



Hello. Happy New to everyone. Hope you all enjoyed the holidays and are back on track ready to face the challenges of 2008 and all the excitement of the year ahead.

Neil and I had a wonderful holiday in Japan for almost 3 weeks. This was our fourth trip to Japan but the first visit in winter and without the pressure of a training schedule.

2/01/08

We left Melbourne at 1am. It had been over 40 degrees the previous day in Melbourne

. We arrived in Japan on the same day around 2 p.m. It was only 5 degrees.

Having been pre-warned, we were well rugged up for the cold weather.

We were met at Narita airport by our Kung Fu cousin Mochizuki who had arranged all our travel schedule. This made our life so much more comfortable and hassle free.

We stayed at Fuchu where Mochi and our Kung Fu brother Master Ozawa Shoji reside. Owaza was travelling to Cambodia at the time, so we did see him the first week.

3/01/08

Mochi took us to Koedo on the train. We were very surprised to see how few people were travelling on the train. We had never seen Japan this. People were on holiday and it was a pleasure to see a few children about. A rare sight to see small children travelling on the train due to the major overcrowding on the commuter trains throughout the year. On one day, when Neil and I were travelling Shinshiku, we got on the rapid commuter. It was a terribly experience.

Being winter, I rugged up in many layers of thermal clothing and topped it with my snow jacket.

The temperature inside the train is around 25 degrees. As the train continues to fill up at every station, the environment becomes unbearable. I could barely breathe as I struggled to hold onto the hand grip above me. Men never give up their sit for a women. Constantly being moulded against so many bodies in this unbearable heat is scary. Anyone in Australia who complains about our overcrowding on public transport needs to visit Japan and experience this. I guarantee you will never complain again. Japanese people are the most tolerant people in the world.

Koedo Kawagoe is an ancient village surrounded by rivers and inhabited during the Jomon period (around 10,000-300 BC) The buildings and business are old style. Lovely to see small business thriving operated by some really old people, selling authentic artefacts etc. It is brimming with culture and history. Loved trying out all the little food samples that were on offer.

5/01/08

Mochi and his wife Masuko, met us at Fuchu station. We travelled together to Nagano. I had for many years wanted to see the snow monkeys. This was my opportunity. I was not disappointed. We went to a forest called Jigokudani Yaen-Koen where the monkeys live and bath in the natural hot springs. The many monkeys were everywhere and we were able to get very close to them whilst they were bathing. I was enchanted watching them bath, groom and comfort each other.

Neil was busy clicking away with his camera. The ground was very slippery and treacherous. I fell on the narrow track and was lucky not to fall down mountain as I was rescued by Mochi and Neil who quickly grabbed me. Silly of me not wear proper footwear.

Back in Nagano, we visit Zenhoji temple. It was very ancient and very interesting with lots of beautiful gardens. Many new foods to try hear also. Everything is always so fresh to eat.

6/01/08

Today, we all went to Matsumoto castle in Matsumoto, also called Crow Castle because of its black walls and spreading wings. This castle came under the rule of the Takeda clan. This castle was built in 1593. Much of it has been restored. The warriors must have been really small judging by the narrow hallways, stairs and tiny doorways. Displays of armour and weapons confirm this, but they must have been very strong to carry it. Later, we went to the Hokusai Art



Gallery to view the art of one of my favourite painters. Hokusai is world class and I have long admired his work. As we were leaving, the receptionist gave me and Masuko a paper crane she had lovingly made as a gift. What a lovely gesture. I brought it home safely in one piece.

7/01/08

We left Mochi and Masuko to return to work whilst we travelled on to Mt. Fuji on the Shinkansen or Bullet Train. They travel long distance in the blink of an eye and unlike the local trains, they are very comfortable. Mochi had booked us into the Mizunosato Ryokan at the foothills of Mt. Fuji. Unfortunately, there was little snow but our accommodation made up for this. To our most pleasant surprise, it more than met our expectations. Due to the fact people had already gone back to work, this 5 star Ryokan was almost empty. We had the most beautiful tatami room with a perfect view of Mt. Fuji from our private balcony, including a small spa outside.

Breakfast and dinner was included and we were thoroughly spoilt by the staff who offered an endless supply of fresh food with so many varieties. The communal hot spring spas for guests were something else. As is in Japan, spa's are not unisex, so Neil and I had the spring to ourselves, separately. As I sat in the hot spa in the open air watching the sun set over Mt. Fuji, I thought how fortunate I am to experience this magnificent view. Nature is such a treasure to behold and never to be taken for granted.

10/01/08

Ozawa took us to see the Tokyo Tower, a massive structure that is 333mtrs. and weighs 4,000 tons. It is the world's tallest self supporting steel structure. Made in 1958 from re-cycled submarine steel, it is lighter in weight than the Eiffel tower in Paris. It is awesome and well worth the hours of waiting in ques to buy tickets, use the elevator, view the shops etc. I was not happy though, in seeing the Aquarium. So many beautiful large fish crowded into tiny tanks.

11/01/08

We went Kakegawa to visit Ryiochi, our Japanese student that had returned after spending 6 months in Australia training with us. His parents lived in an old village and run a small restaurant. They had invited to lunch. We were the only ones there, so were able to look around at all the lovely trinkets and art and furniture that Ryiochi's father made by hand from natural timbers. Ryiochi's mother also made kimonos and small purses. Her name was Midori. We were thoroughly spoilt as dish after dish came to us, freshly cooked. So many tasty morsels to experience. We loved every minute of it. Midori gave us a lovely gift of miniature pottery made by a famous potter who had lived in the village and long deceased. Ryiochi then took us to visit the Kakegawa Castle. This is the first castle in Japan to be rebuilt completely of wood. Originally built 400 years ago by Yoshitada Imagawa, a lord governing the era of the civil wars. The castle was destroyed by the great earthquake of 1854. It was reconstructed by Sukekatsu Ota.

12//1/08

Today, we met up with Master Ozawa and did a little training with his students at Fuchu. They were all happy to see us again after 2 years since our last visit. We had dinner at Ozawa's home. His beautiful wife Hayami, cooked hotpot and we sat around together with Mochi and ate whilst we joked and laughed. We always feel very comfortable at Ozawa's home.

13/01/08

Ozawa took us to Shibuya to visit Master Jibiki, his wife and his daughter Hiroko. Master Jibiki is president of Cheng Ming in Japan and his daughter is now Vice President. (Go, girl power) After chatting and drinking tea, we made arrangements to meet up again with Hiroko in a few days.

14/01/08

Today was special. We went to with Ozawa and Mochi to see the Sumo wrestling in Tokyo. Before hand, we spent time at Edo museum. So many things to see there. I loved it. The wrestling was awesome. So much flesh and fat. Those guys are incredibly strong. The excitement of the crowd grew in intensity at each round. We spent 3 hours sitting cross-legged which was



very challenging for us, but I enjoyed the display of pomp and pageantry. Such a procession. To my complete surprise, at the end of the tournament, people through their cushions into the ring. Not wanting to miss out, Ozawa gave me the nod to say it was ok for me to likewise.

Unfortunately, my aim is not so good. I hit some poor lady on the back of the head. Oops.

15/01/08

Neil and I went to Hiroshima. The memorial park and peace museum was extremely confronting. It was hard to contain emotions as we slowly progressed through reading transcripts, viewing shreds of clothing that belong to young children and viewing real life models of people suffering the effects of the A bomb. God forbid this should ever happen again anywhere in the world.

Outside, where the remains of the only building left intact after the bombing in 1945. There was very little left of the Dome that had been the centre of the bombing. It is hard to believe as I stand looking at this modern city rebuilt, that it had previously all disappeared.

16/01/08

Today, we went on the Ferry Hiroshima to Miyajima Island. I was immediately approached by some deer that freely wonder around calmly mixing with the tourists. Such a magical place with its shrines built in the sea in 1168. When the tide comes the shrines appear to be floating on water. I loved the little villages and tiny shop fronts. Famous for their oysters, I had to sample some, but felt that our Sydney rock oysters are the best in the world. Had a great time here.

17/01/08

We met up Hiroko at Shibuya. She took us to lunch in Tokyo at the most exquisite Hotel I have seen anywhere in world. Called Meguro Gajoen, it was celebrating its 80th. year. Artworks and gardens had been renovated and restored. Such opulence and wealth. It blew me away. Hiroko had booked a private lunch room for us, Japanese style with our own kimono clad attendant. As is always the case with Hiroko, she thoroughly spoils us whenever we visit Japan. Wonderful to have such a thoughtful and generous Kung Fu cousin who will one day oversee all Cheng Ming in Japan. Master Jibiki, our Kung Fu Uncle, has 30 schools and many hundreds of students studying Kung Fu and Aikido. At age 82, he does not show any signs of slowing down. He is an incredible and lovely, gentle man. An inspiration to those studying the Cheng Ming system.

18/01/08

Time to leave this beautiful country that I have grown to love over the years. Due to our early flight back home, we decided to spend the last night in Japan at the Airport Hotel at Narita.

We are pleasantly surprised at how quite it is. Must be sound proof.

19/01/08

We arrive safely back in Melbourne on Sunday morning and it is a pleasant 17 degrees and raining. Back in Wattle Glen, we are eagerly greeted by our dogs and cats. Garden has survived pretty well under the care of our house guest and as always, it feels good to be back. We had a really great time and will carry our experience with us for many years to come.



Now, back to work and back to routine.

23/01/08

Classes in Tai Chi and Qi Gong resumed today at YMCA in Eltham. All last years students returned. After classe, we met for lunch. Great to see people eager to get back into training. Letters have been sent out to parents of children enrolled at Panton Hill Primary School. My program Kung fu 4 kids will commence on the 12th. of February. Looking forward to teaching kids again. With my permit for “Working With Children Check” firmly in place, I am confident that this will open many new doors. The need to promote non-violent classes in self defence, self care and self development is an important role for me and progress to my own journey.

30/01/08

Classes resumed in Wattle Glen.

Welcome to two new students Tracy and Claudia who attended the Wednesday morning class. Both responded well, learn quickly and left feeling very relaxed and refreshed.

Confirmation from Livingstone Community Centre in Ivanhoe to commence Tai Chi classes on Wednesday evening. This is a new program for them. Wonderful to see the Baptist Church embrace opportunities “out of the norm” for their local community to try out new areas of health and wellbeing.

Many thanks to Susan Mclaughlin for her patience and expertise in bringing this all together. The Centre is very fortunate to have such a supportive and capable person in their administration.

31/01/08

Class resumes in Wattle Glen for the Thursday evening group. Wonderful to see everyone back and looking refreshed. In these times of heavy demands, it is rewarding to see students committed to their training and facing the challenges in learning this wonderful art. If we all took responsibility for our own health, there would be more time to spend doing the things we really enjoy with the people we love. People often say they have not time enough to these things, but remember, if you do not, they you will need to take time out later on to care for your illness. Tai Chi is a way of life. A living art to treasure and trust.

Until next newsletter, take care, keep safe and be kind to others.

Regards Miriam