

Out of Jim Riva's satiric, comic novel *The Geographer* come chapters four through seven. If you haven't already listened to the author's reading of the first three chapters, you might want to listen to them first. The reading, in an MP3 file, is free of charge at www.jimriva.com.



Ashes to Hashish

At Osaka International Airport, Winston disembarked with his hat on his head and his daypack on his back. It was 4:00 p.m. Japan Time, and he went with the flow of people following signs for IMMIGRATION/BAGGAGE CLAIM. With dark circles under bloodshot eyes from not having slept a wink for the past thirty hours (and very little in the past week of high anxiety), he walked for what seemed like a very long time to PASSPORT CONTROL.

People were standing in many different lines, most for JAPANESE RESIDENTS, a few for ALIENS. The lines of aliens were moving much more slowly because immigration officials were asking questions and checking their computers.

It was a Saturday, on the weekend marking the end of the three-day summer holiday called *Bon*, when the traditional thing for Japanese to do was to return to their ancestral hometowns to welcome the return of their deceased ancestors' spirits. On the following day, the country's expressways, railways, and airports would be a congested mess with people returning to make it back for work on Monday. Many untraditional people who did not take overseas vacations escaped the intense heat by heading for popular cool places like Karuizawa, Kamikochi, and Hokkaido, while senior politicians were wondering whether or not they should pay a controversial visit to Yasukuni

Shrine to pay tribute to the war dead, some of whom were convicted war criminals, with General Hideki Tojo topping the list.

It had been a brutally hot August. A few little children had died of dehydration in parked cars while their mothers were busy playing *pachinko* (vertical pinball). The heat had made beer the top-selling, traditional mid-year gift, and Asahi Super Dry was outselling perennial best-selling Kirin Lager. Some people may have been thinking about washing their cars with beer, as the monsoon-month of June was very dry and Japan was experiencing a drought of such severity that water was being rationed in some parts of the country and efforts were being made to bring rain by 'seeding' clouds. The drought would have adverse effects on the rice harvest, which would make it two bad years in a row, as the relative coolness of the previous summer brought about such a bad harvest that rice needed to be imported, dealing a big blow to the Japanese ego that had been getting battered since the burst of the bubble economy in early 1990 and the subsequent and ongoing recession that replaced optimism with pessimism.

The Japan that Winston had come to was a country with the wind out of its sails. People didn't feel like jumping for joy while doing their traditional *Bon* dance. The American dollar broke the psychological ¥100 barrier in early June, causing the biggest shock to the yen/dollar relationship since 1971, when Richard Nixon took the dollar off the gold standard and ended the fixed exchange-rate of ¥360 to the dollar. Companies relying on export were setting up factories abroad if they hadn't done so already. Lifetime employment was a thing of the past; restructuring was a thing of the present.

The only thing that people seemed to be excited about was J.League soccer, which began the year before and was still spawning soccermania. There was also dinosaurmania because of the blockbuster movie *Jurassic Park*, which happened to be running concurrently with the twenty-first sequel of the original *Godzilla*, and that sequel (titled *Godzilla vs. Space-Godzilla*) made it clear that the Japanese film industry was not going to help the country out of its economic woes by penetrating foreign markets any more than its execrable music industry was.

Winston wasn't going to be seeing many, if any, of Japan's economic woes because they seemed to exist only on paper. To people who didn't have their perceptions affected by gloomy economic reports, Japan still seemed to have the bustle in its hustle, and the money flow was still astounding.

Winston finally made it to the front of the ALIEN line. He handed the official his entry card and his brand-new passport containing a one-year visa for Specialist in Humanities. The official looked at Winston's photo in the passport, then up at Winston in person. After looking at the visa and running a computer check, he asked Winston where he would be staying. Winston showed him a letter from his contact person, Mrs. Junko Teratani, which gave the address of a person named Shingo Tsujimoto in Kobe. The official wrote down the address on Winston's entry card, stamped his passport, and

gave him a card informing him that he had to go to the local ward office within ninety days to receive an Alien Registration Card.

Winston walked down some stairs to BAGGAGE CLAIM, where the checked-in baggage was already going around on a carousel. Joe Haywood pushed his way in and grabbed his suitcase. Seeing Winston, he wished him good luck.

“Oh, by the way, a very polite way of greeting people in Japanese is ‘Watashi wa kichigai desu’. Try it. Watashi wa.”

“Watashi wa.”

“Kichigai desu.”

“Kichigai desu.”

“Watashi wa kichigai desu.”

“Watashi wa kichigai desu.”

“Good. Be sure to use it. Sayonara.”

Winston repeated the expression a few more times to commit it to memory as Joe headed for CUSTOMS CONTROL while snickering from the thought of the stressed-out guy with the white beard and black hair innocently greeting people with a taboo word (kichigai) in an expression that really meant ‘I am a lunatic’.

Winston’s two brand-new Samsonite suitcases finally came around. He took them off, put them on a cart, and pushed the cart to CUSTOMS CONTROL, where he greeted a stone-faced customs official with “Watashi wa kichigai desu”.

“Nihongo ga hanaseru no?”

“Pardon?”

“Can you speak Japanese?”

“No.”

“Pasupoto.” (Passport.)

“Here you are.”

“Anything to declare?”

“No.”

With his white beard that looked like it might be fake because of his otherwise youthful-looking face, Winston aroused the custom official’s suspicious nature. He opened Winston’s suitcases and felt around, then asked him to open his daypack.

The official took off the top the Folgers coffee can, unwrapped the urn, and took the top off the urn to see what was inside it.

“What is this?”

“Ashes.”

“Eehh! Hashish?”

“Yes.”

It was a common case of double-misunderstanding between speakers of different languages, but it had bad consequences for Winston. Two customs officers took him to

the Kansai airport bureau of the Osaka District Customs Office and stood him before their seated superintendent, Hisao Muramatsu.

Superintendent Muramatsu put out his Mild Seven cigarette after listening to the details. Then he looked up at Winston and pointed at the jar in question.

“Sa.”

“Watashi wa kichigai desu.”

“This is hashish?”

“Yes. It’s my wife’s ashes.”

“Your wife’s hashish?”

“Yes.”

“Your wife wa, where is he?”

“He?!”

“She.”

“She’s gone.”

Muramatsu said to the other policemen: “Kare no iu tori kichigai nanda na. Yome-san ga ita ka do ka shirabedase. Kono ja o kanshiki ni mawase. Furiizu-dorai no hashish kamoshirenai. Atarashi teguchi dana. Doisho o yoi shiro.” (He might be crazy like he says. Find out if his wife was on the flight with him. Take the jar to the lab for analysis. It might be freeze-dried hashish. That would be a new one. And get a confession ready for this guy to sign.)

Junko Teratani, Winston’s contact person, waited in the arrival area with a sign that read WINSTON BALDRY for a very long time after the plane that Winston was supposed to be on arrived. Then she checked with a person at the Northwest Airlines counter and was told that Winston Baldry was indeed on that flight. Afraid that he might have passed by her without seeing the sign, she had him paged, but without success. She made an inquiry at Airport Security and learned that he was being detained on suspicion of possessing an illegal drug. So she called the United States Consulate General in Osaka.

The consulate was closed and would remain closed, according to a recorded message, until the following Monday because of *Bon*, but the mobile-phone number of an embassy minister in Tokyo was given in case of an emergency. Junko made the call and spoke with the minister, Marshall George, while he was putting on makeup in full drag at a place in Roppongi that catered to men who liked to secretly dress up in ladies’ clothes and spend a couple of relaxing hours conversing with other ‘ladies’.

Known to other transvestites at the establishment as Queen Marsha or Madame George, Marshall George got back to business the next morning. He had higher rights-protecting priorities to attend to than this matter of another American who had apparently tried to smuggle narcotics into the country, such as the matter of a long-term resident American priest in Sendai who faced deportation for refusing to be fingerprinted for his new Alien Registration Card, and the litigation matter of a resident

American hemophiliac who contracted AIDS from tainted American blood that the Japanese Blue Cross scandalously didn't treat with heat.

Marshall got around to the matter of Winston Baldry after lunch and was given permission to speak to him on the phone late in the afternoon. Fluent in Japanese, Marshall proceeded to inform Superintendent Muramatsu that the jar in question contained nothing more than the cremated remains of Winston Baldry's deceased wife, and he explained the pronunciation-problem that led to the unfortunate misunderstanding.

Muramatsu didn't want to admit that the problem was his imperfect English because he was very sensitive about his English. He got up early every morning to catch NHK's twenty-minute *English Conversation* program, he subscribed to the English newspaper *Mainichi Weekly*, and he had taken lessons for many years at Bilingual language school in Osaka. (He would still have been going to Bilingual once a week to receive lessons from a blue-eyed bleached-blond with silicone implants if the language school, which he joined because they advertised that they hired only good-looking teachers, had not gone bankrupt two years before.) So he told Marshall George what he proceeded to tell the Drug Enforcement Agency and the National Police Agency: It looked like freeze-dried hashish in the urn and that's why it was sent to the lab, but, above and beyond that, there was reason to believe, based upon the suspicious way that the suspect gulped during questioning, that he swallowed an illegal drug, and that was the real reason he was being detained.

Muramatsu didn't mind making things difficult for the detained American because he blamed the American for having made things difficult for *him*. He moved the American to a more detaining detention room and forced him to sit on a portable toilet under constant surveillance until he had taken a dump. Winston tried to cooperate with all his might, but unfortunately for him (and much more unfortunately for Muramatsu, as it would turn out), Winston was constipated from having gone from jet laggy to jet laggier.

That evening, there was a special dinner at the Hotel Okura in Tokyo, attended by the United States' Ambassador to Japan (Walter Mondale), the deputy director-general of Japan's Foreign Ministry's Cultural Affairs Department, a senior editor for the *Japan Times*, a foreign correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, and many others, including Marshall George, who was now wearing a suit and certainly not telling anyone to call him Queen Marsha or Madame George.

Marshall told the story about the hapless American man and the vindictive police superintendent over dessert, and in the morning of the same day in west-coast America (because of Japan Time being fifteen hours ahead of Pacific Time), the story appeared on page three of the *Los Angeles Times* under the headline ASHES TO HASHISH, DUST TO BUST.

Right away, the story generated interest. The American man's desire to grant his wife's wish of having her ashes scattered in Japan at Kyoto's Golden Temple, Kinkakuji, re-warmed the hearts of people whose hearts had been warmed by the final scene of the recent box-office smash *The Bridges of Madison County*. That afternoon, a high-ranking member of Amnesty International, who cried during the famous final scene of *The Bridges of Madison County*, issued a statement lambasting Muramatsu for "not being man enough to admit his mistake in English and subjecting Mr. Baldry to degrading cruel-and-unusual punishment just out of spite". That evening, the House Majority Leader, Richard Gephardt, was on *News Hour* with Jim Lehrer to discuss, among other things, the American trade deficit with Japan, and he happened to mention the Winston Baldry incident as being "a perfect example of Japan's lack of fair play with America". That was all it took to wind up the Japan bashers, for whom Winston Baldry immediately became a sitting-symbol standing for protectionism and the need to impose trade sanctions under the Super 301 clause of the U.S. Trade Act.

The humorous side of the story was not forgotten. The ordeal of the American man forced to sit on a toilet in detention until he had taken a good, healthy shit gave plenty of ammunition to jokesters. On the night of the very same day, Jay Leno cracked a joke about it on the *Tonight Show* and David Letterman poked fun of it on *David Letterman*. In Las Vegas, a bookmaker started taking bets on the exact time and day that Winston Baldry would, as the media were putting it, "move his bowels".

Nobody was looking forward to Winston Baldry's bowel movement more than Winston Baldry. On the other buttock, nobody was looking forward to it less than Superintendent Muramatsu, for he knew how things were going to come out, so to speak, meaning that he didn't have shit on the American, so to speak, meaning that his chances of getting promoted were going to go down the toilet with Winston's shit, so to speak.

Muramatsu thought about putting cocaine into condoms and making the American swallow them like small-time drug smugglers often did. He still had access to cocaine from a seizure made three days before on a Colombian freighter. What he didn't have access to was American-made condoms, and he had no idea where to get some or even if they were available in the protected market. With Japanese-made condoms, it would have been an obvious frame-up. Muramatsu didn't want to get nailed for planting evidence against an American because America was capable of making a big stink about things like the big stink they were making about this incident. It would have been so much easier if the fellow were not American.

Newsworthiness in America made the story newsworthy in Japan. The *Japan Times* ran the ashes/hashish story and called it the biggest mistake in English since 1992, when 16-year-old Yoshihiro Hattori, an exchange student in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, went to the wrong house to attend a Halloween costume party dressed as John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever* and supposedly mistook the order 'Freeze' for 'Please' (according

to the Japanese media) by the paranoid owner of the house, Rodney Peairs, who proceeded to blow Hattori away with his .44 Magnum.

English teachers throughout Japan felt the need to write 'ashes' and 'hashish' on the blackboard and work on pronunciation with emphasis on the position of the tongue. The comedy duo 'Downtown' Hamada and 'Downtown' Matsumoto lampooned Muramatsu in a spoof on the television program *Downtown's Comedy Show*. A week later, Muramatsu would shoot himself dead with his own gun, but on August 14th, the second day of Winston's detainment, he was fighting for his professional life, which he felt was the only life he had.

An editorial in the *Asahi Shimbun* raised the question that the Americans were so aggressively raising: If Muramatsu really believed that the American had swallowed an illegal drug, why had he not ordered x-rays to be taken?

The big shots at the Drug Enforcement Agency and the National Police Agency were very critical of Muramatsu in private, but they decided, for the time being anyway, to support him publicly because public criticism of one of their own would have amounted to public self-criticism. So they backed up Muramatsu with his own answer: X-rays aren't perfectly reliable, and whatever it was that the American had swallowed, whether it was an illegal drug or not, was going to have to come out sooner or later, and there was no harm in waiting an extra day or two in the name of national drug enforcement.

They certainly weren't betting on it, but they were hoping that the American would shit out some controlled substance – because then they could show magnanimity by sending the drug smuggler back to America with a lifetime ban on re-entry instead of doing what they had every right to do: throw him in jail in Japan. Maybe they would even give Muramatsu a citation for excellence just to rub the Americans' noses in Winston Baldry's prohibited shit.

With American newspapers from coast to coast carrying the story, and reporters from ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN giving live updates from Osaka International Airport, President Clinton was forced to speak out, and he made his most vociferous appeal to a foreign country concerning the treatment of an American citizen since appealing to the Singaporean government six months earlier on behalf of Michael Fay after the 18-year-old was sentenced to be caned for spray-painting cars.

President Clinton spoke with Prime Minister Murayama personally over the phone and expressed his sincere wish that Mr. Baldry's human rights be respected. Clinton's appeal was somewhat effective, as it had been in decreasing the number of strokes with the cane that Michael Fay ended up receiving, and Winston was allowed to get off the toilet every two hours to stretch his legs.

After three days with lots of fruit but no success, Winston gave written consent to be given an enema. Marshall George, who had been speaking frequently with Winston via mobile phone during Winston's confinement on the portable toilet, was asked to be

present as a witness – to Winston’s signing of the agreement, that is. The last thing the police wanted to be accused of, at this point, was coercing the American man’s consent. George was on his way to America, however, to discuss how things presently stood (and how Winston presently sat) with Larry King on *Larry King Live*. So Ambassador Mondale made the three-hour ride on the bullet train from Tokyo to Osaka to witness the signing.

The enema accomplished what it was supposed to accomplish, and, after a thorough stool test, Winston had a load off his mind as well as off his bowels. The news flashed up on the Motogram on Times Tower in New York’s Times Square, and people who had placed bets were checking their tickets. A photo of Ambassador Mondale shaking hands with a haggard Winston Baldry went straight to the Associated Press. Winston was given back the cremation jar with half of its original contents and let go without an apology.

Ambassador Mondale led Winston out of detainment and turned him over to Junko Teratani. After making a stop at the airport bank so Winston could convert dollars into yen, they were escorted outside through a media swarm buzzing with the clicking of cameras and a barrage of questions that commingled into a clangorous jumble from the pack of bustling press-people jockeying around with TV cameras and microphones.

Finally making it to a stretch limousine arranged for them by the American Embassy, Winston and Junko sat in the back seat behind darkened windows and breathed simultaneous sighs of relief. Junko looked out the rear window and watched the swarm become smaller and smaller before saying what she had expected to say to Winston three days earlier: “Welcome to Japan.”

The First Supper

Junko and Winston arrived at Junko’s house in Kyoto’s Sakyo Ward a little before 5:00. A whirring *TV Tokyo* helicopter, which trailed them all the way from the airport, filmed them getting out of the limousine. The driver helped Winston with his suitcases and said goodbye to him at the *genkan* (front entrance) after receiving his autograph.

Following Junko’s example, Winston removed his shoes, stepped into house slippers, shuffled through the house, and stepped out of the house slippers to walk in stocking feet on the *tatami* (woven floor mats) of the air-conditioned guest room. There was a small party going on for several other Americans for whom Junko had arranged housing and was acting as a liaison. They, along with Junko’s husband, were all seated on floor cushions at a low table.

Winston received applause fit for a celebrity. Junko’s husband, Nobuhiko, a section chief at the NHK Culture Center in Kyoto, stood up to introduce himself and formally

give Winston his *meishi* (name card). Everyone else stayed seated and greeted Winston upon being introduced to him by Junko.

There was a lady who was going to teach English at a high school in Kyoto, a man who was going to teach The History of Western Civilization at a high school in Osaka, and five high-school students (three girls and two boys), who were on student-exchange programs in Kobe, Osaka, or Kyoto. They were all very aware of Winston's ordeal and had been looking forward to receiving some entertaining firsthand information. So Winston became and remained the unwilling center of attention – until Junko said that Winston-san probably wanted to take a shower.

Junko led Winston to the bathroom and showed him how to turn the shower on and off and how to use the water-temperature control, and she added that the bath water was ready in case he wanted to get in after showering.

Winston took off his clothes and rolled the cover off the *furo* (Japanese bathtub, which you get into *after* washing and rinsing). Skipping a shower, he stepped straight into the hot water that was made bluish-green by a packaged bath powder. He soaked for a few minutes, then stepped out, lathered himself with soap, and stepped back in. After shampooing his hair and dunking his head into the bluish-green water to rinse it, he pulled the plug and stepped out, leaving a ring around the tub.

Winston came out of the *furo* looking fresh in clean clothes. He went back into the guest room, where the guests were talking about this and that while occasionally watching a televised game of the 76th National High School Baseball Championship at Osaka's Koshien Stadium.

Junko put more food on the table that was already covered with food, such as *makizushi* (long roll of sushi, wrapped with seaweed), potato salad with slices of cucumber in it, *edamame* (boiled and salted soybeans in the pod), de-crusted, quartered ham & egg and cucumber & egg sandwiches, and watermelon, plus various beverages, such as beer, sake, plum brandy, orange juice, and cold barley tea.

"This is self-serve. There are some silverwares in case you prefer instead of chopsticks," Junko told Winston.

Winston sat down cross-legged at a corner of the table next to the fellow who was going to teach History of Western Civilization. Nobuhiko stood up and went over to fill Winston's glass with beer, then went around and refilled everyone's glasses. "Kanpai!" (Cheers!) he led them all in saying with their glasses raised.

After a chorus of deep sighs of refreshing beery satisfaction, Nobuhiko hollered "Oi, biiru!" (Hey, bring more beer!) to Junko, who had already gone to the kitchen to get more beer.

Focus on the Winston Baldry fiasco gradually faded, mainly because Winston didn't really want to talk about it, and isolated conversations sprung up. The lady who was going to teach English was talking to Nobuhiko about the recent fall of the Liberal Democratic Party and the shaky, new coalition-government headed by Tomiichi

Murayama of the Social Democratic Party; the two high-school boys were talking about the great video games on their host families' Famicoms (Family Computers); and the three high-school girls were talking about problems they were having with their host families, including one girl's account of how she caught her host father stealing a pair of her panties.

The fellow seated next to Winston was busy looking through the Employment Section of the *Mainichi Daily News*, but he put the newspaper down to talk to Winston.

"Are you going to make some extra money teaching English?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I'm a *geography* teacher."

"That doesn't make any difference. You're a native speaker. That's the only qualification you need. Me, I'm a history teacher, but I got a job teaching English on evenings and on Saturdays at Nichibeï English school in Osaka. I can make an extra ¥90,000 a month teaching there over and above my teacher's salary of ¥180,000. Plus, I picked up a couple of private students who are coming to my house for ¥3,000 an hour. Here, let me pour you some more beer. That's the way it's done here in Japan. You never pour your own beer, unless you're alone, of course. So after school starts in a couple of weeks, I'll be bringin' in about ¥300,000 a month. That's \$3,000 – and I've been in Japan less than two weeks!"

"Holy moly!"

"Yeah. And I'm tryin' to pick up some more classes. I've been goin' to the Pig & Whistle pub in Osaka at night to talk to other foreigners about what's going on. I put an ad in the *Kansai Time Out* monthly magazine offering private classes, and I gave Mr. Teratani my résumé because I'd like to get my foot in the door at NHK. I had some business cards made too. Here's one."

Winston looked at the card that read JAMES D. RICHARDS, ENGLISH CONVERSATION INSTRUCTOR and gave James's address and phone number.

"Keep it," James said. "I had five hundred made. You can get 'em made at Takashimaya department store here in Kyoto. I'm thinkin' about having some fliers made too. I've got a lot of openings on Sundays, and I can still squeeze in some other classes here and there during the week."

"You mean you're teaching seven days a week?"

"Sure. Why not? The money's great. That's what I'm here for. What else is there to be here for? It's easy money too, like takin' candy from a baby. I'm gonna rake it in. The dollar's back up to 101 today, but I think it'll go back under 100 again. I hope so. I hope it goes down to 90. I'll be laughin' all the way to the bank. One year here and I'll save about \$20,000. That's a nice nest egg, but I'm not just gonna sit on it. I'm gonna use it to make *more* money, a *lot* more money. Japan is ripe for business opportunities. Did you know that there's no frozen orange juice in this country? They've got little bitty

refrigerators, and frozen orange juice would be a good space-saver. That's just one of my ideas. I've got a lot of ideas. I'll tell you about more of 'em someday. Give me a call."

"All right. This beer is going straight to my bladder. Where's the bathroom?"

"You came from it just a little while ago. The restroom, which they call the toilet, is where you want to go, unless you're planning to piss in the bathtub. You wouldn't be the first person to do it. I made that mistake the first day I was in this country. Junko brought me here and I asked her where the bathroom was, and she directed me to the *bath* room. But with its square shape and that blue-colored water that looks like Tidy-Bowl Cleaner, how was I to know that the bathtub wasn't a Japanese toilet? It's a good thing I had to go Number One and not Number Two, although I'm sure *that's* been done too. The toilet is down the hall on the right. There's a urinal in it. That seems to be standard. The toilet is the non-flush Japanese-style, so if you have to go Number Two, be careful not to fall in."

"I don't think I'll have to go Number Two for a long time."

"I sure as hell wouldn't think so. But don't feel bad – some poor bastards have to get enemas every day. Don't stay in there too long. I've got to go too."

Upon finishing his business in the toilet, Winston came back into the guest room and walked on the *tatami* without realizing that he was still wearing the red, synthetic-rubber toilet slippers. After his attention was calmly called to the alarming fact, Nobuhiko set up his karaoke set and was soon singing *My Way*.

Junko served coffee and homemade cake while waiting her turn on the karaoke set so she could sing *Ue o Muite Aruko* (Let's Look Up While Walking), known in America as *Sukiyaki*.

Winston ate half his cake and suddenly felt very strange. "Were there any nuts in the cake?" he anxiously asked Junko.

"The frosting was with mince pecans. Do you allergy of nuts?" Junko replied.

Straight back to the toilet went Winston. Down on his knees, with his head near the hole (through which a three-week heap of fly-infested shit was visible), he vomited and vomited until he passed out from exhaustion.

Home Sweet Home

The port city of Kobe had a large and diverse foreign population scattered among its nine wards. Five-hundred Vietnamese lived in the southern ward of Nagata and constituted the largest ethnic group there after the nine-thousand Korean inhabitants. It was a poor side of town badly in need of urban renewal. A disproportionate number of elderly people lived in old areas crammed with small shops and factories. 6,500 people worked in the ward's 450 synthetic-shoe factories.

Shingo and Kimie Tsujimoto lived in a better part of Nagata Ward and ran one of Japan's 22,000 bookstores. Their bookstore was attached to their house. Next to their house was another house that was also theirs. Both houses were quite old, built shortly after World War Two in the traditional way with wooden frames and tiled roofs.

The second house was for their son, Yoichi, and his wife, Sachiko, to live in, but Yoichi died two years before from overwork, shortly after he became a father, and Sachiko left with the baby to go back and live with her parents in Yokohama. Wanting to internationalize themselves for all of their neighbors to see, Shingo and Kimie put the house up for rent through the Japan Foreign Teachers program that Junko Teratani was involved in.

Junko and Winston stepped out of the taxi they had taken from JR (Japan Railways) Shin Nagata Station and got Winston's suitcases out of the trunk that automatically opened and closed. Junko led Winston into the Tsujimoto's air-conditioned bookstore, My Book, where several teenagers were browsing through *manga* (comic books) while Mr. Tsujimoto worked behind the counter.

Junko introduced herself to Mr. Tsujimoto and then introduced Mr. Tsujimoto to Winston. After agreeing that it was hot ("Atsui desu ne"), Mr. Tsujimoto led them into his house, where Mrs. Tsujimoto greeted them in *seiza* (upright kneeling/sitting position) and followed the greeting by saying, "Atsui desu ne."

Mrs. Tsujimoto served green tea and sweets and talked with Junko in Japanese because her English was very limited. In fact, the only thing she could say of any substantial length in English was 'I can speak English only a little'. Junko translated for both her and Winston and enabled Winston to answer her most pressing questions: where in America he was from, what his impressions of Japan were, why his beard was white, and could he use chopsticks.

Mrs. Tsujimoto led them to her second house, which had new *tatami* mats in two of its four rooms and an unplugged, uncovered *kotatsu* (low heater-table) in one room, the living room. She turned on an electric fan and showed them around the house, which smelled slightly of mildew from not having been aired out much during the hot, humid summer. She made a stop at the *furo* to explain how to run the bath water and how to turn on the gas to heat the bath water, and added that there was a *sentō* (public bath) down the street if he preferred that.

After getting a box of big, purple grapes out of the refrigerator, Mrs. Tsujimoto invited them to sit down at the *kotatsu*, on which there was a thermos, a tea pot and tea cups, green tea, and rice crackers.

Mrs. Tsujimoto sat opposite them, poured tea, and said that she hoped that Winston would teach English to her and some of her friends, a group of three or four, maybe five or six, depending on the time and the day, as her friends were involved in such things as calligraphy, flower arrangement, and tea ceremony, not to mention the full-time job of being mothers to their husbands.

Winston grabbed a few of the grapes and ate them with the skins on, something that Japanese *never* do. If there had been some apples, he would have *really* shocked the ladies by biting into one after shining it on his shirt.

“Suimasen!” (Excuse me!) shouted a sushi-shop man who slid open the *genkan* door and came right in with a platter of assorted sushi that Mr. Tsujimoto had asked to be delivered. After exchanging formalities and saying “Atsui desu ne”, he left, leaving the three of them with the sushi.

Winston followed the example of the women by taking the tiny, red cap off one of the little plastic-fish containers of soy sauce so that he could squirt it on the sushi. Unfortunately, he squirted Mrs. Tsujimoto in the eye.

“Suimasen!” (Excuse me!) shouted a woman who slid open the *genkan* door and came right in with a honeydew melon. After exchanging formalities and saying “Atsui desu ne”, she said that she had heard that a *gaijin* (western foreigner) would be living there and that she had come to welcome him and give him the honeydew melon and ask him if he would teach English to her three-year-old son, who was presently enrolled in a cram school for preschoolers so that he would hopefully get into prestigious Keio Yochisha kindergarten in Tokyo and then slide all the way into Keio University, thereby guaranteeing him a job at an elite company.

Mrs. Tsujimoto asked the woman if she would like to join them for sushi, but the woman said that she had to pick her son up from his private mathematics lesson, and then she backed her way out while bowing incessantly and making the customary apologies for having bothered them.

Junko said that she also had to leave in order to be back in time to prepare dinner for her husband, and she told Winston to call her if he had any problems. Mrs. Tsujimoto left with Junko after telling Winston through Junko that she would come back in a couple of hours to take him to a nearby restaurant for *okonomiyaki* (pancake-like dish containing cabbage and meat and/or squid).

Winston breathed a deep sigh of relief to finally be all alone. So this house would be his home for half a year. He walked around the house again and made a much closer inspection, then sat down on the floor against a wall in a room between the living room and the kitchen, which he decided would be his office.

My God it was hot, and My God it was humid! His short-sleeved shirt was sticking to him. Sweat was running down from his armpits. He took his sweaty shirt off and threw it across the room. What a week! What a nerve-racking, culture-shocking week!

For almost an hour, he sat against the wall with his legs stretched out, exhausted. Finally picking himself up, he trudged to the *furo* to take a refreshing, cold shower. Upon opening the door, he saw a big Japanese cockroach scamper into the corner.

Outside the house a minute later, which is how long it took him to put his sweaty shirt back on and grab his bags and get the hell out of the house with the intention of

going straight to the airport and taking the next plane home, he calmed down enough to go back inside and call Junko Teratani.

Junko informed him that there were many cockroaches, especially in the older houses, and that he should go to a pharmacy and buy a strong cockroach-killing gas that came in canisters. She said that three canisters would be enough for a house that size and added that he should set the canisters off the next morning because he would have to stay out of the house for about eight hours. As for this night, she suggested that he go to the public bath down the street that Mrs. Tsujimoto had mentioned.

In With the Out Crowd

Winston stood outside the *sentō*, wondering which of the two entrances was for men. His question was soon answered when an elderly man, wearing a *yukata* (casual cotton kimono) and carrying a wash basin, came out of the entrance on the left.

Upon entering, Winston came alongside a little counter with a woman seated behind it. He gave her a 'How much is it?/I have just arrived from another planet' expression. The woman wrote '450' on a piece of paper. Winston pulled out coins from his pocket and was carefully examining each one when the woman finally pulled his hand closer and picked out four 100-yen coins and one 50-yen coin.

After receiving a towel and a wrist band with a locker-key attached to it, Winston apprehensively walked into the locker room, where there was an elderly man in long underwear and a wide cotton waist band. Another elderly man came in from the bath area holding a wash towel over his private parts.

Winston found his locker. A couple of minutes later, he took his wash towel and entered the bath area with nothing on except his wrist band. There were five baths of different sizes, ranging from very large to fairly small. In three of them, steam was rising in densities that showed hot, hotter, and hottest. Two men were seated up to their necks in the hotter one with their wash towels on their heads. There was a long, shallow pool with a cold waterfall that a man was standing under. There was also a sauna, out of which came a man with tattoos over his entire torso. Two elderly men, seated on bluish stools at the washing faucets and lathered with soap, were vigorously washing themselves with wash cloths.

Winston sat on a stool at one of the faucets and poured water over himself again and again, adjusting the water-temperature control from the shades of red to the shades of yellow to the shades of blue. When he had washed away all of his sweat, he went over to the least steamy of the steamy baths, and he closed his eyes with a pleasurable sigh upon sitting deep down in the hot water.

"Dochira kara?"

He opened his eyes and saw the fellow with tattoos. The tattooed part of him was submerged and appeared to be floating in front of him. His name was Yasumasa Kanamori, and he was the number-two man in the Kuramoto-gumi crime syndicate, which was affiliated with the Kobe-based Yamaguchi-gumi, the biggest of them all with one-third of Japan's 85,000 mafia members, called *yakuza*. With a huge head and a short, tight Afro, Kanamori looked like a gorilla – and he repeated himself.

"Dochira kara?"

"Pardon?"

"What is your country?"

"America."

"America big country. Japan little country."

"Have you been to America?"

"Please once more."

"Have you been to America?"

"I go America many time. Business. Hawaii very like. What is your job?"

"I'm a geography teacher."

"Jogging teacher. Sportsman. Sports very like. What is your name?"

"Winston."

"Say me more one time."

"Winston."

"Weenstone. I am Kanamori. Please be to enjoy dinner together."

"Well, I –"

"You will my guest."

"Well, all right."

The gangster stood up and stepped out of the bath, revealing tattoo work so extensive that he looked like he was wearing a green short-sleeved shirt and matching shorts. "I am waiting," he said.

When Winston walked out of the *sentō* fifteen minutes later, he saw a big, black Cadillac with darkened windows and a young man with a short, tight Afro leaning against the front door, smoking a cigarette. The young man flicked away the cigarette and opened the door for Winston, who got in reluctantly and sat next to Kanamori. Winston didn't want to offend Kanamori because, with a 'chauffeur'-driven Cadillac, he seemed rich enough to be a very important member of the community, perhaps the mayor.

"You like Korean food, Mr. Weenstone?" the mobster said as they drove off with the younger man behind the wheel. "I very like. We go Korean restaurant. Very good."

Wearing a sweatsuit and massage sandals, and smoking a cigarette, Kanamori entered the restaurant and led Winston and the driver to a table. A middle-aged woman promptly came over to greet Kanamori and give them *oshibori* (rolled-up, hot, wet cloths). Kanamori put out his cigarette while keeping his eyes fixed on the menu and

ordered a couple of kimchi dishes and two large jockeys of beer, one for himself and one for Winston. After slowly wiping his face and the back of his neck with his *oshibori*, the gangster took the last cigarette out of his pack and crinkled the pack, which was the signal for the younger *yakuza* to run out and get his boss another pack of Kents. "Kanpai!" (Cheers!) Kanamori said upon raising his beer to Winston.

When the young *yakuza* returned with a new pack of Kents, Winston noticed that the fellow was missing a fingertip on the little finger of his left hand, a sure sign of a *yakuza* who at one time had been ordered to take a knife to the finger at the first joint and turn the fingertip in for having done something that displeased his boss. It was almost automatic to look from a man's short, tight Afro, another *yakuza* trademark, and see if he was missing a fingertip on his left pinkie.

Prosthetic fingertips were now available to *yakuza* who wanted to get out of the racketeering business and not have the permanent finger-pointing stigma. Many older *yakuza* had been dropping out since the passage of the Anti-Organized Crime Law in 1992, which finally designated *yakuza* as criminal organizations and provided means of making life financially difficult for them. The number of young recruits was in decline because the gangster business was no longer seen as a good business to get into. Older *yakuza* like Kanamori waxed nostalgic about the *yakuza* heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, when there were half as many *yakuza* as policemen and there was a long-standing understanding between the *yakuza* and the police that had since become more short-standing. Kanamori was prominent enough to still be doing pretty well, although there was nothing pretty about it. "From now we go Osaka," he said after they finished their beers.

Before Winston knew it, he was back in the Cadillac, seeing no compelling reason not to go with the flow. Kanamori was impulsive, aggressive, and arrogant, perhaps even violent, but Winston did not feel threatened. Kanamori seemed to like him and was being friendly to him in his own way. Besides, it was a chance to become acquainted with a Japanese person on just his first day in town and get driven around to see some sights.

"You like whiskey?" Kanamori said while pouring Chivas Regal into two glasses at a small bar in the large back seat. "Scotch whiskey very good, number one," he continued while adding water. "Kanpai!" (Cheers!) he said and talked to Winston through thick, swirling cigarette smoke about Hawaii – and then to someone else on his mobile phone that he shouted at before hanging up in disgust.

"Her no good. Maybe I get new girlfriend. I have three girlfriend. You like beautiful lady?"

"Yes, but –"

"From now we go *nopankissa*."

Tennoji Street was like many streets in Osaka with its neon-lit restaurants and bars, but it was the most famous street in the city for *nopankissas*, which were tea shops with waitresses who did not wear panties.

“Ah, Kanamori-san! Irasshai!” (Welcome, Mr. Kanamori!) shouted a man in a suit, who was standing outside the entrance of a *nopankissa*.

A slightly-intoxicated Winston followed Kanamori into the establishment while the cigarette-smoking gangster talked to someone else on his mobile phone.

“Ah, Kanamori-san! Irasshai! Futari desu ka?” (Welcome Mr. Kanamori! Two people?) said the manager, who led them across a mirrored floor to a table for two.

A waitress in a miniskirt (and no panties) promptly showed up and gave them *oshiboris*. Still talking on the phone, Kanamori leaned over and looked straight down at the mirrored floor beneath her as the smoke from his cigarette went up under her miniskirt and partially clouded his visibility.

“You like, Mr. Weenstone?” he said after finally ordering two iced coffees without looking up.

“Well, I um um – ”

“I very like.”

Winston was dazed. He leaned back in his chair and observed with bloodshot eyes that all of the customers were men, and every single one of them was smoking. His eyes were burning. He would have had a headache if not for the analgesic effects of the alcohol.

Their waitress soon came back with their two iced coffees, plus two more iced coffees and two mixed juices for customers at another table. Again Kanamori leaned over to look up by way of looking down. Unfortunately, the waitress lost control of the tray and spilled all six drinks on Winston.

Kanamori jumped up and knocked the waitress down with a slap across the face. Shouting like a madman, he dragged her by the hair across the mirrored floor toward the door. The manager and two other men restrained him in a respectful way and tried to calm him down as he continued shouting at the top of his lungs about the ineptness of the no-good waitress that had mistreated his friend.

“Very regret,” Kanamori said when they were back in the Cadillac and heading to Juso Music, the most famous place in Osaka for decadent strip shows. Winston wanted to escape, but he certainly didn’t want to insult this volatile man.

“I would really like to go home,” he said.

“More another place we go,” Kanamori replied.

“Ah, Kanamori-san! Irasshai!” (Welcome, Mr. Kanamori!) said the manager of Juso Music, who led the mobster and Winston to two open seats at the base of the stage, on which a completely naked lady was using a vibrator to bring the second show, the masturbation show, to a climactic conclusion. Kanamori lit a cigarette, ordered two

small tonic drinks, and sat with his arms folded at his chest as the third show, the 'open' show, began.

A cigarette-smoking naked lady, platinum-blond down low as well as up high, came out and sat wide open on the edge of a chair, and proceeded to put the filter-end of the cigarette into her vagina and draw on it.

"Her my type," Kanamori said and clapped loudly as she inserted a small blowgun and shot off darts, popping balloons that were attached to the wall.

Winston Baldry, the conservative from Corvallis, was shocked. He had never even imagined anything like this. He felt ashamed to be in such a place and wanted to leave, but he didn't have the faintest idea how to get back home, and he didn't have enough money on him to spend the night at a hotel. He felt at the mercy of Kanamori, and he hated being at the mercy of such a jerk.

"Please take me home," he said to the racketeer as the entertainer turned her back to him and bent over to look at him through her legs.

Winston tried to redeem himself by looking completely uninterested, and she responded to his indifference by kneeling down before him at the edge of the stage and pulling his white beard to her platinum-blond pubic hair, making it impossible to tell where one ended and the other began. Everyone laughed, especially Kanamori.

Winston sat pensively as the entertainer danced away. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her crouch down over a customer's bottle of beer and pick it up (without using her hands). "I don't mean to offend you, but I'm leaving," he said to Kanamori as the racketeer answered his mobile phone.

Winston headed straight for the door – but stopped in his tracks upon hearing a terrifying yell from the mobster. Turning around, he saw an alarmed Kanamori screaming on his mobile phone. Then Kanamori was moving fast. "Iko!" (Let's go!) he said to Winston without breaking stride. The next thing Winston knew, he was back in the Cadillac, speeding back to Kobe.

Tomohiro Takahashi, boss of the Kuramoto-gumi syndicate (also affiliated with the Yamaguchi-gumi), had been shot by two gunmen while coming out of a bar in Kobe's Sannomiya district and was now being rushed to the hospital by ambulance. That much was clear, but that's pretty much where the clarity ended, although there seemed to be little doubt that it was a 'hit' carried out by henchmen of the Azumi-gumi or its affiliate, the Seiyuki.

Winston was scared of the speed of the car and the insanity of the horn-honking driver. At amusement parks, Winston refused to go on any ride faster than the Ferris wheel. Now here he was, holding on tight and watching himself doing high-speed tailgating and passing cars like they were standing still. Leaning forward, he saw the speedometer registering 160, which he mistakenly thought was miles, not kilometers, per hour.

By the time they came to a sudden stop and parked outside Sannomiya Station, Winston was a basket case. He was as white as a ghost and his nerves were shot. Through the darkened windows of the parked Cadillac, he saw many police cars, many big cars, and three *gaisenshas*, which were big, military-looking trucks with barred windows and external speakers. (Like the hundreds of other *gaisenshas* throughout Japan, these were owned by ultra-nationalistic right-wingers who wanted to bring back the emperor system and the glory days of the Japanese Empire.)

Hundreds of bystanders were bystanding. This was obviously a crisis. Seeing Kanamori chewing out a policeman while other policemen looked on, Winston wondered if Kanamori was perhaps the chief of police.

Winston took a deep breath, got out of the car, and went over to where the driver, smoking a cigarette, was watching his boss hollering at the policeman.

"Excuse me, but how can I get back home?" he asked, hoping that the tough-looking man would be kind enough to take him back.

"Eigo wa zenzen dame" (I can't speak English) the man snapped and turned away.

Winston looked at the *gaisenshas*. Their owners, like the owners of other *gaisenshas*, received a lot of financial support from *yakuza* and wielded considerable political clout, which was clear by virtue of the fact that they were allowed to parade their vehicles through the busiest of the big-city streets and blast their recordings at deafening levels in an outrageous disturbance of the peace. Winston watched two of the *gaisenshas* leave in a hurry, then turned his attention back to Kanamori, who was huddled with several guys with short, tight Afros.

Takahashi had been shot in the upper arm and would be okay. Twenty *yakuzas* were already at the hospital to provide protection for him. The two *gaisenshas* were on the way there now.

Kanamori's driver finally wedged his way in to ask his boss what to do with Winston. Kanamori flicked his backhand with an order for one of the younger guys to take him home. The nod ended up being given to the driver of the third *gaisensha*. Before Winston knew it, he was in the front seat of the truck with a tough 20-year-old kid who had become an *adult* delinquent on the last Coming of Age Day.

The kid had orangish-brown dyed hair, actually more orange than brown, which meant that he was more than a little rebellious. He tapped the last Seven Stars cigarette out of its pack, put it in his mouth, and threw the empty pack out the window. Then he lit the cigarette and took off. Grabbing an opened can of Georgia coffee from a can holder, he drank what was left in it and threw the can out the window. He turned on the CD player that had a Public Enemy CD in it, ate the last piece of an order of *takoyaki* (grilled balls of flour, egg, octopus, and ginger), and threw the Styrofoam container out the window. After another drag on the cigarette, he grabbed a comb from behind the sun visor and combed his hair. Then he threw the comb out the window and said, "Shimatta!" (Damn it!)

Without an address or even the name of a district, efforts to find Tsujimoto's bookstore, My Book, were so frustrating that the kid's I-don't-give-a-shit attitude got taken to its limit. He turned on the *gaisensha*-recording full power.

People gnashed their teeth and went to their entrances to see what in the hell was going on. Many of them put their hands over their ears while watching the *gaisensha* pass by. Before long, or rather *after* long, the driver found My Book ... and Winston's neighbors saw him step out of the front seat of the *gaisensha* and go into his house.

If you read these four chapters (and listened to the author's reading of the first three chapters), then you have covered about 20% of the book. The whole kit and kaboodle, available as an eBook, can be purchased through the Kindle.