

Japanese Ghosts

When I was chosen to represent San Francisco on my trip to Osaka for three weeks during the summer, a small assignment was placed on my shoulders along with honor: To pick a topic of interest, research it while in Japan, then, when back in San Francisco write about it. This may sound simple but because I received the huge gift of being picked, I felt that the matter was not to be taken lightly. So I set out thinking of something that could change how some Americans view Japan. I have always been interested in anthropology and this was the perfect opportunity to be an observer to a different society. I finally decided on the “generation gap” of Japanese people. I originally wanted to observe both young and old people and how growing up in different time periods effected their relationship.

Unfortunately for me, I had no way of carrying out this research in Japan. Plus there were many distractions; shopping around Hep Five, day trips to Kobe, Nara, and Kyoto, plus Osaka is the land of adventure by itself. During my stay I lived with the Sugiyama's; Mr. Sugiyama, his wife Chika, their six year-old daughter Tomoka, three year-old son Yuya, and the parents of Chika. I only knew them as Obaasan and Ojiisan.

I may not have had a solid way of researching but I did watch the kids and grand parents interact a lot. From what I understood both grand parents still worked which is was incredible to my American ears. Even while working, Obaasan (grandma) would help cook meals, clean the house, and help the kids eat. She would sit next to the kids and literally stuff food into their mouths and clean their faces. All so that they could watch T.V. The morning after I arrived in Osaka I went down the stairs for breakfast, and to my horror was greeted by a huge cicada being help captive by Obaasan. She and Ojiisan played a lot with the kids and one of their favorite activities was going cicada catching, regardless that not even the kids had the courage to hold it with their bare hands like Obaasan did. Ojiisan (grandpa) was not at home as much as Obaasan, but when he returned, he was very generous with his love. He returned one night and was served chilled zarusoba, a cold noodle dish. As soon as he sat down the kids came over to the table and asked for some, twenty minutes later, the children finished off the last of what

used to be Ojiisan's zarusoba. Both Ojiisan and Obaasan had a loving bond with each of the children that warmed my heart even in the summer Osaka heat.

Now when I look back on my research topic, I realize that I fell victim to the ignorance of youth. Not to say that is a bad thing because that is how we learn. However, I see that I made an assumption about Japanese culture that I regret now. I assumed that because Japan has such values in tradition that there would be visible classes of the "traditional" and the "new age". But seeing the grand parents feed the children while their mind is lost to television, then the very next day seeing a them catching cicadas together, makes the traditional ghost of old Japan disappear.