

6 November 2014 (Tuesday):

Don Lawson

The Mercure Narita hotel has a terrific breakfast buffet, including grilled fish and some exceptionally good miso soup. (Don has made a number of business trips to Japan, and his opinion is that the breakfast buffet at the Mercure is better than anything he's encountered on his various stays in Kobe and Osaka.)



Breakfast at the Mercure

The Science and Technology contact person decided to stay overnight at the hotel, since his affiliation is with an institution located quite a distance from Narita. It was nice to have his company during breakfast. He taught Mark how he eats natto (with rice and nori, so it doesn't stick), and talked about how his parents would make natto when he was a boy wrapping the soybeans in leaves and allowing it to ferment. He also said that, compared to what we were having for breakfast that morning, what he had as a boy wasn't very good.

After breakfast, we had a little bit of free time, so the band decided to take a short walk near the hotel. The weather was beautiful, in the low 60s and sunny... far nicer than the weather we left in Wisconsin! We walked a small loop, and got a feel for where we were. It was still relatively early in the morning, so we were walking past people going to work, and students on their way to school. We all felt fortunate to be experiencing what felt more like "everyday Japan", and not just tourist destinations.



A morning walk in Narita

After the other two delegation groups left the hotel, our group's host families drove us over a studio that specializes in traditional Japanese dance. The studio is run by Tsubaki Wakako, who is the grandmother of the Tsubaki family. Her daughter Rei explained (through an interpreter) that the wigs and outfits were originally worn by men who were playing the parts of women characters (in plays etc.). A very elaborate wig with flowers would be used to portray a princess. We saw around four or five wigs. The last wig that Rei brought out was for a male character, and it had hair that was parted in the front, instead of being swept from the front to the back.



Dance wigs

The wigs are all custom-made, with a shell that is custom-fit to the person's head. The hairs (which are from women) are then attached to the shell.

It was explained that some of the costumes used in Noh and Kubaki were so elaborate that they weighed as much as 16 kg, which works out to be around 34 lbs.

Bobbie got to wear a kimono with very elaborate embroidery. Red background, with circular patterns of vivid green, blue, and yellow. There were cranes embroidered onto the fabric, along with "medallions" of gold-colored thread.



Bobbie in her kimono

All band members were then encouraged to try on kimonos. The men's garments had regular geometric patterns and simple belts. The women's kimonos generally had much more elaborate patterns and colors, and used very lavish broad belts. The most florid example of an elaborate kimono was the garment offered to Bobbie.

After trying on the clothing, we were asked to fold the kimonos again. This was a bit of a trick, but it helped to realize that the folds needed to go along the seams of the garment. As I folded my garment, I realized that much of the styling came from how the garment was made from large rectangular blocks of fabric. It felt very much like how we were taught to fold a flag back home.



Don folding a kimono

After visiting the dance studio, we went to a Japanese-style restaurant for lunch. This was the only establishment that we visited on our Chiba visit (other than the Tea Ceremony room) where the seating was cushions directly on the floor. As had been the case at the dance studio, the Japanese women were able to sit on the floor with their feet extending straight out behind them. However, the band members could barely manage to sit cross-legged on the floor. Our food at lunch was very good, with a good-quality miso soup, tempura, rice, etc. Mark texted a photo of his lunch to his family, and his daughter asked, “is all food in Japan so beautiful?”



Mark's lunch.

After lunch, we went to a large Buddhist temple complex in Narita (the Narita-san Shinshoji Temple), and we picked up a volunteer tour guide who did a very good job of explaining things as we walked around the grounds. (It would not be surprising to find out that Aoki had made arrangements for the tour guide to be available for us.) Our guide was a gentleman who speaks very good English, and to supplement his commentary he was able to give us brochures that were written in both Japanese and English.



The main gate at Narita-san Shinshoji Temple

The outermost temple gate had a Chinese/Japanese zodiac set of sculptures. This outer gate was supposed to be a site that would spiritually cleanse visitors from impure thoughts and keep evil out of the compound.

After going through the outer gate, we came to the place where we could wash our hands with bamboo scoops. (The ritual is to first wash one hand, then wash the other, then use one hand as a cup so you can wash your mouth (and swallow the water, not spit it out), then catch one more cup of water and let it run down the handle of the cup.. After this, we went through a second gate (with two “devil” sculptures, one devil with an open mouth, and the other with a closed mouth. The large rattan at this second gate is made of steel, and was donated by fishermen of the Tokyo fish market. This “rattan lamp” weighs 800 kg - i.e., approximately one ton in USA measurements. (The fact that this rattan was donated by people as far away as Tokyo indicates that this temple complex has a noteworthy prominence in Japan.)

After the second gate, we came to an incense fire, where we could wave smoke over ourselves and breathe in some of the smoke as a symbol of divine wisdom.

There is quite a collection of different shrines and buildings in the site. A rotating holder of Buddhist scripture hadn't been physically rotated in quite a while, because the hinge assembly was starting to wear out. But, this rotating library was several centuries old, and so it's understandable that the hinge has aged. One of the pagoda towers dated from the early 1700's and has a suspension system that allows the upper section to swing as a pendulum (relative to the first story's base) when earthquakes strike.



The rotating Buddhist scripture library

The temple complex is devoted to Fudo Myo-o, the fire god who is an incarnation of the Cosmic Buddha. Three buildings have successively been used as the

Main Hall for worship ceremonies. Each of the earlier buildings was built on a primary site, and after a century or so of usage was moved to nearby location so that a new (larger) Main Hall could be built. The oldest building had been built in the 1700s, the next most recent in 1855, and was moved in 2009. The current hall was built around 2010, and was finished in 2011.

The day that we were at the complex was one of the four times per year that there is a “Ghosa” ceremony of burning sticks with messages on them. Our band wrote onto two sticks. One stick was for the group (wishing for peace and understanding), and the other was used by Don to express thanks for health and other blessings. The sticks were later collected to fuel a fire on an altar inside the main hall. At one point in the ceremony, the worshippers in the audience offered bags to the monks, who waved the bags into the smoke to bless them. Bobbie offered up her purse for this smoking ritual.



Writing on a prayer stick

After the ceremony, we went down towards the main gate. We passed a pond with a turtle-shaped rock, with turtles in the pond. Turtles are a symbol of a long life. It was 33 steps from the main complex (the plaza that includes the rotating library and the main hall) to the pond, three steps from the pond to the next staircase, and 17 steps down to the lower plaza (with the incense fire). The sum is 53 steps, which agrees with an old story about a monk's dream of a stairway going upwards to enlightenment (and having 53 steps).



The steps and turtle pond

After visiting the temple, we went to the house of the Tsubaki family, where we were treated to a potluck meal provided by all the Cultural Exchange host families. We then enjoyed an exhibition of traditional dancing.

The class of dancers included Yuga, who is the teenage son of our hosts, plus around 4 or 5 girls. All of the dancers appeared to be middle school students.

The first dance was “Tears in Okanawa,” danced by one of the girls. Then Yuga son did a dance which showed great artistry. Both of the solo dances communicated a considerable degree of feeling. After this, three girls danced together.



The gathering at the Tsubaki house

Finally, Wakako (the woman who runs the dance studio) got the WCI delegates (and many of their hosts) arranged into a circle, handed us all plastic fans, and taught us a simple dance.

The dancers are arranged in a large circle. (It was convenient that the Tsubaki family has a large “living room,” because we were quite a crowd.)

The first part of the dance was tapping of the fan: followed by three rotations of the fan. The lift the fan, wave it into the circle, out of the circle, into the circle, then hold the fan down for three steps and three sweeping motions.

After the dancing, Don, Dave, Mark, and Bobbie pulled out their instruments and ran through some tunes, but the quality of our performance was badly affected by our fatigue, and the rosin on Bobbie's bow (being suitable for a dry Wisconsin winter) was misbehaving in the warm humid air of Chiba. However, this chance opportunity to run through tunes in our performance line-up was extremely useful, since we were going to be doing our first performance early the next day.



Note the future Cultural Exchange Groups: If the group is a musical group like ours, it would be extremely helpful for host families to provide an opportunity and location to do a “first evening in Wisconsin” or “first evening in Japan” run-through without feeling like the musicians are on display. Also, it probably would have been helpful for our band to have received a suggestion that we’d have an opportunity to do a run-through of some tunes. This impromptu “potluck evening” performance was an idea brought up by Don and Mark, but the idea was hatched after we had arrived at the Tsubaki household. The drawback of this was that Pam and Debbie did not have their instruments, nor their music books).

At the end of the dancing and music, it was time for everybody to go their respective Host Family houses. The four guys in the band were staying at the Tsubaki house. Dave and Joe were in a bedroom, and Mark and Don were given futons in what would normally be the dining room.

A “goodbye kiss” between Don and Bobbie drew titters of laughter from some of the moms of the dancers. This sort of PDA (“public display of affection”) is clearly on the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behavior in Japanese culture. But, it must be barely on the acceptable side of things, because later in our tour the other married couples were doing similar “goodbye kiss” routines in the lobby of City Hall at the end of each day, and none of our hosts made any comment at all.

5 November 2014 (Wednesday):

Debbie Wilhelm

Magokoro 'Be Ambitious' Social Welfare Corporation, Narita Kokusai High School

The day started out with the culture group having breakfast with their respective host families and then meeting with instruments at the Narita City Hall. At the City Hall I was amazed by the wall of small TV's that were showing programs from around the world. Opposite the wall of TV's was a mural and a display of what appeared to be a shogun warrior. This statue was very similar to ones we saw later in the week at the Narita festival atop parade wagons. After loading our instruments onto the van that was our transportation for the day we headed out to visit the 'Be Ambitious' Social Welfare Corporation. 'Be Ambitious' is a corporation who teaches mentally challenged students from 16 to 19 years old skills so they can take their place in the workforce and earn money to make them more independent.



The TVs in Narita City Hall

Upon arriving at the modern two story building that is the home for the corporation we were met at the door by the staff. We removed our shoes and put on slippers that were provided. We were escorted to the second floor where in a large room with audience chairs set up we stored our instruments for the time being. From here we left on a tour of the facility. We were introduced to a 15 year old young lady named Shiho Kamagata. Shiho was a student of the corporation and had been awarded the title '2014 Ambassador' for the program. Shiho was very shy at first and very intense when she gave her welcome speech but we all loved her on sight. She had a wonderful smile. During our tour we saw a number of rooms where different skills were being taught. The first room had a group of youths untangling headsets that were given to them from various airlines. They were to separate each one from the pile and then hang them over what appeared to be a clothes rack. The headsets were sanitized, repackaged and returned to the airlines for use on future flights. In another room silverware was being wrapped into napkins. This project was also for use on airline flights. Anna Airlines was one of the airlines sponsoring these activities.



Our tour guide, Shiho Kamagata

During the tour we were shown the campus lunch room, met the staff who does the cooking for the students and learned about the healthy lunches that were served. Our next stop was a room where a soba noodle making program going on. We were shown how the buck wheat was ground into flour, water added to make the dough, rolled out very thin with a wooden roller and then placed on a wooden slat and cut into the very thin noodles that become the soba noodle. The young men who were cutting the noodles were very focused on their tasks. They had a wooden board that sat atop the dough and they used that to guide them for cutting the noodles into the very thin strips. We learned that the students ate the noodles at lunch and also sold them for lunches that were served to the public in the small restaurant that was part of the corporation campus. After this interesting experience we were taken past the bakery where, thru a large window, we could see those students who were interested in learning to bake and cook making cookies and cakes. These items were sold at the bakery that was on campus and open to the public. During our walk thru the building we saw some artwork and a small courtyard with metal figurines of children and animals. It was a very cheerful setting.



Preparing soba noodles

After our tour we met with the director in her staff room where we were served tea and listened to the director explain the philosophy behind the founding of the corporation and its goals for the mentally challenged. The director told us, thru a translator, that she had had a stroke a few years ago, in fact she was still paralyzed in her right arm, and how she knew some of the challenges of being handicapped. From the staff room we headed upstairs to set up and tune our instruments. We performed a 40 minute program for the 60 students and staff. We could see the students were having a good time as they were moving in their chairs in time to the music and clapped loudly. They were especially interested in the kilts the guys were wearing that day. It was noon when the performance ended and we were escorted from the gig room to be treated to lunch at the campus restaurant. The short walk to the restaurant was lovely with pretty flower garden plots along the walk way. At the restaurant we were served the soba noodles that were made on the grounds along with tempura vegetables and dipping sauces. I learned the proper way to eat the noodles – putting chopped onion and wasabi into the sauce and then picking up small amounts of noodles with my chopsticks and dipping them into the sauce. It was delicious and very special knowing the noodles had been made fresh by the students. After lunch we were all given a gift envelope which contained a booklet on the school and a kimono coaster which turned out to be made by Shiho. As a craft project Shiho takes pieces of old kimono's and sews them into these coasters. Knowing these were had made by Shiho made them especially precious to all of us. Tho we hated to leave, we exchanged our slippers for our street shoes, collected our instruments and headed to the bus. As we loaded up the bus the students and staff lined up outside to wave good bye to us as we boarded and the bus pulled out. Everyone was so friendly, the tour here made a big impression on all of our group.

After leaving Magokoro, the Garlic Mustard Pickers tour bus headed to Narita Kokusai High School. The principal, vice principal and 2 of the students who could speak English were there to greet us. After exchanging our shoes for slippers, we were lead to the principal's office where we were treated to tea and learned about the school and its international program. Our next stop was to a classroom to learn about calligraphy. The instructor was a well known Japanese calligrapher. Translation by Yoki, the instructor gave us a lecture on the history of calligraphy, its many different styles and showed us 6 different styles for writing the character 'wa'. We were given paper, brushes and ink so we could practice drawing the characters ourselves. Our best example was given to the instructor to be framed Japanese style and the school stamp applied. From here we collected our instruments and headed to the auditorium to perform. The students were already assembled and sitting in the risers. They applauded as we walked in and took seats in the first row. The program was begun with an announcement by two of the students (one in a mad hatter's hat). Students from the judo club came on stage to perform. We learned they rank as #1. The next group to perform was the high school band. Their first piece was very lively and energetic. There was a gymnastics team that did a routine to the music that was being played. For the final piece, the band performers put on masks and danced at their



The directors of Be Ambitious and the Garlic Mustard Pickers



Our lunch at Be Ambitious



Our calligraphy lesson

stands as they performed. It was a fantastic performance and a hard one for our band to follow. However, even though we didn't put on masks and dance at our stands, the students enjoyed our music. After our performance the students came down to the floor to talk with us and have group pictures taken. Since time was running out, we packed up the instruments, went up two flights of stairs to collect our calligraphy pictures and then load and board the bus. The staff escorted us to the bus and waved goodbye as the bus left the parking lot on its way back to the Narita City Hall.

It was a full day of touring and performing but I was extremely impressed by how friendly everyone was and how well we were treated. There were times I felt like a diplomatic dignitary with the special attentions we were extended, the refreshments we were greeted with at both visits and the lovely gifts we were given. The atmosphere of the places we toured was impressive. The staff at both were devoted to their students and it showed in the faces of the students and the activities we saw.



A picture with our audience at Be Ambitious

6 November 2014 (Thursday):

It was a bit drizzly and overcast in the morning as we met at the Narita City Hall at 8:30. Everyone was eager to begin what was to be a very busy day.

Our driver took us to the Chiba Folk Museum, which is located on a hilltop in downtown Chiba, where we had an hour to explore the museum and the surrounding park.

A picturesque castle on a hilltop in downtown Chiba, presently the home of the Chiba City Folk Museum. The present castle is a reconstruction designed to house the museum in 1967, built on the site where Chiba's namesake Chiba Clan once ruled from their own fortification, Inohana Castle.



The Chiba were an eastern branch family of the Taira Clan that sided with Minamoto Yoritomo when he rose up to become the first shogun of Japan. They remained important allies of the Kamakura Shogunate (12th ~ 14th c.) then declined in influence in the following Muromachi and Sengoku periods (together 14th ~ 16th c.). http://www.ccb.or.jp/e/_sightseeing/2262

The museum was not busy and it was suggested to us that we start on the 5th floor and work our way down. There was a nice view of the city from the top floor even though it was a foggy day. We had fun taking photos of each other putting our faces in the life size shogun cutouts. The armour exhibit was quite impressive and we commented about how ancient their history is compared to the U.S.



Playing with cutouts

We especially enjoyed the park area surrounding the museum where we had a lovely view of the building and could imagine how beautiful it must be in the spring with the cherry blossoms in bloom.

Back in the van, our driver took us to the Chiba Prefectural Government Office in Chiba. We were escorted to a room where we were seated to await the arrival of Governor Eiji Suzuki (Suzuki Eiji). As we sat in the front row of the assembly, we could feel the anticipation of his arrival as the press was ready with their cameras and officials were busily making sure that everything was in order. Suddenly he arrived practically running up to the podium, all smiles and full of energy. It was a very warm and lively welcome and the interpreter introduced each of us by name. Sharon spoke of the history of the Chiba Wisconsin International connection and how much each country has grown by forming friendships with individuals and families on a very personal level. Sharon presented a gift to the governor and he likewise presented her with a lovely Japanese art print.



Sharon Durtka and Gov. Suzuki Eiji

At the end of the session we were each given a gift bag consisting of a tour guide, maps, a pen, and an adorable stuffed Chiba-kun toy.

At noon we ate in the dining hall and were served a delicious hot lunch. One of our hostesses made an especially beautiful treat. We learned that it was a local tradition. "Chiba's most representative traditional foods is futomaki-matsuri-zushi,



Futomaki-matsuri-zushi

or “thick-rolled festival sushi”. These unique and colorful sushi rolls have been made for special occasions and festivals since times of old, and are another form of traditional culture that we pass down through the ages.”

As we left the government building we saw that they were flying the American flag alongside their own in honor of our visit. It left us feeling quite awed and humbled to be given such a warm and generous welcome by the governor and his staff.



After a quick but enjoyable lunch, we were back on the van for a scenic drive to Chosie High School in Mobara city. The one hour drive took us on roads through the country where we got a glimpse of various crops growing in the fields and smaller villages.

When we arrived at the high school and entered the lobby, there were rows of empty lockers where we put our shoes and then put on the slippers that were provided for us. We followed our guides to a classroom where English is taught and the students were sitting at tables in groups of 2 to 4. The 7 members of the band sat in a row at the head of the class and each of us was given a card with a number and a phrase. The instructor asked a question about Wisconsin and the band member with the right answer was sent to the table with the corresponding number. It was a fun way to introduce the next activity. Each of the band members was then interviewed by the students at his/her table. The girls at my table were quiet and shy and it took a lot of courage for them to speak English and interpret how my answer should be written down. At the end of the interviews, a spokesperson from each table gave a short report on what they had learned about each of us. The staff and students were all so friendly and we enjoyed being able to share our stories with them while helping them with their English in a very fun and relaxed activity.



Our band then performed a piece called Slibh Russell. From there we went to a conference room and enjoyed tea with the principal. He presented each of us a towel with the school’s name and logo which is “Spirit, Nobility, Wisdom”. As we left the school, many students and staff waved and sent us on our way.



We arrived at the Mobara City Center and waited in the lobby for our next performance. After being seated in the auditorium, the show started with speeches by the Chairperson of Mobara. Following that was a performance by Nezumi, woman in colorful kimonos playing Japanese style flutes made of bamboo, and a man playing a drum. The music was beautiful and the group performed several numbers that also included wooden blocks, bells and a Japanese guitar or Shamisen, played with a Bachi(looks like an ice scraper). The next group of men and women performed with harmonicas. There were harmonicas in all sizes and the music was a mixture of familiar tunes and traditional music. The Garlic Mustard Pickers then performed music from our first set, with introductions from Sharon and Ioki. We presented them with our CD and they presented each of us with a key chain.



Back on the bus Aoki handed out cracker/fish snacks for the drive back to Narita city hall where we each met our host families at 6 pm. After a very busy day, we were all pleasantly exhausted from such stimulating and enriching experiences.



7 November 2014 (Friday):

Bobbie Groth

Another loooooonnnngggg day!

We met at Narita City Hall at 8:15. It is so nice to get together again after our nights at our separate host families—everyone is expectant and hopeful for the day, and we get a chance to once again practice our Japanese greetings and bows. Our host families gather around us and see us off for the day—it is a wonderful feeling to be surrounded by their support and friendship!

We left for Akasaka Community Center where we saw a wonderful display of animal and flower and vegetable drawings done by the seniors who meet there.

We knelt on pillows and learned the history of the formal tea ceremony from our teacher beautifully outfitted in a traditional Kimono. Then she took us to an inner room which was modeled after the traditional part of a house, with grass mat flooring, a fire recessed into the floor on which to boil the tea water, and cushions surrounding the perimeter of the room. We each knelt on a cushion while she explained the tea ceremony to us.



It is a great honor to both give and receive the tea in the traditional ceremony. When you enter the tea room, you enter in peace, and each day a new inspirational scroll is hung on the wall to set the tone for that day. Ours had characters that meant, “A new day, and happy day, the best day, a peaceful day” (this is a popular saying, and I did see it in English at a souvenir shop when we went to Tokyo the following Sunday). When you enter the tea room to participate in the ceremony, you are to leave your cares and the violence of the world behind. Our teacher explained to us that the reason the entrance door is so short is so that the warrior will have to bend down—everyone must assume humility when they come into the tea room, strong and weak, powerful and not so powerful alike. The warriors cannot bring their weapons in the tea room. It is a place of refreshment, honor, and peace.



The mistress of the tea ceremony dips the hot water from the kettle into the tea bowl. She says some ritual words to do this. Then she puts in the Mitchi powder, and whisks it in a very particular way so that the tea powder mixes with the water evenly, and a great froth of bubbles is created. Then the bowl is placed with it's special painted image away from the tea drinker. The tea drinker picks it up and offers it up while bowing their head. Then, the tea bowl is turned in the hands until the icon faces the other way, and cradled in the palms, the recipient of the tea honor begins to sip their tea, relax, and enjoy the honor and the peace of this ancient tradition.

After we were given our first bowl of tea, we were then taught to make the tea ourselves. I think Dave did the best job with the least amount of coaching! We all tried our hand at the proper amount of Mitchi powder with the special spoon, and manipulating the rattan whisk to get the profusion of bubbles that are sought. We



Our hostess



Receiving our tea



Adding matcha to the cup



A frothy cup of matcha

liked it so much, we did it a second time! Don and I were taken with this, and made sure we had visited a local tea shop in Narita and purchased the requisite supplies to do our own tea ceremony at home, before we left.

After our appreciative thanks, we left for Kozu-no-mori Junior high school where we received a fourth bowl of tea and many generous gifts as the principal talked to us about this brand new absolutely gorgeous school. Of course, this once again involved removing our shoes and wearing slippers to come in, as has been true of all the schools we visited. Our big American feet do not fit well into the slippers, so managing the stairs was a particular challenge—we were often stopping for someone to retrieve a slipper that got away from them. The three men wearing kilts were particular gorgeous in their slippers!

We had a 30 minutes performance which we now have a standard format for: Aoki-san reads the introduction in Japanese to the students. At some point she has Mark explain the men's kilts and each of us talk about our instrument. We generally only have time for about 5 pieces, including a song, and the twenty minutes of playing is up!

We get vast amounts of applause from these gracious and well-disciplined children. They are so refreshing in their willing and enthusiastic engagement with their school programs—I am utterly charmed by the schools and wish all children in America could attend such wonderful schools.

After the concert Don and I were taken by Kenji, a young teacher from Cameroon, to be our guide and interpreter so that we could eat school lunch with a classroom of children. He explained that this was like a “home room”. All the children eat lunch in the classrooms. They serve, eat together, then clean up. On this day they had fish, rice, miso soup, and sweet potato. After lunch they were going to clean the whole school. They do not waste their food, and can have seconds if they desire. They were funny and curious about how we knew how to eat with chopsticks already, and had a lot of questions for us, that Kenji graciously interpreted to us, then interpreted our answers back to them.



Students at lunch



Seaweed tea at Kenzo-no-mori

After lunch we went back downstairs for yet another bowl of tea! Then we left for Nishi junior high—very huge and fortress like but also beautiful, and very friendly and homey on the inside. Another bowl of tea! Our guide was a young American woman named Simone from the South. We performed for twenty minutes. The students sat on the floor and were extremely well disciplined and polite and friendly. They knew the rules and older children helped seat the younger ones. If a student slumped, a gentle reminder from a teacher was kindly done, and respected.



After the performance the children were very interested in trying out the dulcimer, as were two teachers. They were quite thrilled to get our business card, and to see that we had a website that they could visit on the internet. We went back to the first room we had met in—another bowl of tea! By this time I had tried every restroom (toilet) in the school!! It was worth it—I felt great after all that green tea!



After tea we took a tour of the whole school and the after-school clubs that were in session. The students were very involved in their sports, dancing, music

etc. It was wonderful to hear their voices and their laughter. The very best thing to see was the brass band club, which we went to last. Those students were FANTASTIC!! They were playing a piece for the first time together, and it was amazing—they engage so enthusiastically with their music and seem to really be having fun.

We left the school at 5 pm and went back to City Hall, where our host families picked us up. Every day has been so full of new sights, new experiences, wonderful receptions from the people we meet, and more and more feelings of admiration for the Japanese who receive us in such a friendly way, and for a culture which is so well suited for the modern world, and so efficient and welcoming



Visiting with the band



Putting on the guest slippers

8 November 2014 (Saturday):

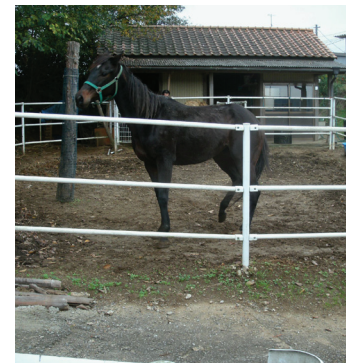
Don Lawson

This day had the “highlight” event of our trip - a folk festival celebrating the 60th anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Narita.

It was explained to us that, in the Japanese culture, a 60th anniversary is a REALLY BIG event, representing time span of five times through the 12-year zodiac cycle.

As we started the day at the Tsubaki household, the guys in the band were told that the weather forecast called for scattered rain. So, we prepared by fitting raincoats and miniature umbrellas into our backpacks. Our suitcases were packed up and left just inside the front door of the Tsubaki’s house because, even though the Tsubaki van is generously big, it is not big enough for both our instruments and the suitcases. So, we placed our instruments and other “gig” gear into the van, leaving the suitcases for Chikara Tsubaki to deliver to the hotel later in the day..

On the way to the group meeting at Narita City Hall, Chikara took a detour from his normal route, turning onto a small road that went between some farm fields. After driving on a winding route, he stopped the van as the road led down a slight hill. On the left-hand side of the van we could see a large shed, around 6 meters wide. Chikara explained that this was the place where his horse stayed. A caretaker was busy feeding the horse, and after Chikara spoke to him, the caretaker brought the horse out into the yard. It is quite remarkable that somebody could keep a horse as a pet, particularly given the limited number of areas where it would be possible to ride the horse.



Our band (and the musicians’ host families) regularly met in the lobby of Narity City Hall. In one corner of the lobby, we had seen a larger-than-life doll figure of a shogun-era local warlord. The doll was made over a century ago by a noteworthy Japanese artist. and it rests in a glass display case. The display case includes commentary on a plaque, and the English “subtitle” text tells that this doll is pulled through the streets during festivals. When not used during the festivals, the doll is kept behind glass in its display cabinet.

On this particular day, as we walked into the lobby, we noticed the empty display cabinet.

We were then driven over to the hotel, and then after meeting with Aoki-san and other Chiba-Wisconsin people, we were led down the narrow street towards the Buddhist temple. When we followed the street around a bend, there in a side alley we saw a gaudy multi-tier festival wagon. Up on the top tier - probably 18 feet or 6 meters up - was the “warlord” doll, looking down fiercely as he held up his sword.



Around the wagon was the crew of local people who would be handling the wagon and riding on it. They were wearing traditional-themed attire. They were happy to pose for our cameras.

After traveling another short block down the street, we passed first one stage area, and then came to another that was adjacent to a rest room facility. A traditional flute-dance-and-drum group was warming up in the street,

with their larger drums held on poles that were supported by two guys. One guy would be flipped onto his back so that the drum was between the two musicians. The upper drummer would have high wild strokes with his drumstick, giving the illusion that he was thrashing the drummer who was underneath the drum. Then, the upper drummer would get up and pull strongly on the drum's pole, helping the lower drummer to quickly get to his feet. After some mock struggling (the two drummers leaning in towards the drum, giving the impression that each was trying to push the other backwards), the drummer who had formerly been uppermost would now drop to the pavement, and the drummer who had been former the underdog would now be leaning over the drum, giving wild strokes.



The drum group in the street

This group had come to Wisconsin a few years ago as part of a Chiba-Wisconsin Association delegation. They are well known in Chiba, and they have made other trips abroad besides the "CWA" trip. The dance routines that they perform, and the stylistic drumming techniques used, give this group great visual appeal.

These drummers then went to the stage to start their act. We went into an adjacent "stage prep" tent and quietly checked tuning, and then went to another tent which was backstage from the performance stage, where we waited for turn to perform.



As we were about to begin tuning, we were joined by Marutani Miki and her husband. Miki traveled to Wisconsin as part of the Chiba-Wisconsin Association Delegation for 2013. She is a public health nurse and she had stayed with Don and Bobbie in October 2013. Miki is now working in Osaka. She had traveled all the way from Osaka to hear our band, and to say hello to Bobbie and Don. We were honored by her actions.

Our band was scheduled to perform from 10:30 to 11:00 AM. The drum group got a call for an encore, so we got off to a slow start. We began with Sliabh Russell while the sound system was still being set up. By the time we had gotten to a song, the sound system was up and running very well, and I noticed that a pair of high-quality video cameras were filming our performance.



Our first song was Holy Ground, and clearly the English-speaking audience members (including other members of the Wisconsin-Chiba delegation) were shouting their "Fine Girl you Are!" response, and everybody in the audience was spontaneously clapping along. I'm not sure why the songs prompted the audience members to clap, but the same thing had happened when we performed for the high school Brass Band Club on our first day. Our audiences at the two junior high schools had been a bit more reserved, but they also ended up clapping to the songs.

As we started performing the next tune, a lot of our audience members got up to walk away. I was wondering if we had done something wrong, but then I noticed that both video cameras were being hastily covered up with clear plastic sheeting. That's when we realized that it was starting to rain. We were comfortably dry under the stage's "rain roof" tent, but our audience was getting soaked. It was encouraging to see a large part of our audi-

ence putting up their umbrellas or putting on their raincoats, and staying with us as we continued the performance.

We were asked to do an encore, and we obliged with Frieze Britches. The audience was rewarded not only by the encore tune but by a stop to the rain. When we were done, we were able to quickly clear the stage to make room for the next group that needed to set up. The next group was a flute-and-drum traditional musical group. As we got off the stage we were given a big round of applause by the incoming group.

After meeting again with Miki and her husband, we were ushered by Yasuko-san over to a side street's building, where we were provided with lunch. Miki and her husband were able to join us because Aoki had made "special diet" meals for Bobbie and Debby, and so Miki and her husband were able to have some food that had been prepared for the musicians. (Arigatto gosaimas, Yasuko-san!)

After lunch, we carried our instruments to a "preparation tent" at the stage where we were to do our afternoon performance. This gave us a chance to wander through the festival for a half hour or so, before re-tuning and doing the afternoon gig. When we were back on the street, we encountered a number of festival wagons being pulled past us by large crowds of people who were first carrying, then pulling heavy ropes that were around 2" diameter. There must of have been a small fortune worth of rope for each wagon - easily 120 feet (or, 40 meters) of rope at each corner of each wagon. (There were also ropes coiled up on the "back" part of the wagon, because the narrow streets do not allow a wagon to be turned around.) The crew pulling the ropes were being led in cheers of "Rashah" (or "Washah") by a cheerleading guy with a bull-horn. (This cheer is similar to "hooray!" and is intended to build up some anticipation and excitement in the onlookers.) At around the same moment in time, Aoki and I saw Bobbie, Debbie, and Sharon Durtka pulling on the rope that was across the street from us. Walking along, I found a gap among the crew pulling the rope on my side, so I got into the gap and joined in the pulling. I figured that I had plenty of time before we needed to be back with the band for our afternoon gig, so I probably pulled the wagon for at least a full block. Then I gave up my spot and went back to the stage for our afternoon gig.



Bobbie, Deb and Sharon get to work

We saw a total of six of the festival wagon being pulled down the street. Most of these had the shogun effigies (dolls) on the top tier of the wagon roof. Clearly there is a lot of friendly rivalry between various cities in regards to each town's favorite legendary historical figure.

When we got to the afternoon's stage, we found another flute-and-drum group was performing.

Once we got onto the stage, we had to wait for one of the festival wagons to move down the street. Since the wagon's "trad music" band was being amplified by the wagon's sound system, the wagon would have been a bit of a distraction for our audience. Once the wagon was moving down the street, we were able to start our performance. We started out with Holy Ground (because it gets the audience quickly fired up), and the sound system was working splendidly. We then continued with Three Marches. The dulcimer solo on Laird of Drum Blair was a bit "sketchy" on the first time through, but was absolutely "solid" on the second time through. One factor contributing to the solidity was the non-varying tempo of the rhythm section of the band - they were holding a great tempo, which was a very good support for the dulcimer player.



For the band's second song, we did *The Craic was Ninety*. By singing this song at a moderate tempo, we hoped that those in the audience who had some skills with spoken English would be able to follow the thread of the lyrics. There was no rain, and the audience (which was a nice sized group) was present for the whole performance. We weren't sure if an encore was called for, but decided to do *Frieze Britches* again as a wrap-up.

After this second performance, we quickly cleared our stuff from the stage. (That's one thing that we have learned from sharing venues with other bands - it can be very aggravating to be a "follow-up band" and watch the preceding band go through a needlessly leisurely take-down while the audience finally gets bored and leaves.) Once we were in the "back-stage" tent, we were able to pack up our equipment. But before making the trip back to the hotel, we got to watch a traditional flute/drum/dance group where the dancers were men dressed up in dragon costumes. Apparently some sort of story was being told through a ceremonial dance, because two of the "dragon" dancers stood still, watching the ground, while the first dancer did a long solo dance. Then the other two dancers joined in.

Not wanting to be burdened by carrying our instruments around all day, we went back to the hotel, where we were able to collect our suitcases, check in, and deposit our belongings in our rooms. (Some of us ended up back in the same rooms that we had occupied on our first night in the hotel.) It was a great convenience for us that we had been lodged in a hotel that is within a short walking distance of the festival. (Our thanks to whomever had the foresight to book us into the Hotel Mercure.) Then we went back to the festival. While the other guys in the band changed from their kilts into casual attire, Bobbie and Don decided to remain in our performance garb (Bobbie's dress with lots of "Celtic knot" designs, and Don in the kilt.) As we walked past the train station plaza on our way toward the festival area, some Japanese people looked at us and said "Idlish Musicians," and pantomimed playing a fiddle. This might have been on account of Don and Bobbie still being in their "band" costumes, but other musicians had a similar experience while been in non-gig clothing. So, we must have made a good impression.

As we went down the street we kept encountering the decorated wagons with the 'rope pull' teams in colorful outfits. Each wagon has a sound system, and the musical instruments are equipped with "pickup" microphones. Between the cheerleader's bullhorn and the band's sound system, you can hear the wagon coming at the same time that you first see it.

During the walk, Bobbie and Don met up with others in our group - other musicians, and also the band's Japanese hosts including Yasuko Aoki and one of the other "CWA" people. There was an incredible amount of Japanese folk culture on display, mostly traditional, but also some contemporary acts. The only aspect of the street that didn't move around was the set of "zodiac statues" that lined the street - a snake, a rat, a pig, a dragon, a dog, etc. Otherwise, there was a constantly shifting blend of both traditional and contemporary Japanese performing groups

The lower end of the street (away from the performance stages and towards the Buddhist temple complex) has a lot of shops. Around a third of them sell food, a third of them sell miscellaneous items (particularly items that a traveller might be interested in, like kids' backpacks or umbrellas), and the rest sell souvenirs. Bobbie and Don were trying to find a shop where we could buy some gifts to bring back home, and we found ourselves in a "Parade of Mascots," where people going down the street were wearing costumes of various characters. The typical "mascot" character has a width that is half of the character's height, with a general appearance that would be suitable for a child's stuffed toy. In looking at the costumes, I was wondering how the person inside was able to see out. Most "mascots" were accompanied by an assistant. The mascots were quite colorful, ranging from the blue "stuffed airplane" of Narita to a bright red "bird" character, etc.

While they were in one shop looking for gifts to bring home, Don and Bobbie met a Japanese man in a medieval-era style traditional robe. Coming up to Don and pointing at the kilt, he bellowed “Scotland?” Don grinned and nodded. Then the gentleman pointed to his own outfit, and with a big smile, he bellowed “Japan!” Don and Bobbie gave him a big ‘thumbs up,’ and then got a store clerk to take a picture.



“SCOTLAND? JAPAN!”

As they worked their way down the street, Don and Bobbie heard a voice calling “Bobbie!” Looking up, they saw the Higher Education part of the WCI delegation in the second floor of a tea shop.

Most of the band’s musicians eventually worked their way down the street to the temple area, where the noise and crowding were significantly reduced. Things were abruptly quiet as one walked through the main gate and up the 53 steps to the plaza that surrounds the Main Hall. The plaza area was nearly deserted - we saw almost nobody else. Don went to the Main Hall’s doors, tossed some coins into the offering box and offered a prayer of thanks for a truly wonderful day and a wonderful week. We had been extremely fortunate to be able to have been the Cultural Exchange Group in the 2014 WCI delegation.

After giving thanks at the Main Hall, they went towards the right to go to the garden area. We found that two other couples in the band (Deb and Joe, and Pam and Dave) had also ended up in the gardens. We all felt that it was necessary to “unwind” after the loud music and bright costumes of the festival.

We did some strolling in the quiet of the gardens. From the tranquility of our surroundings, it would have been hard to guess that we had been in the noisy street of the festival. At one point, we came across an old wooden house which was tucked into the back side of a hill. Near this house we saw a small stream, and across the stream was a hollowed-out space in the side of the hill which made a small echo chamber. Aside from seeing only one other person, the band’s musicians had the whole area to themselves.

We needed to be back at the hotel by 4:45 pm, so that we could be on hand for the formal Farewell Dinner (which started at 5:30 pm). On our way up the street, we found that the wagons were still out, but now the crews had to work very hard to pull them up the steep hill. Where we had encountered the wagons earlier in the day, the street was quite flat, and lots of people who were attending the festival were happy to join the crews on the ropes. But now the crowds were thinning out, the cheerleaders were no longer shouting “Washah!” and the wagons were on the lower part of a hillside. The wagon’s crews had no assistance from onlookers as they worked by themselves. The lanterns on the wagons were lit up, giving an added festive touch to the gathering dusk.

At the hotel, the Farewell Dinner was a much bigger event that we might have anticipated. Around half of the band had attended a similar dinner the year before in Milwaukee, which had taken place at a favorite Chinese restaurant in band’s home town of South Milwaukee. However, the dinner at the Mercure Hotel was in a large hall, and it included a traditional music group doing entertainment.



Performers at the Farewell Dinner

Members of the band were split up to give the group as wide a presence as possible at the dinner. Don was sitting at a table with two board members of the Chiba-Wisconsin organization (neither of whom spoke English) and a representative of Kikoman (Yoshiuki Nogi, who has excellent English skills). Also at Don’s table was a gentleman from the Chiba Prefectural Government, who had grown up in

9 November 2014 (Sunday):

Our last full day in Chiba was a free day, and it had taken a lot of thought to figure out what to do. It's not a simple choice: there's far too much to see, and not enough time to see it in one day. After much consideration, the band decided to make a day trip to Tokyo, to experience the capital city. Chikara and Yuga Tsubaki had both said that they wanted to come along with us, as well. As the farewell dinner for the Wisconsin Chiba Delegation, Kimiko (who splits her time between Japan and Madison, Wisconsin) said that she would be willing to write up an itinerary for us, and give us a guided tour around Tokyo. As fun as wandering around by ourselves sounded, having a guide sounded like a good idea.

We set off in the morning to the rail station to get our rail passcard. The trip to Tokyo is about an hour, and then we would be taking several rail trips in Tokyo itself to get to the different areas. Kimiko figured that about 3000 yen would be enough. To us, that seemed like a great deal: round-trip transportation and mass transit for the whole day for a little less than \$30? We wish we had mass transit options like that back home!

Once on the train, we settled in to watch the countryside pass by. The train we took was a commuter train, and not an express, so it stopped at many stations along the way, and the train gradually became more crowded. However, since this was a Sunday, the train never got unbearably full. Kimiko told us stories about how full Japanese trains could become. As the trip went on, the landscape changed over from farms and spaced out houses to a built up urban landscape.



Buying a rail card



Chikara, Sharon and Kimiko on the train



Scenery on the way to Tokyo

Our first stop was Asakusa Station, and the Senso-Ji temple. One of the first views that greeted us on the street, was a view of the huge Tokyo Skytree, the tallest structure in Japan. Yuga had told us about it when we were talking about things to see in Tokyo.

We walked across a street, and then we were at the main gate. The train may not have been crowded on a Sunday, but the temple certainly was, with a huge temple complex. We walked down the row of shops towards the temple, trying to keep each of us in sight so as to not get lost. We had an hour at Senso-Ji, and were amazed at the scale and beauty of all the buildings.



Tokyo Skytree



Main temple gate



Five story pagoda



Hundreds of shops



The main temple building

All too soon, it was time to head off to our next destination: Shibuya Station. This area could teach Times Square a thing or two about being crowded, flashy, and very, very impressive. One of the more unique parts of this area is the pedestrian crossing. At one point, all traffic is stopped, and the entire five way intersection is open for pedestrian traffic, truly unique.



Shibuya Station



Another view of Shibuya Station



Hachiko and Mark

Another stop at Shibuya Station was to the statue of Hachiko, the dog who waited for his owner at Shibuya Station for 9 years. It's a very popular meeting spot, and there was a line of people to get their picture taken with it. There are five exits at Shibuya, and the one with the statue is known as the Hachiko Entrance/Exit. While we were in Shibuya, we had the opportunity to visit the second floor Starbucks to watch the traffic and pedestrian patterns, or visit a nearby electronics store.

Lunchtime! We took a short walk to a nearby farm-to-plate restaurant called Eco-Farm Cafe 632. It sources many of its ingredients from local farms, and had wonderful food. I found it interesting that this was the only restaurant we visited that didn't have chopsticks, only knives, forks and spoons.



Local produce



Inside the Eco-Farm cafe



Pasta with squid

After that, it was another walk to the train station, and a short ride to the Harajuku station. Here, we would get to see some of the shopping areas. The street was a wide, divided street, with pedestrian walkways over it, and was lined with upscale stores. Part of the group went to the Oriental Bazaar, an art gallery and store, while I walked with Chikara and Yuga around the backstreets of the area. We walked to Takashita street, which is an area known for its trendy small shops, and even trendier dressers, We saw many amazing outfits while walking around...and more than a few puzzling ones. After we saw a group of five men dressed in fish outfits, I asked Chikara, "Why??" He replied, "Don't know." It was fantastic.



After the bright lights and crowds of Takashita street and the shopping district, we walked to toe Meiji-Jingu shrine, a Shinto shrine with a large garden. I found it amazing that such a short way from the crowds and shopping was such a quiet and serene place. It was, and is, one of the most incredibly beautiful places I have ever seen: landscaped, yet not. Perfect. We walked the long path to get to the center of the garden and the shrine within, walking past containers of sanctified saké. We were there at the end of the day, so the grounds were being closed...but we had enough time to be able to walk through and experience the shrine and gardens.



After leaving the gardens, we had an opportunity to shop at the Takeshita street 100yen store...essentially, a Dollar Store. I had visited the Dollar Store in Narita, and thought it to be similar to the ones we have in Wisconsin. However, the one on Takeshita street was impressive: it had a huge range of goods, and it was also four stories. I was impressed to find a large number of ceramic cups and bowls that were made in Japan. We all did a lot of shopping for gifts (and for ourselves) before we headed off to the next destination.

After that, it was another short rail ride to Ryogoku station for dinner at Hananomai Ryogoku, a sumo-themed restaurant. At one point, the building was an actual sumo gym. It still has a sumo ring in the middle of it, where they occasionally have demonstrations. Tonight, there was no sumo, but there was a demonstration of traditional Japanese drumming. I found it interesting how tipping works for performers in Japan: instead of a hat, the performer will wear the bills on his shirt, on display. It's an impressive sight for a good performer, his shirt covered with 1000 yen bills.



Dinner was similar to the izakaya restaurant the Tsubakis had taken the men to on Friday: the menu was an assortment of smaller dishes, and we all ordered one or two things, which we also shared with the people around us. Once again, an incredible end to the day.

After that, it was time to catch the train back home. It was a long day, and more than a few of us fell asleep on the return trip. Kimiko had planned out the fares perfectly: we ended up having 500 yen remaining on our cards when we returned to Narita, which the attendant at the rail station was able to refund to us when we turned in our rail card.

Kimiko did an incredible job of setting up a whirlwind tour of Tokyo for us. We all agreed that we saw far, far more of Tokyo than if we had tried to do it ourselves. The Tsubakis were also great guides, walking around with us and showing us things that we might not have noticed otherwise. Truly a day to remember for a lifetime.