komochi Village.

Mr. Iizuka did the best he could under difficult postwar circumstances, and when he died an amazing 1,700 people came to his funeral at the Komochi Athletic & Scholastic Institute, which was erected on land he donated. The Japanese prime minister sent condolences, and a couple of former prime ministers attended the services. Mr. Iizuka was *not* a failure in the eyes of his true family. And his daughter Yoshi was not a *kojiki*, or beggar. Jackson, her husband, held a

responsible job at a large American newspaper. *Anyway, Yoko, if baby sister Yoshi ever needs help, I will take care of her, and I am richer than you.* So declared Kazuko, a kind-hearted and fair-minded woman whom I have always liked. Yoko never got the million yen she was after. Never mind that it was a relatively small sum.

Japanese, once brought to battle, are fierce and unforgiving. Unkind words are not forgotten, and long-ago slights are recalled. Not so different from Americans, now that I think about it. Discussion of the Yoko/Yoshi fracas continued for weeks among the Iizuka women, back and forth across the wide Pacific — spurred, no doubt, by Yoshi, who couldn't let it go. It was even suggested by Yoshi's sisters during these long-distance telephone postmortems that Yoko, having lost her husband, resented Yoshi for still having one.

They knew that Yoshi, so much younger than they are, had developed a special bond with this family outsider, because Yoko was the Big Brother's wife and, important, too, because Yoko fell close to Yoshi's age group. Yoshi and Yoko were sister spirits, and for many years each had seen the other as an actual sister. But Yoshi was too trustful. *Blood is thicker than water. Everybody else is a stranger. Yoko is not an Iizuka, Yoshi. We told you so*. I swear I don't really understand any of this. Selfishly I hope Yoko doesn't poison my relationship with her boys. I have never had a son, and I enjoy my too-rare contacts with my brother-in-law's offspring, three sterling young men.

Kei, I felt you wince when I wrote that last sentence. Damn! You knew I adored you in an almost sappy way, but I was never able to convince you that a daughter, you specifically, you providentially, was all I ever wanted, all Jack ever wanted. You knew we had a boy's name picked out for you when you were born. Marcus Jackson Sellers, it was. We would have called you Marc. You knew we had to scramble to come up with Yvonne Keiko Sellers when you turned out to be a girl. It was the damned doctor's fault. But in his defense, the science of sex detection was not well developed in those days, back in the Sixties. The doctor simply listened to your strong heartbeat in your mother's womb and declared you were a boy.

I was disappointed, but I didn't say so. Instead I said it didn't matter at all. I would love any child of mine, no matter what. When you were born, a nurse actually said: "Mr. Sellers, will you settle for a girl?" Would I settle for a girl? A girl was what I really wanted! My heart soared that day. A daughter! She would love me forever.

I told you all of this as you were growing up, but you never quite believed

me. Doting fathers tell their daughters those kinds of lies. So you pledged to give me a grandson someday, to make up for . . . for what? Darling, I say again, even though you may not believe me again: I never wanted anybody but you. I still don't.

In the face of Yoko's objections, Yoshi decided she would not attend Mariko's Osaka wedding in March. If she showed up and Yoko carried out her threat to boycott the event, it would spoil the wedding for Mariko. Since Mariko's late Uncle Tsuneo can't attend, her Aunt Yoko simply must. Yoshi and I, foreign family relations, don't fall anywhere close to top priority here. We will wait until next fall or later to meet Mariko's husband. We will make our next trip to Japan in the autumn of 2000, this time starting out in late October, about a month later than the start of this trip, so we can be certain of seeing brilliant colors in the mountains of Gunma and Nagano prefectures.

Highlights of our Year 2000 trip: We will stay at an old-fashioned Agatsuma River ryokan that will sink beneath a new lake when Japan builds a dam just downstream from "River Bank Hot Springs," a Meiji-era resort that Japanese know as Kawarayu, lying to the southwest of the Iizuka compound at Komochi. The world changes even within our short lifetimes, and one wishes, hopelessly, to experience everything before it does.

Also, as a sop to my interest in Japanese military history, we will spend a day and a night near Ueda in southern Nagano Prefecture, northwest of Karuizawa. Nearby stands the ruins of Sanada Yukimura's 400-year-old castle. I have become fascinated with the tough mountain warlord whose small army almost overthrew Ieyasu's mighty Tokugawa Shogunate in 1615. When Yoshi called to make reservations at the Ueda inn, the mama-san was pleased to learn that I, an American, was interested in the Sanada family, and she promised us a bigger room at a cheaper price.

My return to Yoshi's homelands in the year 2000, and another trip the following spring, will, most likely, turn "Bittersweet Journey" into a full-fledged book of 250-plus pages. But frankly I don't have much faith in its prospects for professional publication. The manuscript may not be commercial enough, focused as it is on a father's grief and a young Amerasian woman's Japanese family. It may remain an exercise in self-therapy, centering always on you, my dead daughter, which is good enough for me, although I, a writer as well as your father, hope that someone — my friends, my family, your friends? — will want to read it. Writers always look for an audience whether they admit it or not.

Poko, the female half of our aging cockatiel twosome, died a month after we got home. Her death ended a great love story that you and I have related many times. When you were a preteen, we purchased Peko, a handsome male cockatiel, at a local pet store. Red-cheeked Peko turned out to be the nosiest bird in God's creation. We put his cage on the backyard deck, just to give ourselves relief from his squawks inside the house. We speculated he was calling for a mate or a companion. "Good luck," I said sourly. "Cockatiels come from Australia. You can't expect one to show up in Lake Forest, California." But I was wrong, as I often am.

One day, miraculously, an injured female cockatiel answered Peko's call. She had escaped from somewhere and had found her way to our yard, attracted by Peko's squawking. One side of her head was bloody. She had obviously been mauled by something, probably a cat, but otherwise was in good shape. When we opened Peko's cage, she went right in, pleased to find a safe home and an appreciative mate. Peko yelled the cockatiel equivalent of "Yippee!"

We called her Poko in recognition of her pokiness in showing up. "You lucky bird," I told Peko, and he and his serendipitous wife billed and cooed for nearly 20 years. Most important for us, Peko quieted down, satisfied with the beautiful creature that had answered his lusty calls. Poko produced many eggs over the years, but none of them hatched, perhaps because we human caretakers didn't know how to arrange things in the cage to get optimum results. So Poko died childless. Her only accomplishment was to make a lonely man happy.

We buried Poko next to Belle, the beloved white cat with one blue eye and one green eye, the last pet you mourned just a couple of months before your own death. This backyard cemetery includes the final resting places of Cinnamon, your hamster; Tama, the fawn-colored cat that liked to sleep with you; Thumper, the rabbit that you and your mother found in the front yard and adopted before I could say no, and finally Pochi, the dear mixed-breed dog that was every bit the daddy's girl you were. Pochi was born about the same time as you in Louisville, nine weeks after our fox terrier bitch ran off for a couple of days with a handsome collie, and she was jealous of the attention I paid you.

Besides Peko, only the pampered alley cat Cleo remains with us. The cat Kafka, embraced by your soft heart when a San Diego neighbor abandoned him, is still alive, I trust, thanks to arrangements that *Times* counselor Jackie Hyman made with the Orange County Animal Assistance League after your death. They promised he would never be put to sleep. If he wasn't adopted he would be allowed to live out his life at the league's shelter. Today I make annual contribu-

tions to the league on your behalf, and *The Times* matches my donations.

We carried Peko's cage to the burial site, and he became especially quiet as we planted Poko a foot deep. But later, back on the deck, he resumed his noisy ways of 20 years ago. Yoshi and I fancy we can hear a sad difference. This time he is calling for a lost love, not a new one. *Come back here, you dumb woman!* Good luck, Peko, but I fear you have already enjoyed the only miracle you will ever know. You will die in a few lonely years, much as I will, except you don't have enough sense to understand she is gone forever. *You lucky bird*.

Goodbye, Kei Darling. Your father, a sentient being, knows better but, like poor Peko, calls for you nevertheless.

Jack/Jackson Sellers
Lake Forest, California
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