

Ken Asano

By Ken Himself

I was born on April 5, 1936, and grew up in a small, rural town in Miyagi Prefecture, some 200 miles north of Tokyo. A country boy by nature. After graduating from Waseda University in Tokyo in 1962, I was employed by an import-export company, a small but fast-growing one mainly exporting electric and electronic products. It was just about the time everything electronic started to get transistorized. Anything and everything we offered found buyers almost immediately. We sold lots and lots of transistor radios. It was really a booming time and a fun time for us. In July, 1964, a few months before the Tokyo Olympics, I was sent to Kansas City, Missouri, as the company's representative and lived there for two years before returning to Japan. That was my first trip to the States. And I fell in love with America – love at first sight, the kind that never fades away. By the early 1970s my company had branched out into manufacturing, making citizens band (CB) radios, marine radios, etc. Quite ironically, the “Oil Shock” at the time added fuel to our business. We could never catch up with demand. That was the second booming time and fun time for us. In 1975, when my company opened a sales office in Irvine, California, I assumed management responsibilities at this subsidiary and moved to California with my family, for good as it turned out. In the late 1970s, my company developed a cordless telephone – a harbinger of the cell phone. We were the world's first to introduce the cord-free telephone into the market. It



literally sold like hotcakes. Even Ma Bell, before its divestiture, came to grab any quantities we could supply. That was the third booming time and fun time for us, and the last one for me personally. I resigned from the company in 1985, and started my own import-export business. Just a tiny, one-man operation and yet good enough to bring food to our table. My long-cherished dream finally came true in March, 2003, when I passed the test for American naturalization (“with full marks,” according to the two interviewers who administered the test) and I legally became a U.S. citizen. At that point in time, as an attestation of my love for and faith in this country, I legally changed my first name to Kenneth. My new Japanese ideograph serves as a good reminder that, being a country boy, I still need polishing.

Postscript by Jackson:

Ken's *Yu-Yu-Jiteki* boxwood *rakkan* was obtained by Masa Usami from the Tokyo shop that provides our personal seals. The single ideograph, *à la* Phil Jordan's, is pronounced “Ken” and means “Sharpen.” All of us aggrandize ourselves a bit, and I thought Ken would do this, too, boiling down the meaning to “Sharp,” a positive appellation for an intelligent and quick-witted man. No, that's not the way he looks at it. Anything that needs sharpening is dull, or at least dull enough to require sharpening. Ken, now in his 71st year, sees himself that way, still learning, so his *rakkan* will forever mean “Unpolished.”



Photo by MASA USAMI