

# Five Days & Nights in Tokyo

It was time to say farewell to sleepy villages where mine was the only *gaijin* face. There would be plenty of foreigners in bustling Tokyo as we completed the final days of our month-long trip. Within a few hours of our arrival at Shinjuku's Century Hyatt Hotel, we kept a dinner engagement at the hotel's elegant Chinese restaurant, where the *de rigueur* firing-squad photo below was taken. Everytime I go to Tokyo, Nissan Motors throws a dinner for me. Yes, I have written several Nissan-related articles for the world-class *Los Angeles Times*, but I like to think that my relationship with these gentlemen goes beyond that and approaches real friendship. Three of them in the photo below — Yutaka Katayama, Norio Matsumura and Shozo Usami — have dined at my Lake Forest home. The amazing 93-year-old Mr. Katayama (I cannot bring myself to refer to him by his given name) sits between Yoshi and me. Known the world over as “Mr. K,” he is the recognized father of the famous Datsun and Nissan Z cars. Norio, standing behind me, is executive VP and board member in charge of international sales and marketing. Shozo, behind Mr. K, is a humanities university professor and the younger brother of another Nissan friend, Masataka Usami of San Juan Capistrano. Yukio Kitahora, standing behind Yoshi, has twice joined us at these dinners. He is senior VP in charge of domestic sales and marketing. The dinners are high points of my Japan visits. The Nissan people speak English well, as compared to my in-laws and most others I encounter, and I learn much from them while enjoying their company.





## Faithful Old Dog

In my day, 40 years ago and more, the dog statue at Shibuya station was a place where lovers met. It still is. The only difference is that some young men and women, like the character standing behind the statue, have frizzy hairdos dyed red or some other shocking color. I can't explain it. I won't even try. But the story of the dog is worth telling. He accompanied his master to the station every morning, then came back to greet him in the evening. One awful day, the master died at work and never came home again. For many years until he himself died, the poor dog plodded to Shibuya station at the correct time to wait in vain for his dead master. This memorial was erected to honor him, and Japanese still leave treats in a dish for him.



Yoshi flashes a peace sign in a crowded Shibuya side street. Running off such side streets are alleys with similar attractions. At a pub on this night, we ate fried oysters and pizza washed down with mugs of beer.





# Tsukiji

In the world's largest and busiest fish market, Yoshi purchases \$80 worth of dried sardines for Tiger, our Lake Forest neighbor's cat, who comes for breakfast every morning, very much like Jayko, the wild scrub jay who eats from Yoshi's hand. Jayko is satisfied with breadcrumbs and peanuts, but Tiger has become accustomed to *urume*, expensive sardines from Tokyo's famous Tsukiji Fish Market. The two boxes of *urume* that we brought home in February contain 500 of the little fishes and will last until November when we go back to Japan to replenish Tiger's supply. Our Japanese friends, who see *urume* as a deluxe treat for human palates, kid us about our extravagance, but what the hell, I say. Do the math. Each sardine costs only about 16 cents. Isn't the happiness of a handsome if spoiled cat worth that much?



Tiger gets a breakfast sardine, while Jayko dines on peanuts.

# Sushi & Gyoza

*Sushi* and *sashimi* can never be fresher than the treats served in this shop in the very heart of the Tsukiji Fish Market. But it can be a little too fresh for the squeamish. A young man sitting next to me ordered *odori*, or “dancing” strimp. A couple of wiggling creatures were plopped onto the the *sushi* chef’s cutting counter. Their heads were pinched off. Their plump tails, stripped from shells and slapped onto *nigiri* of vinegared sticky rice, were served to the young man, who promptly dipped one of them into *wasabi*-spiced soy sauce and raised it to his mouth. Suddenly the raw shrimp flexed and jumped completely off the poised finger of rice. Women on both sides of us yelped in horror, but the tasty morsel was quickly retrieved and went down the man’s gullet like a good shrimp should.

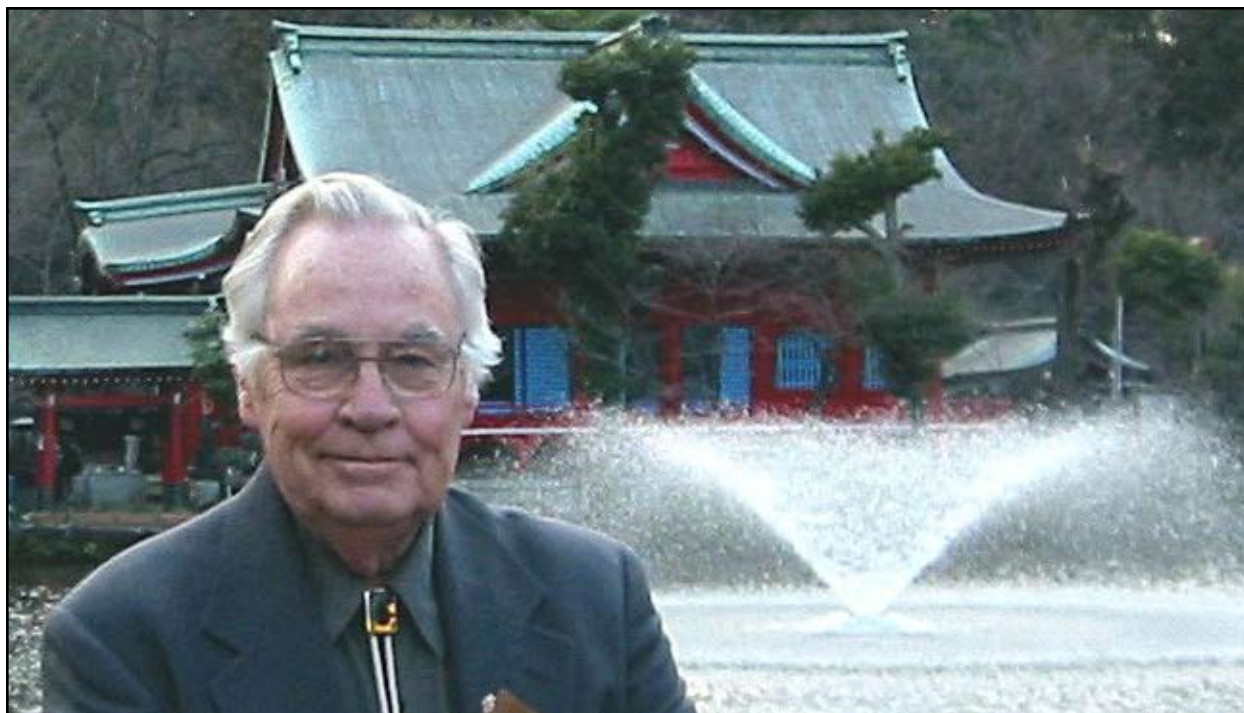


In a crowded little coffee shop in the community where we lived 40-something years ago, Yoshi cuddles a cat owned by the shop manager. She spent the rest of the day plucking hairs from her clothing. The shop, located near the Tomigaya train and subway station, has four cats and a dog to entertain its customers at three booths and a four-stool bar. But Yoshi and I were the big attractions on this day. Me, because I am a *gaijin* newspaperman. Yoshi, because she is a Japanese who looks somehow different. She is often mistaken for Yoko Ono, John Lennon’s widow.

At age 71, I still appreciate beautiful Japanese girls, so my camera’s viewfinder strayed a bit as I shot a picture of Yoshi having a smoke after a lunch of sumptuous *gyoza* in Shinjuku. The *gyoza* at this popular Chinese restaurant was unusual. It was segmented, with something different stuffed into each segment. The restaurant brags that you can’t get better *gyoza* outside China. The girls? What can I say? Office workers probably, they were animated and lovely while having their lunch. I watched.

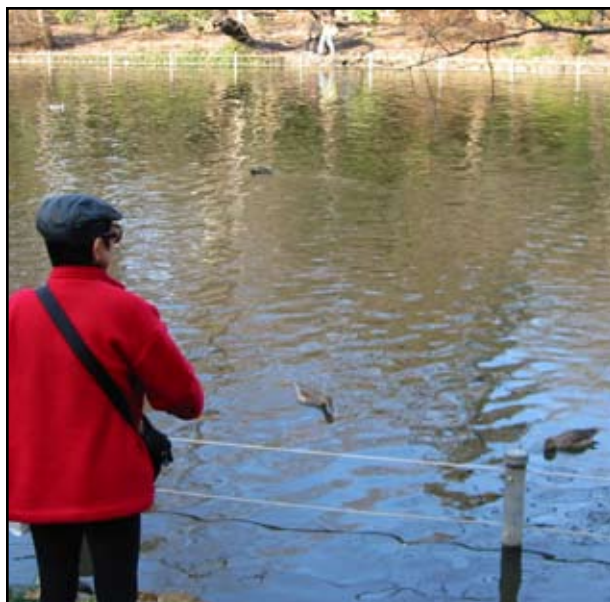






You don't see much of me in these album pages. I don't like the way I look nowadays. My mind's eye still sees the slim brown-haired man of 30 years ago, gone forever. Anyway, Yoshi is more photogenic, as she always has been. But here, on a bridge crossing the large natural lake at Inokashira Park in Kichijoji, I allowed myself to be photographed in the amazing jacket that Yoshi purchased for me, the one that spent a whole month in a suitcase and came out wrinkle-free after we reached Tokyo and I needed it. This park was not a complete stranger to me. I had been here before,

back in the late 1950s, when I was Jack instead of Jackson. Jack lived in neighboring Mitaka, in a small eight-*tatami* room, within walking distance of where Jackson stood today. For several months, Jack was a Japanese-language student at Mitaka's International Christian University. A classmate was Jay Rockefeller, better known now as U.S. Sen. John D. Rockefeller IV of West Virginia. On one spring day, Jack and his live-in lover, a lovely girl named Momoko whose heart would be broken, came here to see the cherry blossoms that rimmed the lake. Today, on this winter visit by Jackson 45 years later, there were no blossoms, but sturdy poles still supported old *sakura* limbs stretching out over the waters, and ducks still approached anyone who might possibly throw out something edible.



# Family

A sushi lunch with our niece, Reiko Aikawa, a highly successful real estate sales manager for the giant Mitsui conglomerate headquartered near our Shinjuku hotel. In 1965, just after Yoshi and I were married, 10-year-old Reiko sometimes visited us at our Ebisu apartment. She was the very first of my Japanese nieces and nephews to call me *ojisan*, or uncle. I was pleased, and I gave the cutie pie a small gift, an American dollar bill. I left Japan and didn't return until 1999. An old man now, I entered a Buddhist temple to attend a memorial service for Yoshi's elder brother, a Bank of Gunma CEO who died 10 months after our Kei. Among the in-laws who rushed up to greet Yoshi's American husband was 44-year-old Reiko. She showed me the dollar bill I had given her 34 years earlier. At her request, I signed it: "Uncle Jack." Below, another niece poses at an upright piano at her father's Kichijoji home. She is Mariko Itani, daughter of Yoshi's only surviving brother, Hitoshi Iizuka, a retired automotive executive who, at below right, gazes proudly at Mariko's firstborn, a baby boy who arrived on January 17 while



we were in Karuizawa, our first stop on this long vacation. The handsome baby, my newest grand nephew, was given the name of Taiki, meaning "Big Hope." Perhaps he will one day call me *ojisan*. Mariko and her husband Hidehiko live in Kobe near Osaka on Japan's Inland Sea. After visiting Kanazawa's "Old Japan" in western Honshu this November, and then the Hakone and Mt. Fuji region in the summer of 2004, Yoshi and I will commemorate our 40th wedding anniversary, in the spring of 2005, by retracing our Kobe-to-Kyushu honeymoon, God willing. This will give me a chance to meet London-educated Hidehiko, to whom I have spoken only on the telephone. And by this time, Taiki will be just old enough to be intrigued by an ancient blue-eyed stranger bringing gifts.







## Back Home, but Still Surrounded by Beauty



It has been said that one travels afar in order to come home with renewed appreciation. At our home in Lake Forest, Yoshi creates beauty everywhere — front, back, side and court gardens. To capture it in any season, I only need to point and shoot in any direction. Yoshi has never made a dime, but she makes a fine home inside and out for us. Above, within one corner of our backyard, blossoms of roses, bachelor's button, lilies, petunias, columbine, delphinium, verbena and scabiosa hold forth in the month of May. Scattered azalea bushes and the plum tree with its tortured limbs are solid green right now, but their season will come as it does for all things. At left is a functional beauty, our Japanese digital toilet, which washes and blow-dries anything that needs it. With warm water and warm air, no less. If I had been traveling anywhere in the world except Japan, I would have missed this toilet terribly. As it was, all but two of the 13 *ryokan* and hotels in which we stayed offered them, so I survived well enough. Anyway, I leave you with this image as I write “The End” to this album.