

**ASIA EMAIL**

**JAPAN 1998**

## RREYNA

**From:** Century Hyatt Tokyo Business Centre  
**To:** Socrates (socrates@intersatx.net)  
**Subject:** Far East Diary

Konichiwa!

After some good time in the far east, I am coming home tonight.

As you know, I arrived last Sunday night after leaving San Antonio on Saturday morning.

Monday morning, I worked in the hotel in preparation for my Tuesday deposition. There were a lot of papers to review and things to do so that the deposition would go off without trouble.

Monday afternoon, I had a late chushoku (lunch) at one of the local eateries. I had a cold duck salad and a seafood soup. The soup had ebi (shrimp), aoyagi (clam), ika (squid), hotate-gai (scallop), and gohan (rice). It was tasty but somewhat bland. I need more spice in my diet. I then hiked over to inspect some of the local architecture and specifically, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building (a real monstrosity). It was kind of cool to check out all the skyscrapers in the area. After that, I hiked over to Shinjuku-Chuo Park (there were many kids playing and homeless in the area). Everybody was very friendly and patient with my poor Japanese.

Monday night, I met with Lt. Chace and his wife. They were very nice and we had a couple of drinks in local bar to get acquainted before starting our preparations. He has traveled all over the world and is a genuinely decent guy who made a mistake that continues to haunt him. We worked until about 10:30 p.m.

Tuesday morning, I got up at 2:00 a.m. because I couldn't sleep. I checked out all the news from home on the S.A. Express-News web page. I almost couldn't believe what I read and the pictures I saw. Incredible rains! It looked terrible.

The deposition started at 6:00 a.m. local time Tuesday (4:00 p.m. in San Antonio on Monday) and lasted most of the morning. It went very well due to our preparations the night before. Lt. Chace was very precise in his answers (which frustrated the other lawyers--part of the game plan). I napped part of Tuesday afternoon (old age you know).

Tuesday night, I went to dinner and a show. I feasted at the world famous Kabuki-za Theatre. I had a tempura style dinner of beef, chicken, and

shrimp accompanied by a Japanese salad (cole slaw esq), Japanese soup (like chicken broth if you ask me), and of course, gohan (rice). They eat rice with every meal.

The show was excellent. I'm glad I went. I can't really say I was looking forward to it, as I am not into the theatre, but it was awesome. They don't allow women to act in Kabuki. The show was about a man and wife who are very poor and whose poverty exacerbates their problems and inability to express their true feelings. They divorce and meet, by chance, five years later. Although they both loved each other very much, they could not express it. When they meet again, she is married to a Lord and has vastly improved her station in life. He, by contrast, has been reduced to selling reeds. She confesses her love for him but the difference in their respective stations, he says, will keep them apart. He, like her, has never stopped loving but is unable (due to pride) to open up his soul. They part again, and go their separate ways (both very sad).

I had a bit of an adventure Wednesday (and a wet one). I caught a 7:00 a.m. bus to Nikko, about 90 miles north of Tokyo but infinitely farther in actuality. Tokyo is so big with it's 12 million people, that it took 3 hours to get there (and the bus was cramped). The weather; well, it was raining all day.

Once I got there, it was great. I checked out the Toshogu Shrine. It was made in honor of the first and most famous of the Japanese Shoguns. It is considered a national treasure and the facility is excellent. I think it was built in the 1600s.

Wednesday afternoon, I hiked over to Lake Chenzuji, a volcanic lake that has many trout. I had lunch at a local restaurant (chicken, noodles, snow peas, carrots, and corn soup--good). I had lunch with a Japanese lady who is now living in Bellevue, Washington. She, along with her son, came back with her mother's ashes (presumably to spread them around the homeland). She had all kinds of treats which she gave me, two in particular (nigiri--rice ball with some kind of filling dipped in soy sauce and wrapped in seaweed--similar to sushi; and doramaki--pancake type pastry with red bean (azuki) and chestnut (kuri) filling)

Later in the afternoon, I went to Ryuzu Falls and Kegon Falls, both very scenic. I took a bunch of pictures--hopefully they'll come out despite the very inclement weather.

It was a very good day for sightseeing and I'm glad I made the effort to visit Nikko.

After the long ride back, I stopped in the Ginza area of town to check out the scene (there was lots of shopping to do in that area--most expensive in the world \$10,000 per square foot). I eventually, after trekking through the rain, came back to the Shinjuku area where I am stayed. The subway station there is considered the largest and busiest in the world. It was wild to see. There are also many restaurants and shops in the area. I ate Teriyaki chicken and rice with a Japanese salad (pickled), and miso soup (seafood broth).

Thursday, I got up early and quickly went to Shinjuku station. I spent more time checking out the shops. You name it, they have it there. The station must have hundreds of shops and must have at least ten levels below ground. There are seven metro lines that connect into Shinjuku station and 2 million people pass through there everyday (2,000,001 that day).

I studied the metro system map and finally figured out how to buy my ticket. Most of it was in Japanese and my books did not give me the requisite guidance.

I headed to the Otemachi station and Kokyo (Japanese Imperial Palace and Japanese Imperial Gardens). Of course, I got lost before I could make it there. As such, I resorted to an old staple, sumimasen michini mayoimashta (excuse me, I'm lost). I was pointed in the right direction and discovered I was there when I came upon a moat in the middle of the financial district. The whole thing is surrounded by a moat. The grounds are very beautiful. Many business people can be found relaxing in the gardens during lunch. The place is so big that, in some areas, you'd swear that you're in a forest (not being able to tell that you're surrounded by concrete).

As I finished paying my respects to the old ones who occupy the premises, I saw Tokyo Tower in the distance. Thinking that I couldn't get lost by heading toward it, I started walking (and I kept walking and walking and walking). Well over an hour later (no kidding), I quit. I stopped in a restaurant for a lunchtime snack. I don't recall what the thing was called, but it seemed to be a close relative of the chicken pita.

Determined, I resumed my trek. I arrived at a replica of the Eiffel Tower (only bigger). Thinking to myself that Rachel and I did not venture up the one in France, I went straight to the top with thoughts of Rachel and the engagement in my mind. The view was great. I could see forever (the city is so big, there was no end in sight).

Next, I found a metro station and headed to Ginza (the shopping district). I had been there before, but as with Shinjuku station, it's so big that you

could spend a whole day there and not see everything. There is a building (constructed in 1894) there, at the intersection of Harumi-dori and Chuo-dori, that has a clock on it and that is the only building in the area to have survived the raids of World War II. I checked out the scene there, spending a good bit of time people watching. I got hungry and found a restaurant for the afternoon delight. I embraced the opportunity to communicate (with my poor Japanese, with hand gestures, and with finger pointing). I thoroughly enjoyed it. There was nothing in English, not even the numbers, but we were able to understand each other. I sampled a dish that had beef, snow peas, mushrooms, and a bed of rice. It was accompanied by a seaweed soup. It was the most authentic and tasty meal I had to that point. The restaurant owner, despite the language barrier, fully understood my pleasure.

I also went into Matsuzakaya, a seven story store (say that three times) that first opened in 1611 (yes, 1611).

After that, I walked over to the Kabuki theatre to check out that scene again. It was a brief stop and on my way back, I ran into a store called Mikimoto. I recalled that Rachel "mentioned" in an email that Mikimoto pearls were the very best in the world. If she weren't so wonderful and if I weren't very much in love with her, I would have quickly walked on. Instead, I quickly walked in. The next thing I knew, I was walking out with a set of pearl earrings (with an accompanying diamond jacket). If I can't bring her to Tokyo (although I offered), I'll take a little (but expensive) bit of Tokyo to her.

The day was not over and I caught the metro to Asakusa. I went to the Kanno Temple (the oldest in Tokyo and which has several buildings that are several hundred years old and which survived World War II). The entrance is marked by Kaminari-mon (Thunder God Gate). It marks the entrance to Senso-ji (another glorious temple). There are also many traditional shops in the area and I took a good many pictures of the area and of the people.

I headed back to the Shinjuku area thereafter, properly fatigued. I ventured into Odakyu store (very well known--twelve stories--ala Harrods). I found a card that says "I love you" in Japanese.

My last stop was the Century Hyatt Tokyo and the six beers in my mini-bar (two Kirin, two Sapporo, and two Asahi).

Friday, I got up early for what I thought would be a relaxing trip to Fuji-san. Given the hectic day before, I knew what my feet deserved. It was not what they got. Due to communication difficulties, I missed the bus that would have taken me to the glory that is Mt. Fuji.

Therefore, and with a bit of Shogun/Samurai Warrior in me, I tackled the day (despite the pleas for mercy from my feet).

I headed for Tsukiji. It is the fish distribution center for the country and it is the biggest fish market in the world. They fish are brought in beginning at 5:30 a.m. and the auctioning starts thereafter. There is fish everywhere and a myriad of shops. It's really neat to see. I thought about sampling sushi (which was available), but I was too chicken (or is it that I was too fishy--get it--fishy--ha ha).

I walked over to Hongan-ji next. It is a Buddhist temple first constructed in 1657. It was quite beautiful and I hung out inside for a good spell.

On my way back to the metro station, and in a bit of an interesting change of pace, I came upon what looked to be an elementary school. I was up high (literally not figuratively--although I still hope for the return of the latter-ha ha). After taking a couple of pictures, and with the calling of my relatives in mind (many of whom are/were in the field of public education--mostly importantly now, Rachel), I decided to visit the school and conduct interviews. I laid some fine rap as I talked to the principal (school master), teachers, and students. I took many pictures and spent about an hour there. Among the more fascinating details, the three-year olds wear pink hats, the four-year olds wear red hats, the five-year olds were no hats, and everybody older wears uniforms. Also, no shoes allowed inside the school (unless you are a visitor from Texas).

Having no where else to go, I decided to visit an old mentor. I took the train to Kamakura (about a two hour trip). It was quite tricky figuring out how to get there and wild to be the only non-Japanese person in sight. As before, my feeble Japanese, hand gestures, and finger pointing got me on the right track. Once there, I decided that I needed to gain strength before the final push. I found a local restaurant (with no name as far as I could tell). As with many of the encounters of late, I couldn't effectively communicate (if I had known in advance, I could have really studied the tongue--like with French (France) and Swahili (Kenya) previously). My lunch was fantastic. It was a distant cousin of caldo, with noodles, cabbage, onions, carrots, and carne (meat).

I sojourned for about a half hour before I found my old mentor (Daibutsu). He is also known as the Great Buddha. He, and Mt. Fuji, are the most recognizable parts of Japan. He is massive, sitting four stories high. You'll be interested to know that he was constructed in 1292 and that in 1495, a tidal wave washed away all of Kamakura (with one exception--Great Buddha). He was surrounded by a housing structure at the time, which, as with the whole region, went by the wayside. Great Buddha remained, but has had to endure the elements for the last five hundred years (I hope I look

that good after five hundred years).

After the long trip back, I went to the Ginza area and Matsuzakaya (the store first opened in 1611). I needed to buy souvenirs and I did.

Upon getting that done, I knew that I needed a bit of the drink. I went to a local bar for some hiya (sake). It is a uniquely Japanese wine brewed from rice. It is strong (I really had no choice but to sample fully). You know the old saying, "When in Japan, drink lots of sake." The drink, as with other lost arts, is what I do best.

Saturday, the clouds were looming low and ominous as I headed to Mt. Fuji. They say three strikes and you're out. They also say the third time is the charm. On this day, I was not to be denied.

I took the long bus ride to Hakone National Park at the base of Mt. Fuji. The fog was thick and the signs did not look good. I had lunch and made my way to Lake Asahi. I took a boat ride as the skies began to clear. It was late in the day, but better late than never. I noticed a gondola and caught the last train up Mt. Konagatake. The gondola ride up provided a great view of Mt. Fuji. That, however, was not as magnificent as the view from up top. This was the highlight of the trip. It was a truly breathtaking view that words cannot describe. I just hope that some of the pictures will do justice to the beauty that my eyes have seen.

While taking pictures, I met a couple from San Antonio. They were rather unfriendly and not talkative in the least. I heard them mention San Antonio and quickly introduced myself. They said "hello" and nothing else. I stated that it sure was a small world and they said "yes." Their brevity and tone spoke volumes. Quickly, I was on my way.

I had dinner at a tiny hole in the wall in Owadara, just before catching the 170 mph Shinkansen (bullet train) back to Tokyo.

Today, Sunday morning, I wanted to partake of one last bit of sightseeing. I first visited the Sengakuji temple where 47 ronin (masterless samurai) are buried. They are revered by the Japanese as examples of truly loyal men. These ronin avenged their master's death by plotting revenge for two years and finally, having no further aim in life, committed seppuku (suicide by sword) and were buried next to their master.

My last stop was Meiji Jingu, the shrine dedicated to the spirit of Emperor Meiji (who reigned during Japan's transformation from an isolated island, unchanged for hundreds of years, to a modern world power). I saw many women in traditional kimonos.

Tonight, I leave Tokyo for the long haul home. The Japanese people

were very friendly and patient. I enjoyed the country and am so grateful to have had the opportunity to visit. Mostly, however, I must say that I completely and thoroughly relished the solitude. It gave me the chance to be alone, with no one as my company but my thoughts. It was a glorious adventure. Next stop on the world tour, Australia.

Sayonara from the Land of the Rising Sun.

Rick