

My Left Shoe

Jackson Sellers Email
Sent Out in May 2006

Shipmate Terry Sutherland wrote:

Jackson, don't forget to fill us in on the funny story in regard to the Great Buddha of Nara. You mentioned it in one of your postcards.

Well, it's one of those stories that's more embarrassing than funny – at least it was funny to the Japanese who became aware of it. I wish I had an illustration for the story but I destroyed the evidence when I reached Kyoto about two weeks into my 2006 trip. The story starts even before I left America in March. I had two pairs of *Ecco Gore-Tex* hiking shoes, exactly alike. One pair was old and comfortable, having served me in Japan and at home for years, but the soles were thoroughly worn out, in tatters actually. The relatively new pair had pristine soles but were not as comfortable, especially the left shoe, and I spent a year wearing them as much as I could stand them because I knew I was going to Japan this spring. Twice I even took them to the local shoe shop for stretching. We took off for Japan in March and everything was fine, despite all the walking we did in the ancient capital of Nara, our first stop. I said to Yoshi: “You know, I think I've got these new shoes broken in. They feel good.” We tramped around Nara's huge Todai Temple compound, where I viewed the biggest and oldest bronze Buddha I'd ever seen. There, I took a picture I liked:



Yoshi and a couple of boys were lighting incense sticks at the Buddhist temple. She wasn't aware that I was snapping the picture until she saw the flash. She scowled at me. “Don't show that to church people,” she said. It was too

Buddhist, too non-Christian, I suppose. I promised, and I'm sharing the photo here mostly with shipmates who, even if Christian, surely understand that one must be respectful of other religions. Morrie Hansen, ex-radioman aboard the *USS Colahan* and now co-pastor of Yoshi's church, won't show it to anybody.

But back to the damned shoes. Outside the temple grounds, I stubbed out a cigarette on my left sole. What the hell! Were my new hiking shoes wearing out already? No, the right sole was in great shape. I had worn my old left shoe and my new right one to Japan. There was nothing I could do about it at the moment, short of buying a new pair of shoes. My black dress shoes were tucked in luggage that had been shipped ahead to Kyoto, which we wouldn't reach for 10 more days. So I slogged along, leaving bits of tread everywhere as the left shoe continued to deteriorate. It wasn't so bad when we stayed at Western hotels, but there were three traditional Japanese inns on our Kansai route. You see, at Japanese inns, you surrender your shoes when you check in. Every time you go out, your shoes are retrieved for you from a little room next to the entrance. In other words, a stranger is handling your shoes. In my case, with my one conspicuously tattered shoe, an explanation was needed, and I got tired of telling the story in my tortured Japanese, although I enjoyed the laughter when they finally understood what had happened. By the time we got to Kyoto, my left shoe was not only disgraceful-looking but leaking badly even in the lightest rain. I threw it away and wore my dress shoes for the rest of the trip.

Jackson

