

# Northern Midwest ZNA Newsletter



Winter 2004

Friendship Through Scales

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## Inside this Issue:

- **My Experiences In Japan**  
By Adam Strysik
- **Japan How To's**  
Submission by Bob Brudd
- **2003 Xmas Party Photo's**

### **My Experiences in Japan** By: Adam Strysik (Part One of Two)

Unlike many Americans in the Koi hobby, I started young and had many supportive friends around me. From the beginning, my biggest interest was to go to Japan and see as many good Koi as possible, as well as see the environment and meet the people that made these beautiful fish a reality. In the spring of 2001, I was fortunate enough to make my first trip to Niigata. I took a week off of my college classes and traveled throughout Yamakoshi Village. After that great experience, I felt compelled to get back to Japan as soon as possible. I knew that it would be tough to gather the funds and take the necessary time off while still in school, but still, I dreamed.

By late November of 2002, I was scheduled to return to Japan for the Shinkokai All Japan Koi Show. To attend this event was another goal of mine from the beginning of my interest in Koi. In all my preparation and planning for my second trip to Japan, an unmovable thought continued to linger in my mind. I really wanted to spend a lot of time in Japan and find out as much as I could about the daily work that goes into producing these animals.

After casually mentioning my thoughts to a good friend and fellow Koi enthusiast, Bob Brudd, we pondered the thought more in depth. How could I stay in Japan for an extended period of time and learn about Koi production and appreciation? How about get a job working for a Koi breeder in Niigata? Initially, it was a great idea, but how could I make that happen? I hardly

knew any Koi breeders, and even so, what Japanese breeder would want or need a young American to work for them all summer? It seemed like an unachievable dream.

Although it seemed like an impossible venture, Bob encouraged me to make up a resume and a "mission statement" (translated into Japanese), and bring it along to the All Japan Show. I did as he suggested but was still very doubtful that a Japanese breeder would need/want an inexperienced young American working and living with them all summer.

At the "big show", Bob introduced me to a few of his friends who could have been helpful in finding me a "Koi job". I gave my resume and mission statements to many of these people and had some casual chats with them as well. One of these people was Jack Chang, the talented and famous gold jeweler from California who helps out at the Marusada Koi Farm in the fall season. Jack was pleasant and seemed optimistic, but I was doubtful that anything would happen.

On Sunday, the final day of the show, Jack and I examined virtually all of the show vats observing and studying the Koi from sizes 30cm and up. It was great fun and I learned a lot from Jack. While we were studying, Toshikatsu Ikarashi (Marusada Koi farm) joined us, and together, the three of us selected our favorites from many of the show tanks. Many times, I would pick first and Jack and Toshikatsu would agree with my selection. Overall, it was a great experience.

When my Koi dealer friend, Mark Bodycott, and I arrived in Niigata after the All Japan Show, I met up with Jack again. On one of the last nights of my trip, Jack and I talked in the lobby of the New Otani about my intentions and desire to work in Japan for the summer. At this point I was still very doubtful that an arrangement could be worked out.



About a month after my return to the U.S., I got a call from Bob saying that Jack had found a job for me at a breeder in Mushigame and that things would likely work out well for the summer. I was very pleased, almost shocked to hear the good news. When I heard that it was Yagenji, I became even more shocked. To me, and many Americans, Yagenji is known as one of the better breeders in Yamakoshi, and maybe the best for Shiro Utsuri and Gin Rin Showa in Niigata. Since my favorite variety is Shiro Utsuri, I was very intrigued with the idea of working there for a summer. As fantastic as Bob's and Jack's good news was, I didn't tell anyone about my summer plans until May, a few weeks before my departure for Yamakoshi.

As early May approached, I asked Jack what dates would work best for Yagenji. Jack replied that I could go there anytime and stay as long as I wanted. This was great news. I decided to go in mid-June and stay until a few weeks before school would restart in September. In all, my time at Yagenji would span from June 20<sup>th</sup> to August 18<sup>th</sup>.

Finally the day had come. It was June 19<sup>th</sup> and I had my two suitcases filled with my clothes, boots, waders (long boots called "nagai boots"), laptop computer, and gifts for the Ishihara family. After packing, Bob drove me to the airport and saw me off.

After I left Bob in the airport and got to my terminal, I felt a great sense of freedom and adventure. I was going away from everyone and everything I knew for two months. The only thing that would be familiar to me once I got to this "foreign" land would be Koi. There was something very beautiful about that. I had few worries and was really looking forward to start working with the Ishihara family and the Koi they produce. The only thing that I was apprehensive about was my journey from the airport to Tokyo to Nagaoka by train.

The flight was the least memorable and least "painful of all of my flights to Japan. The 14 hour flight seemed like it only lasted 3-4 hours. I didn't sleep, but rather listened to music and daydreamed about the weeks to come.

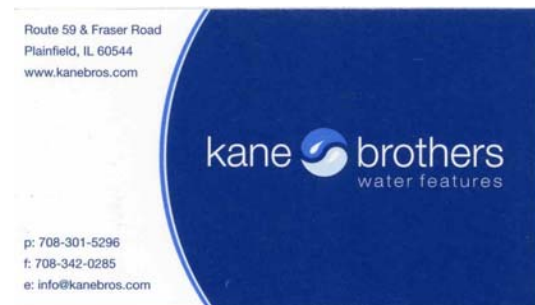
After landing and clearing customs, my journey to Nagaoka began. Jack advised me to call Yagenji when I landed at Narita to let them know I was on the way. I could not figure out

how to use the public phone so I just got on the train and headed to Tokyo Station where I was helped by a Japanese man and his family who took me directly to the platform I needed to be at in order to board my train for Nagaoka. I was touched by this man's kindness. Although many Japanese speak at least a little English, they are usually too embarrassed to do so in front of a foreigner lest they speak improperly. It was very brave and kind of him to do so and this experience is something that I often think about even now.

The train ride to Nagaoka was quick and uneventful. It was a hot day, and I was tired of traveling and lugging around my big suitcases. When I finally reached Nagaoka station, I had to face the public phones once again. I tried inserting the coins and dialing the numbers given to me for the Yagenji house, but there was no answer and I thought I kept getting an operator.

Finally, after many tries, I started to walk around the station. It was getting near dark and I was tired. I asked a few school kids if they spoke English, but they did not. Luckily, I found a lady who directed me to the Daily Yamazaki convenience store where I bought a phone card. From there I went to the New Otani Hotel, a familiar place from my two previous trips to Nagaoka, and tried to use the card to call the Yagenji house. I tried three or four times but was doing something wrong.

At this point I was really getting tired and frustrated. I thought to myself, "I can get a room here at the New Otani and try this again tomorrow", but instead I tried the phone card again. This time I managed to put it into the phone the correct way, and I got through to the Yagenji household. Daisuke, the older of the 2 Ishihara brothers, answered the phone and in my best Japanese I tried to tell him who I was and where I was.



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This conversation was comical. He laughed when I told him I was already in Nagaoka, and he could not understand what I was saying when I kept saying “New Otani”. He asked if I could call Oomo-san or Toshikatsu (since they speak English), but I told him that I did not have their phone numbers. Finally, I thought of the verb for “to be”, and told him that “I am at the New Otani”. He replied with “13 minutes” and I said, “Okay”.

I was reluctant to leave the New Otani’s lobby since it was nicely air-conditioned inside and hot and muggy outside. I sat on the curb outside and waited for someone to pick me up. About 10 minutes after the successful phone call, a black car pulled up in front of me and the window rolled down. I looked up and to my surprise, I saw Toshikatsu. He said, “Remember me?” I replied that I was glad to see him, and we chatted for a few minutes until Daisuke arrived and then the three of us went to a noodle shop for dinner.

Dinner was good and even though I was hot, hungry, and really tired, I was in Japan, the land of Koi, and I was free. From that very first ride through the streets of Nagaoka and that very first conversation at the noodle shop, I knew that I was doing something that very few people would ever get the privilege to do. The most memorable part about the Ramen shop was its music. Every song was John Lennon. From that point on, I knew I was in a good place, and was eager to see what the next day, and the following two months would bring.

After the noodle shop, we went to the house of Daisuke’s younger brother, Toshinori, the place that I would be staying at. His house was not far from the New Otani, maybe 10 minutes away, yet only 10-15 minutes from the family house in Mushigame. The four of us had tea and moved my suitcases to the bedroom I would be staying in for the next two months. I

was happy to see that there was a bed there instead of a traditional Japanese bedroll. Later, I went to bed while Toshinori, Daisuke, and Toshikatsu stayed up talking.

The next day we woke up around 8 a.m. and headed to the Ishihara family house in Mushigame Village. I was introduced to the father and founder of the Yagenji Koi farm, Yaichi, as well as Daisuke’s wife and children. After settling in for a while and having breakfast, we got on with the day’s work of cleaning spawning mops and feeding the non-tosai ponds.

Over the next few days I settled in and got used to the work schedule. At first, it was a bit different to eat three full meals a day, but in time I got used to it and really liked it. The food was great. Japanese cuisine was very easy for me to adjust to. Additionally, I liked green tea from the start, and so that aspect was no problem either.

On my second full day in Japan, Yaichi and I went to a bullfight not far from the family house in Mushigame. Beforehand, I was not sure that I would be amused by the spectacle, but after a few minutes I was proven wrong. The bullfight was a great time. Unlike those in the West, bullfights in Japan feature 2 bulls fighting head on. There are no matadors, yet there are more than a few people in the fighting ring to separate the bulls when the fight is over. Even though I did not understand the rules or who was winning and losing, I still enjoyed the bullfight very much. This experience is something that I will not forget. Aside from the mountainous surroundings, the bullfight was the first cultural event where I was reminded I was a lone American in a different country. Still, I was very comfortable.



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The following day I experienced my first culling. Daisuke, Toshinori, and I culled a pond of Gin Rin Showa tosai that morning. I received very little verbal instruction, but learned by watching Daisuke and Toshinori. The “keepers” at this stage, were the ones with good, natural bodies, and with at least some black showing. At this point, the Gin Rin was not apparent in most of the fry and so it was not a prerequisite for the “keepers”.

During that first week, my computer started to be problematic, and my Internet access was hampered. Luckily, the Ishihara family called Mr.Kobayashi, a former English teacher of Toshinori as well as a skillful computer person, to help me with my troubles. Together Mr.Kobayashi and I figured out the problem...I was plugging the computer into the wrong phone jack. From our first meeting, I could tell that Mr.Kobayashi would be a good friend to have throughout my stay in Japan.

His English was very very good, and he had a good idea of some of the cultural differences I would face as an American in Japan. He was very helpful throughout my stay and I felt even more comfortable knowing that I could call him whenever there was some miscommunication between me and Toshinori or Daisuke.

I grew accustomed to Japan and the Koi breeder way of life very quickly, and after a week or so, most of the newness of being in Japan wore off and the daily work routine became my main focus, which was fine with me. After all, I was there to work and learn.

The daily work usually started with a 5 a.m. wake-up for Toshinori and me. We would then drive to Mushigame, wake Daisuke, and afterwards, the three of us would head out to the mountainside mud ponds to harvest the day’s tosai for culling. After two passes with the seine net, and setting up the culling area, we would return to the family house for breakfast. After breakfast we would rest for a few minutes and watch the news while letting our food settle. By 8 a.m., we were headed back to the mud ponds for the day’s culling.

I loved culling and never got bored by it. True, some days were better than others, but overall, I liked it very much. The first round of culling was sort of tough since the fish were so

small and they hardly resembled the beautiful fish that would be available by the fall harvest. Still, I did not mind that the first round of culling was a little monotonous. The worst part was the rain and wind. I was told that Japan was hot and humid from June to August. Apparently, this summer was a cold and rainy one...and so I missed out on the good weather. I like it hot and “muggy”, and have grown accustomed to the heat and humidity of Chicago in the summer.

In the first round of culling, my favorite variety to cull was Kohaku since the patterns could be seen a little bit. Showa was my least favorite at that stage since we kept many brown and black pattern less Koi. By the later rounds of culling, my likes and dislikes changed slightly.

In the later rounds, I like culling Shiro Utsuri and Sanke the most since their patterns were sometimes crisp and their skin quality and luster was also apparent. Culling these varieties, as well as Kohaku and Hikari Moyo, in the third round when the fish were as big as 20 to 30 cms was my favorite culling experience.

I learned a great deal from culling, more than I can explain in words. Before my culling experiences, I thought that pattern and “tint” of color were the most important and beautiful aspects of Koi. At the All Japan Show, I began to see the true beauty of skin and sheen as well as body confirmation(especially girth and tail tubes), but it was not until the second and third rounds of culling that I learned to have a greater appreciation for these finer points of Nishikigo. In culling, I gradually saw the sheen of the skin and difference between deep, beautiful color and shallow, weak color.

This great learning did not come automatically. Often times, I would spend the first few minutes of a cull watching Toshinori and Daisuke. They were great teachers who did not have to speak much to teach me; rather, I learned by watching.





One particularly memorable type of “learning experience” happened whenever Daisuke or Toshinori would find an especially good to sai. They would pass it over to each other to look at. By looking at these excellent examples, I could see the “ideal” in sheen, body conformation, color depth and intensity, as well as overall quality. Many times I would quiz Daisuke and Toshinori, asking them which of 2 or 3 good Koi were the best. Sometimes they would give me definitive answers, while other times they would say that the Koi in question were all the same.

Additionally, I would often ask Tohsinori if a Koi was to be kept or not when I thought it was very borderline. Although my questions were probably a little too frequent at times, Toshinori was never irritated or annoyed by my asking.

The varieties that confused me the most during the early rounds of culling were Showa, Tancho, and Doitsu Kujaku. It was the first time that Yagenji had bred Doitsu Kujaku, so I think it may have been a learning experience for all of us. I probably kept a few too many Tancho Sanke that turned into Shiro Bekko, but by the time of the third round of culling, the Tancho's were more apparent and we got rid of the poor Bekko's that I had mistakenly kept. One of our jokes was that I liked Bekko's. This is not so, though it must have seemed like it since we had quite a few left by the time of our third culling.

While culling, I learned a lot about Daisuke and Toshinori's likes and dislikes of Koi varieties and characteristics. We also talked about America and American music. They were big Bon Jovi fans during their childhoods so that became an ongoing joke as well. I think our time culling was another thing I will not soon forget. There was something so natural and free about culling through thousands and thousands of Koi everyday. In a way, I felt like I was “creating” Koi, in a sense, making my own style of Koi. Additionally, the day to day culling sessions allowed me to get to know Toshinori and Daisuke. There is a closeness that builds when people work together all day everyday.

In addition to culling, we did many other tasks at or near the Koi farm. One of my favorite jobs was returning the parent Koi to the summer mud ponds. When I arrived at Yagenji, many of the parent Koi were still in the outdoor

ponds recovering from breeding. On two or three occasions, Daisuke, Toshinori and I would catch the fish, put them in the live haul tank on the truck, and drive them off to the mountainside ponds. While doing this, we also checked the fish for bumps and bruises which occasionally required medication.

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**Japan How to's:**  
**Submission by Bob Brudd**  
**Info copied from:**  
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### **How To Handle Emergencies in Japan**

*Gives you some basic steps of what to do in case of an emergency in Japan.*

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Time Required:** 5

#### **Here's How:**

1. If you need to call the police for any reason, dial 110 from any phone.
2. If you see a police kiosk (called a Koban), go there to get help. Each police kiosk has a metallic pentagon symbol on the front of the building.
3. For fire, call 119.
4. If you need an ambulance, call 119.
5. When you need hospital information in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, or Thai, call 03-5285-8181.
6. Also, the AMDA International Medical Information center provides English-speaking personnel. Call 03-5285-8088.(Mon-Fri)
7. If you encounter an earthquake, try to get under a table or counter or something sturdy.
8. Wait until the earthquake stops. Try not to panic.
9. For other help, call the Tokyo English Lifeline at 03-3968-4099 or the Japan Helpline at 0120-461-997. They provide English-speaking counseling and referrals.

#### **Tips:**

1. If you are using a public phone to make an emergency call, push the red button before you dial 110 or 119. No money is needed.
2. Contact your embassy for any kind of help. (The U.S. Embassy in Tokyo - 03-3224-5000/ The U.S. Consulate General in Osaka - 06-315-5900)

### **How To Travel by Japanese Bullet Train**

Japanese bullet trains (Shinkansen) are fast and also very comfortable to ride. Follow the steps below to get to your destination efficiently.

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Time Required:** 15

#### **Here's How:**

1. Go to the major Japan Railway (JR) stations such as Tokyo, Ueno, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Hiroshima, Hakata, and more.
2. Go to a JR ticket counter called Midori-no-mado-guchi which can be recognized by a green sign.
3. Purchase the ticket to your destination. You need to pay bullet train express fares in addition to the regular fare for the distance.
4. If you want to reserve your seat, ask at this time. You can do this for a small additional fee.
5. Check the departure time and the number of platform of your train on the display board.
6. Go to the correct JR Shinkansen gate and hand your ticket to the officer or insert your ticket in the automatic gate.
7. When you get to the platform, go to under the number plate of the car indicated on your ticket, if you reserved a seat.
8. If you don't reserve a seat in advance, go under the number plates of self-seating areas called Ji-yu-seki.

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9. Line up behind the white line and wait for the train.
10. Get in the train and find your seat.
11. Seat numbers are indicated below the baggage rack above the window.
12. If you didn't reserve a seat and also couldn't find any empty seats, you might have to stand in the hallway or entrance area until someone gets off the train.
13. When the person who sells food, drinks and souvenirs comes near your seat, get her attention and buy whatever you want from the cart.



**Tips:**

1. There are ordinary cars and green cars (first class). You need to pay extra to sit in the green cars.
2. Each station offers special boxed meals which are sold on the train. Enjoy Japanese regional food in your seat.
3. The Shinkansen tend to be full, so it's highly recommended to reserve your seat in advance.

**How To Use Public Phones in Japan**

*Gives you information about the types of public phones and the steps of making a phone call in Japan.*

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Time Required:** 1

**Here's How:**

1. You need to use prepaid magnetic telephone cards (you can buy them at convenience stores or vending machines) or 10yen/100yen coins.
2. Pick up the phone and insert a telephone card into the slot or insert coins.
3. Dial the number you want.
4. When you are using a telephone card, the phone indicates how much value is remaining.
5. When you have almost used up the card value or coins, the phone beeps. Add another telephone card or more coins.
6. When you hang up, the telephone card will come out and extra coins are given back.
7. If you want to use prepaid phone card with card number or use your credit card, do the following steps.
8. Use any phone.
9. Pick up the phone and dial 0055. (If you are using green phones, you need to insert coins or a magnetic telephone card to begin.)
10. Enter your card number and the pin number, then dial the number you want to call.
11. If you want to make a collect call or operator call, pick up any phone and dial 0051. (If you are using green phones, you need to insert coins or a magnetic telephone card to begin.)



**Tips:**

1. You can make international calls from the tall gray phones and tall green phones with gold faces, using coins or magnetic phone cards.
2. Some phones accept only magnetic telephone cards, some take only coins, and some accept both. Find out which type it is by looking for coin inserts and card inserts.
3. Domestic calls are cheaper in the early morning, late night, and weekends. Phone fees are expensive in Japan, so save your money by choosing the right time.

8. Go to the Keisei counter in the underground train terminal and reserve your seats.
9. Also, Keisei limited express trains take you to the Ueno station in 80 min. for 1000 yen. (No need for seat reservations.)
10. The Airport Limousine Bus takes you to Tokyo City Air Terminal in 60-70 min. for about 3000 yen. (There are many destinations other than TCAT.)
11. Go to the Airport Limousine Bus counter in the lobbies of Terminal 1 or 2.
12. Find a bus that goes to your destination and buy the tickets.

**How To Get to Tokyo From Narita Airport**

Narita Airport is 40 miles away from the center of Tokyo. There are different ways to get to Tokyo from the Narita International airport.

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Time Required:** 60

**Here's How:**

1. If you want to take a train, the following are options.
2. Take JR (Japan Railways) trains from the underground train stations at Narita airport at Terminal 1 or Terminal 2.
3. JR Narita Express(NEX) trains take you to the Tokyo station in about 50 min.
4. Go to the JR NEX counter in the terminal and reserve your seat. It costs about 3000 yen.
5. Also, JR Airport liner trains take you to the Tokyo station in 80 min. for 1300 yen. (You don't need to reserve a seat for this one.)
6. Keisei Railways is another choice.
7. The Keisei Skyliner takes you to the Ueno station in 60 min. for about 2000 yen.



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**Tips:**

1. Taking the express trains is the fastest way to get to Tokyo, if you don't have so much to carry.
2. If you have a lot of luggage or want to go directly to your hotel, the limousine bus is a good choice.
3. After you validate your JR Japan rail pass at the JR service center in the airport, you can take the NEX or JR Airport liner free. (You still need to reserve your seat if you take the NEX.)





- When you call a taxi from a restaurant or other places, you are required to pay extra charges.



**How To Take a Taxi in Japan**

*Gives you tips for using a taxi in Japan.*

**Difficulty:** Easy

**Time Required:** 5

**Here's How:**

- From train stations or airports, go to the taxi stand and line up.
- In the street, look for a taxi which has a red light in the front window. It indicates the taxi is empty. (If the light is green, the taxi has passengers.)
- When you see an empty taxi, raise your hand and call it.
- The backdoor opens and closes automatically, so stand back and wait until it opens.
- Get in the taxi and tell the driver your destination or show them the Japanese written address of your destination.
- Before you get out of the taxi, pay the charge indicated on the meter. No tip is necessary.
- Wait until the door opens and get out of the taxi.

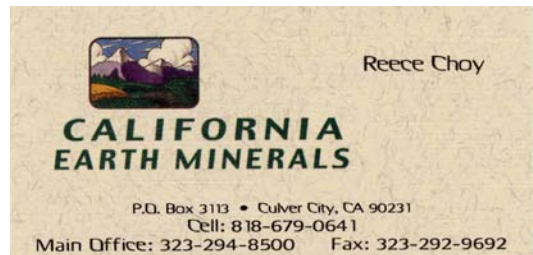
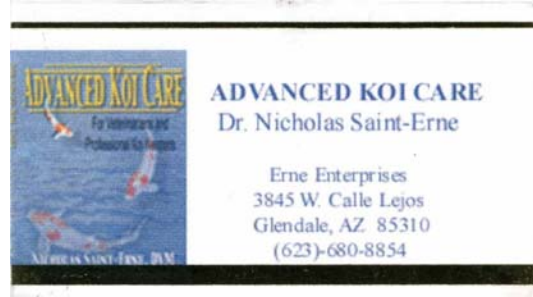
**Tips:**

- Most of drivers don't speak English, so it is highly recommended that you have the address of your destination written in Japanese or have a map.
- Taxis are pretty expensive in Japan (the average fee starts from \$6 for the first 1.25 miles), especially between 11 pm and 5am, when the meter adds extra charges.

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**Calendar of Events**

**February 21st ZNA Meeting  
location: Rizzi's Flower and  
Aquatic Center**



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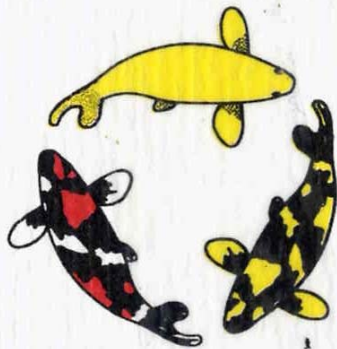
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**Our 2003 Christmas Gala**



Once again the Clark's were our gracious host.



There's nothing like good conversations with good friends



Of course the food was beyond outstanding





**Fun was had by all.....**



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