

Yu-Yu-Jiteki Interludes

DURING my 35-day Japan trip in October and November of 2007, members of *Yu-Yu-Jiteki of America* accompanied me, both in person and in spirit. Jim Hayes, who himself has considerable experience in Japan, was one of those spirits, invisible but a distinct presence in my sentimental mind. Jim had declared, before I flew off, that he would be there with me as I patronized any little joint that harked back to the mid-20th century when we were both young rascals. At right, in a Shinjuku shop where I gobbled chicken livers and gizzards on *yakitori* sticks, an empty stool and a foamy glass of beer awaited him. He didn't show up, although I fervently wished he had. Ken and Harue Asano, who live only a few miles from us in California's Saddleback Valley and also have a home in Kawasaki near Tokyo, followed us to Japan so they could spend five days with us in Matsushima and at a palatial *ryokan* just northwest of Sendai. Below, Yoshi and I are Ken and Harue's dinner guests at the *ryokan*, which, frankly, is a bit too large and pretentious to suit me. Good food, though. Those two white spots above my head annoy me. Another *Yu-Yu-Jiteki*, Bart Everett, once told me



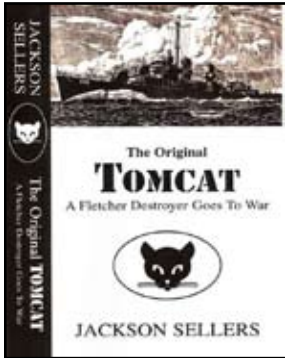
how to remove such photographic defects in Photoshop but I've forgotten the details. In Matsushima, which offers one of the three great seashore vistas in Japan, Ken and I did a little bar hopping. At right, we hoist drinks at Maki's Place. Ken, before flying back home, took the opportunity to introduce himself to another *Yu-Yu-Jiteki*, Shozo Usami, who lives in the Tokyo outskirts. Later, below, I got my chance for an up-close reunion with Shozo. We toasted each other – me with *sake*, him with Chinese tea. The poor guy is allergic to alcohol. He and I were students at Tokyo's International Christian University around 1960, and we were reunited through his older brother, Masataka Usami, an old Nissan Motors buddy. I continue to be amazed at Shozo's



worldwide activities at age 73. A humanities professor, he still teaches, but he also travels overseas in connection with rural education and the recent publication of his book about an old Japanese ship with an interesting history. It was his book that prompted our *tempura* dinner at the Yama no Ue Hotel in Tokyo's Kanda district. The hotel is famous as a gathering spot for authors. At left, Yutaka Katayama, 98 years old at his Tokyo office, displays the gift that Yoshi and I brought him from Aomori at the northern tip of Honshu. It's a couple of jars of *uni*, the soft meat of a fist-sized shellfish. I don't eat much *uni*, not with enthusiasm anyway, but I've never met a Japanese who doesn't love it. Mr. K, as he is called, sends his regards to all *Yu-Yu-Jiteki of America* members.

Shozo & Jackson's Books

Of course Shozo Usami and I needed no justification other than friendship for dining together at the Yama no Ue Hotel on a hilltop in Tokyo's Kanda book district, where famous authors fraternized for

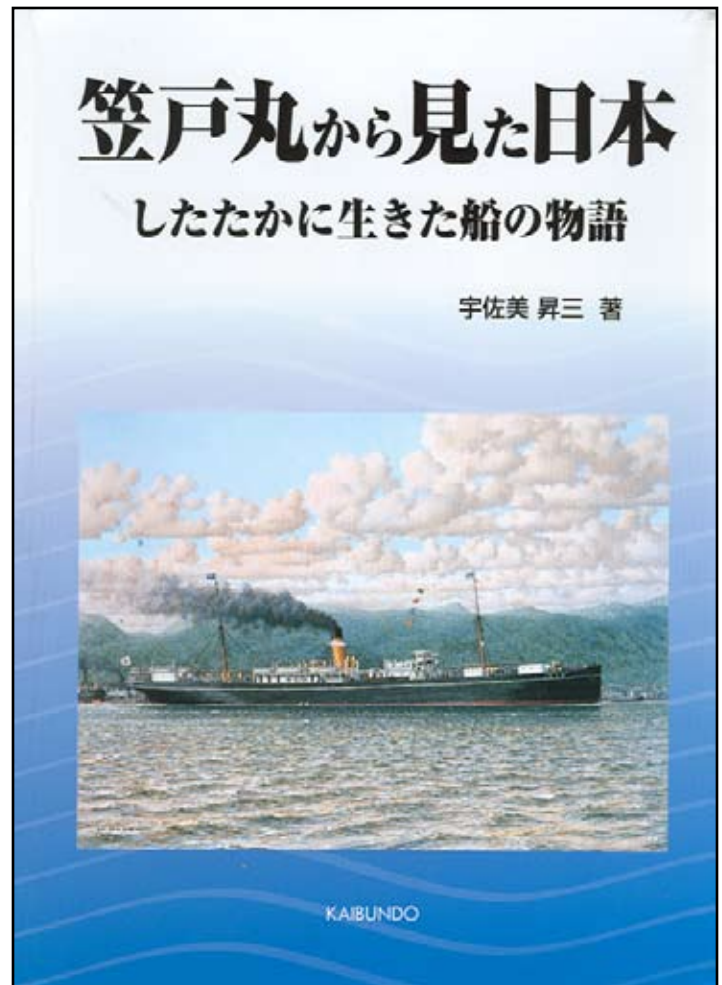


much of the 20th century.

We were not famous but we were authors, damn it. There was my *The Original Tomcat*, about an obscure American warship, and there was Shozo's *Kasato Maru kara Mita Nihon*, about a steamship that Japanese-Brazilians see as their "Mayflower." My book has made a splash among

my old shipmates, but Shozo's, published this year, is making a much bigger splash internationally. *The Asahi Shimbun*, Japan's largest newspaper, recently published this story from Brazil:

SAO PAULO – Brazilians of Japanese descent plan to salvage artifacts from a wreck in waters off Russia that they say symbolizes the nearly century-long history of Japanese immigration to Brazil. The project involving the Kasato Maru, the ship that carried Japan's first immigrants to Brazil, is expected to start ahead of the 100th anniversary of the immigrants' arrival in Brazil in 1908. Brazilians of Japanese descent are hoping to salvage anchors, the rudder, the ship's bell and other fittings. The vessel was sunk by Soviet bombing in the closing days of World War II. "If everything goes according to plan, we hope to keep the anchors as symbols of immigration, one in the port of departure in Kobe and the other in Brazil," said Makoto Yamashita, 63, who leads the project. On June 18, 1908, the first group of about 800 Japanese landed from the Kasato Maru on the port town of Santos to start a new life in Brazil. In the 99 years since, the Japanese-Brazilian population has expanded to top 1 million. For Brazilians of Japanese descent, the Kasato Maru is a symbol of their roots. The project is expected to face a number of hurdles, however. In August 1945, the Kasato Maru, which was used as a fish processing ship, was attacked and sunk in the Sea of Okhotsk off the west coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula. The salvage operations will require Russian government approval because the wreck is believed to lie



within Russian territorial waters. Hidekazu Takayama, 59, a second-generation Japanese-Brazilian who sits in Brazil's Lower House, is leading efforts to petition the Russian ambassador and others for cooperation in the project. The exact location of the Kasato Maru is not known. Survivors of the Soviet attack only recall that the ship sank in relatively shallow waters, at a depth of about 18 meters. Still, the immigrants have high hopes that artifacts recovered from the ship will help them hand down their memories over the generations to come. It is a "magnificent dream that can unify the Japanese immigrants community in Brazil," said one immigrant. The ship itself had a colorful past, according to Shozo Usami, former professor of Komazawa Women's University and author of "Kasato Maru kara Mita Nihon" (Japan viewed from the Kasato Maru), published this year. According to Usami, the ship was built in Britain in 1900 as a cargo-passenger vessel and later carried soldiers in Russia. Japan seized it after the Japan-Russia War of 1904-1905. The ship, renamed the Kasato Maru, was then used to transport Japanese immigrants to Hawaii as well as Brazil and other Latin American countries.



Photo by Mitsuo Katayama

There Were Others at Mr. K's Party . . .

IN my haste to report *Yu-Yu-Jiteki* interludes during my five weeks in Japan, I overlooked some significant others who attended Mr. K's Nov. 24 luncheon at "Eureka," as he calls his magnificent Tokyo office. Hence, this addendum, prepared a few days later. In the photo above, sitting left to right, are Masako Katayama, Mr. K and Jackson Sellers. Standing are Shozo Usami, Yoshi Sellers, Reiko Aikawa and Norio Matsumura. Diminutive Masako was born in San Francisco more than 90 years ago and was sent to Japan when she was nine to get a proper education. She gave her family name – the more prominent Katayama – to young Mr. K when she married him about 70 years ago. That was done often in those days, if not so much now. Mr. K, an Automotive Hall of Famer in Detroit, is revered everywhere as the father of Nissan's Datsuns and Z-cars. He is an old friend. A *haiku*-like poem of his, written in Japanese, makes reference to me and my smoking habit. Translation: "*In a corner of the bar, a blue plume rises. Enjoying Yu-Yu-Jiteki, a venerable, serene old man.*" Reiko Aikawa, my niece, accompanied us to the luncheon. I'm very fond of her.

When I, a hairy barbarian, stole Gunma Prefecture's Iizuka family princess in the early 1960s, Reiko was just a little girl and was too young to understand what all the fuss was about. She was the first of all the nieces and nephews to call me "Uncle Jack." Norio Matsumura is a good old friend, too. When I first met him, he was executive vice president of Nissan Motors. Then he became president of a huge string of Nissan dealerships in Osaka, and was extraordinarily gracious when Yoshi and I visited Osaka and Kyoto last year. He showed us things we otherwise would not have seen. Now Norio is industry advisor to KKR (Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co.), a major equity investment firm. Last but not least among the "others" is Mitsuo Katayama, Mr. K's 62-year-old son, who snapped the above photo and still other photos but never appears in any of them. Mitsuo is an accomplished man with an inquiring mind. He and I joked about how he would always be a kid in the shadow of his famous father. While the rest of us were sitting and conversing off to the side, Mitsuo cleared the luncheon table. I stepped up to him, patted him on the back, and said: "Good job, kid." He laughed.