

Enjoying Talking to Japanese

William Owen Saer



I love studying in Japan! Living this country for just a year has already given me countless opportunities to mix with Japanese - and not only other students of my own age, but a wide range of people: young couples, their children and their parents, from many occupations and backgrounds - company workers (blue collar as well as management), school teachers, university lecturers and shopkeepers to mention a few.

What has struck me is that compared to my experiences in my own country, people of the same age group here have surprisingly similar reactions, and questions they want to ask me as a foreign student. In Britain, it seems that people of the same background have many common opinions, regardless of their age, whereas in Japan I can to a larger extent predict people's conversation with me on the basis of their age.

These conversations between a foreign student of the Japanese language and native Japanese can be regarded as one-sided in a way; no student who has spent three years studying the language and meeting Japanese will be surprised to see Japanese people speaking Japanese, using chopsticks to eat raw fish and seaweed, singing karaoke etc. - but if on the other hand we do those things, the reaction is amazement and praise. In other words, the encounter is full of surprises for one side, and few for the other.

Often when this happens, our first reaction is to feel irritated and we wonder why some Japanese feel this necessity to distinguish so strongly between members of their own group and outsiders (in this case, foreigners). What we need to realise is that this is not racism - society here consists of groups, and people belong to certain groups while being excluded from other, regardless of whether or not they are Japanese. Foreigners can also gain recognition and make friends here.

It's precisely the fact that we all look and act different that makes it such fun to communicate. If everybody in the world ate sushi, what would be the point of coming to Japan?

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Working with and for Animals

Elizabeth Oliver



Ms. Elizabeth Oliver was born in Somerset in the West of England. She was educated at Malvern Girls' College and graduated from the Agricultural Faculty of Nottingham University. She came to Japan in 1968 and became a lecturer at Osaka Institute of Technology. She lives in Noma Ohara a mountain hamlet in Nose-cho, Osaka Prefecture. Her home has become the ARK Centre for rescue of stray animals and the promotion of education in the care of animals. Her other interests include organic gardening and protection of the environment.

Everyone loves tiny kittens and puppies they are so appealing and playful. Unfortunately they grow into adult cats and dogs all too quickly and then people don't want them. It is a sad fact of life that only about 10% or less of kittens or puppies born will find kind and loving owners who will take care of them throughout their life. Every year millions of pets are thrown away or abandoned in Japan. They die miserably; either victims of starvation or traffic accidents, caught then killed by the Hokencho, used for experiments in hospital or cosmetic company laboratories, or eke out an

existence on the city streets or in the countryside. Those that survive breed, and their semi-wild off-spring become a menace to society. Many people don't see or don't want to see it as a social problem. Yet their taxes are used to exterminate this living 'gomi'.

ARK (Animal Refuge Kansai) was started in 1990 to draw people's attention to the plight of unwanted animals. It aims to prevent suffering, to promote education in the better care of animals and to stimulate a fresh approach, a new consciousness through a network of volunteers.