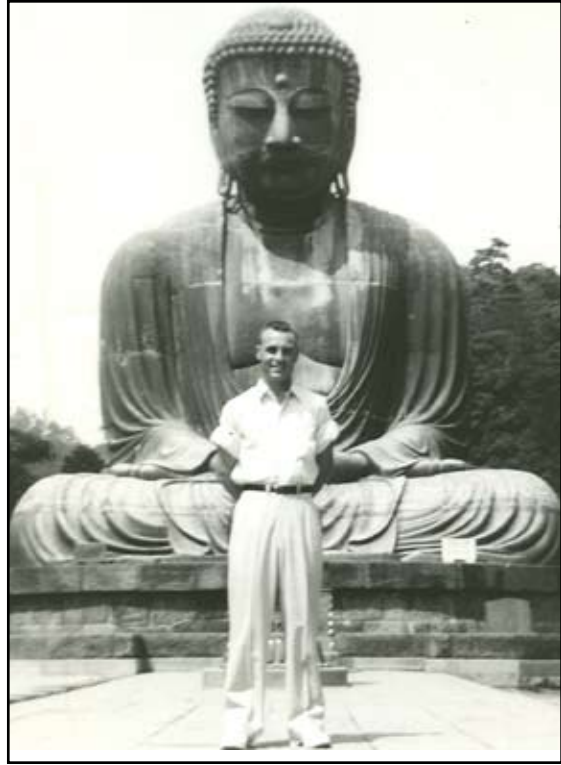


My Favorite Buddha

Nearly 50 years ago, when I was just 24, I posed in front of the Big Buddha in Kamakura north of the Yokosuka naval base where my ship was moored. As an officer, I could go ashore in civvies, and I was wearing a pair of Hong Kong-tailored trousers that hung nicely from my 28-inch waist. Fast forward to December 2004 when Yoshi and I spent four days in Kamakura. Dressed in stretchable jeans with suspenders hidden beneath my jacket, and carrying about 40 additional pounds of blubber, I posed again in front of the huge bronze statue, which hadn't changed at all. It was ancient then, and it was ancient still. Not just three or four hundred years but closer to 800. Its pedestal had been raised, and now there was an admission charge when there used to be none, but otherwise it was the same old 121-ton



Buddha, 11.3 meters high with 830 curls in its punch-perm hairstyle. When the statue was first erected in 1252, during the hey-day of Japan's Kamakura shogunate, it was housed in an elaborate wooden structure. Repeatedly, for more than two centuries, the building had to be rebuilt in the wake of storms, tsunami, fires and earthquakes. Finally, in 1495, somebody important said to hell with it, and the Big Buddha has braved the elements ever since, picking up a lovely green patina. The *Daibutsu*, as it is called, seems to prefer being out in the open. Certainly it has thrived there, gazing with compassion at the multitudes who gather around below and stare up at its spiritual serenity. A century or more ago, Lafcadio Hearn wrote: "Its beauty, its dignity, its perfect repose reflect the higher life of the race that created it." Hearn was an unabashed Japanophile, but I, not so unabashed, cannot quarrel with him.

**Jackson Sellers
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