

Volcano

August 2003 The bi-monthly newsletter of *Active Line*. Volume 6, Issue 3

**Think
globally;
Act
locally**

What does
Active Line mean?

Active Line is a non-political, non-religious, non-profit organization that is actively seeking to form lines of communication with citizens of the world through volunteer activities. *Active Line* wishes to set itself apart from other "friendship" organizations by making efforts to improve the attitudes of Japanese nationals toward resident foreign people in Japan. As of June 1, 2003, there were 7,401 people with different languages and cultures living in Hachioji. This simple fact suggests that creating an open world society in which everyone lives in harmony, is becoming increasingly important in the Hachioji area. The goal of *Active Line* is to think globally and act locally. *Active Line* would like to broaden its vision. We would like to see ourselves as members of an international community, not a "closed" local society. *Active Line* wants to help develop the Hachioji area from a global perspective.



A letter from Dr. Bruce Williams, Chairperson for the Department of Languages and Cultures at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey, United States, to Ms. Yumiko Sato, *Active Line*, regarding a June visit to Japan by 5 students for 17 days. Dated June 19, 2003.

"I wish to thank you for the most generous hospitality you provided to our William Paterson University students during their recent visit to Japan. I have heard that the experiences were immeasurably positive, and that the group developed friendships and gained true insight into Japanese life. They deeply appreciated the warmth with which they were received.

Your dedication, active involvement, and enthusiasm for our study abroad experience will long be remembered with great fondness. These attributes are invaluable for the promotion of mutual understanding between our countries.

Again, thank you for the incredible experience offered our students. I hope we can work together from both sides in the future."

人は誰でも、自分を閉じ込めている殻に気付き、自らこれを打ち破ろうとしなければ、外の世界に触れることも、外の世界からの呼びかけに応えることもできません。広い世界に心を開き、異なった文化、異なった言語を持つ人々と共生していくことで私達は心の豊かさやゆとりを得ることができ、自分の住む町を開かれた、誰にでも住みやすい地域に育てていくことができます。アクティヴラインは、これまでの単なる「友好団体」ではなく、私達日本人の中にある「外国」、「外国人」という意識やそこから生まれる姿勢を見直し、すべての人と隣人になれることを目指そうというグループです。

「Volcano」は火山です。一人一人の心の中の思いがマグマのように溢れ出て、一つの流れとなる時、その流れは変化を促す力となってくれるでしょう。

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The Meaning of the International Students' Visit to Japan

By: Hideo Watanabe
Professor at William Paterson University

Five American students from NJ visited Japan for the first time in their lives on May 31 and stayed in Tokyo for seventeen days. They observed Japan with childlike wonder. When they departed from Japan, they left with unforgettable memories and gratitude for Active Line and other Japanese individuals for their help. The following alone are probably enough to convince readers that Japan Trip was a great success. One of the students remarked, "Without Active Line, I believe the trip would not have done so well, nor would it have been as enjoyable. The people of Active Line are truly wonderful, giving people, and they made the trip so memorable."



One sometimes understands one's own culture when outsiders give comparative observations. One of the five International students explained, "The bath is more than just a bath (unlike American baths). It is a place to talk to one's peers and friends; a place to educate children; a place to relax and wash away cares." Another student was amazed at elaborate and free wrapping service by a sales person in a department store, adding "I assumed that part of the reason for the wrapping was to help advertise the store." Another student pointed out a difference in everyday customs, "When somebody sneezes in the Western world, we expect to hear a small comfort such as 'Bless you' or 'Gasundheit' even if it is from a total stranger. To not hear something like that at times could even feel a little awkward; as if it shows that you have no awareness or feelings for your fellow man."

Japan is Japan. Japanese customs are Japanese customs and should be followed. Although this is true, people from all over the world live in Japan and Japan has to create a comfortable environment for them too. I believe that it is useful for the Japan of the future to remember what inspired, suppressed, and made these young guests hesitate.

Assisting foreign students is certainly difficult, but in essence it gives advantages to both sides. As the leader of the group, I hope that the international students have not just broken the daily routine of those who helped them, but have given a more meaningful impact on them. If, in fact, such bilateral relations resulted from the Japan Trip, then this cross culture venture was truly a great success.



Life Stories—
“We’re having a baby, TODAY!”
By: Shimpei Miwa



After trying to have a baby, unsuccessfully, for 2 years in Japan, we attempted IVF, but to no avail. We continued exploring IVF once we were transferred to Mitchell, South Dakota, USA, on a foreign assignment (population 14, 191), where we currently reside. Shortly before our second IVF procedure, we found out Noriko was pregnant—naturally! This was just the beginning to discovering the differences between the US and Japan. *Note: IVF = in vitro fertilization

To be honest, I’m glad we didn’t need IVF here. Insurance doesn’t cover it in the US nor Japan. The \$10,000 or more price tag, compared to \$7,000 in Japan, had me thinking I was doomed and would need to sell my motorcycle.

When we called our obstetrician to say Noriko may be pregnant, he didn’t advise us to come to his office at once like we expected. Instead, we found ourselves running to Walmart and buying a pregnancy test kit—positive. THEN, the doctor wanted to see us, recommending we bring a videotape to record the fetus. How liberal and how fun! Doctors in Japan would never suggest such a thing. Our doctor here was very friendly, kind, supportive, and funny. He got serious only when he needed—very comforting. On the other hand, doctors in Japan have the image of being very serious, moody, and unfriendly. They never have a smile on their face.

Since Noriko is not fluent in English, I needed to accompany her to doctor’s appointments. It was great to actually be able to go with her because the doctor’s office is only 10 minutes away from work and home, plus my company would just let me go for a few hours without penalty. If this was Japan, I’d have to speak with my boss in advance, apply for a half/full day of vacation or absence, and feel the “customary” shame for taking time off to help my pregnant wife. I’m supposed to feel very embarrassed for helping her out, as Japanese husbands are not supposed to do that! Not to mention, my boss would nag about it forever and ever. Here, I just tell my boss I’ll be out of the office for an hour or so and go. What a difference in work environments.

So, what about when the baby arrives? Toshiba USA gives a maximum of 6 weeks for maternal and paternal leave. Toshiba Japan gives about 1/2 year maternal leave and 1-2 years for parenting leave. Toshiba Japan might sound generous, however, would a company really welcome back an employee after a year or two absence, especially when company loyalty is so important? Sadly, most quit their jobs due to the pressures surrounding it. I took 2 weeks of paternal leave. Why not take 6 weeks? Well, being a Japanese ex-pat is very awkward. You’ve got to look as though you’re blending in with the locals, yet work as though you are at the office in Tokyo. Besides, my other boss is a typical hardcore Japanese salary-man who would give up everything for his beloved company. Not seeing me at my desk for 6 weeks would cause alarm and news would quickly reach the big boys in Tokyo. This does not look good. (What a terrible culture?) I can hear them saying to themselves, “How can you be back after leaving for TWO WEEKS?”

As soon as we knew Noriko was pregnant, our first thoughts were to cancel all our plans, stay home, and sit tight. This is typical Japanese thinking, even by Japanese doctors. However, our doctor told us to go about things as usual and relax, which was great news for an active woman like Noriko. We continued playing golf together for a few more months and kept our plans to visit Yellow Stone with Noriko’s parents. If we were in Japan, most people, especially the elderly, would think we were irresponsible parents playing around all the time. We pretty much did what we wanted to and our pregnancy went smoothly. (continued on Page 4)



**Checkmark****チェックマーク**

1. Learn Japanese—Free private and small group lessons with volunteer teachers. Please contact Toshiko Sonoda in Japanese/English at 042-594-0157 for more information.
2. Active Line Meetings—Saturdays, September 20 and October 18 at 2:00 PM at Hachioji Create Hall. No August meeting. For location information and map, contact Yumiko Sato in English or Japanese at Phone/FAX: 0426-68-5208. Everyone is welcome!

Noriko often watched the cable Discovery Channel on TV. The frequent programs about pregnancy and birth helped her prepare mentally for what to expect before and after the delivery. There aren't any such programs or channels in Japan. Renting a video from a hospital would probably be the closest thing. We took a birthing class, but were disappointed that the Mitchell hospital did not offer any baby care (bathe, feed, etc.) classes toward the end of the pregnancy, like they do in most large hospitals in Japan. Perhaps it was because Mitchell is so small, and unlike in Japan, there would always be family and friends around to help out.

We did some baby shopping, of course, too. All the basic necessities were at the local Kmart and Walmart, which was very convenient. In Japan, you can easily find stuff at Jusco and Itoiyokado near train stations. Prices are no doubt cheaper in the US, but overall quality is better in Japan. In the US, you must have a baby seat for vehicles. Hospitals won't release babies without them. But in Japan, baby seats just became mandatory in 2000 and I doubt hospitals have any similar policy. Awareness of child car safety is not very high.

The day of delivery came sooner than expected. Luckily Noriko's mother had already arrived from Japan to help out. A few days before our planned C-section, we went in for a routine check up. After looking at the ultrasound, the doc said, "Hmm, let's do it today!" Well, we weren't really prepared, so we did some last minute shopping at Walmart, packed our bags, and rushed to the hospital. Much of the paperwork I completed at the hospital focused on whether we had been fully informed about the C-section and why we were doing it. Even before receiving anesthesia, a nurse asked Noriko why she was having a C-section. I was able to stay with Noriko for the entire C-section delivery. In Japan, it's still rather uncommon for fathers to witness births. Soon, Little Kyoko was born! Much to our surprise, and especially to Noriko's mother, we stayed in a private room with a bathroom/shower. In Japan, you usually share a room. Due to Kyoko's small size, she needed to stay in the hospital for a week. It was great our hospital let us stay in the same room, at no extra charge, though Noriko had already been officially released. I would have never expected this in Japan!

Noriko recovered well from the C-section. The doctor told her to start moving around and take pain killers as often as she needed. In Japan the doctor would say the opposite—stay in bed and bear the pain. For C-sections, mothers stay in the hospital for 4 days, unlike in Japan where you would expect a 2 week stay. Even for natural deliveries, the normal stay is 1 week. Our friends, many of whom have lived overseas, all freaked out at this news. "What? That's crazy! You get cut up and stapled and five days later you're kicked out?" Then they teased, "Oh, Americans are so huge and tough, maybe that's why, blah, blah, blah." Noriko decided to nurse Kyoko and supplement with formula. In Japan you're told to sterilize the bottles in boiling water, but here, washing them with regular dish detergent and a brush is acceptable. My friends again teased me by saying that Americans have tough stomachs and probably feed T-bone steaks to their babies.

Getting around with a baby is much easier in the US than in Japan. Here in the US, especially in Mitchell, you must drive a car. There's not a single traffic light and no waiting. The public transportation system in Japan is very inconvenient and crowded—not accessible, especially with a baby stroller. On a recent trip to Japan, not once did anyone offer Noriko and Kyoko a seat on the train. Also, most of the restaurants and public bathrooms didn't have diaper changing facilities like in the US. No wonder the Japanese birth rate is dropping! I think it is less stressful and easier raising Kyoko in the US than in Japan.

Dear Hanako-san

Do you have a question for Hanako-san? Would you like to express your opinion? Have a personal story to share? Please send contributions to the address printed on the back page of the newsletter in either Japanese or English. All are subject to space availability. Contributors may remain anonymous in Volcano if so stated, but name and phone number will be retained in the editors' files.

「花子さん」に質問がありますか？あなたの意見を発表してみませんか？分かち合いたい経験はありませんか？

このニュースレターの裏面に記載されている住所までご投稿をお願いします。日本語でも英語でも結構です。

掲載は全て紙面の都合によります。なお、投稿される時は、必ずお名前とお電話番号を記入して下さい。ご要望があれば、紙面上では匿名とさせて頂きます。



Question: I lived in Japan, long before I had young children. What can I expect on an upcoming stay?

Answer: Expect to get a workout, both mentally and physically! Here's some things to think about:

1. Getting Around—Equipping yourself with a very compact lightweight stroller, a Baby Bjorn-like harness, and a few mules, will help you at airports, department stores, parks, and strolling around a residential area, but not much for everything in between, due to the general lack of accessibility and crowded conditions in Japan. Plan outings carefully, avoiding rush hour and places without carts/benches to lighten your load. Cars pose other concerns like far-away parking, traffic jams, limited rest areas, and the need for car seats (recent law). Be vigilant about escalator, elevator, and automatic door safety. Teach your kids to hold hands with you. Consider “labeling” your children (in Japanese and English), like they do at large amusement parks, with contact info (name, address, cell #, etc.) in case of separation.

2. Playtime—Neighborhood and city parks are a good idea, but some may not be too “kid-friendly” with cement structures, rusted equipment, and hard-packed surfaces. When it's raining, consider taking your tots to department store play areas or to your apartment building's “indoor area”. Be very observant of shoe etiquette in these areas.

On a larger scope, safety/liability issues are not as apparent in Japan as the US—beaches/pools may be un-guarded, railings may be non-existent in steep areas, and much to my surprise, a large wood-working shop in a Tokyo children's museum I visited was totally un-supervised.

3. Basic Needs—Be prepared that only some public restrooms and family-style restaurants will have diaper-changing stations, high chairs, and booster seats for use. Also recall, napkins, toilet paper, and paper towels, are not usually provided. Carry your own water for mixing formula and drinking, as many eateries don't provide water unless you ask, and some charge for “table space”, whether or not the water is free. Since Japanese homes don't typically have water heaters and dishwashers, bottles should be sterilized using a microwave sterilizer or by boiled water. Learn if the local water is considered potable for infants. Creativity and compromise will be needed with your hosts to adjust to communal bathing customs since small children often don't like showers and aren't suited to such deep bath tubs filled to the top with hot water. Space might hinder your ideas for setting up cribs and playpens for some much needed breaks. Wish for a masseuse, get used to the floor, and watch out for the rice paper!





Information Briefs

Child Care Centers (*Japanese-speaking only)

Why the name "Volcano"?

Volcano means "kazan" in Japanese. The reason why we chose the name "Volcano" for our newsletter is because we believe people's opinions, ideas, and feelings should not lie "dormant" or become "inactive" like volcanoes. "Magma" exists in everyone and it needs to voluntarily erupt once in a while to soothe one's soul.



How to Contact Us:

- ◆ With your questions, opinions, stories, suggestions, and ideas
- ◆ For information about membership and newsletter subscriptions

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Join Us!

- ◆ Help gather resources and exchange information with other organizations
- ◆ As a Korean, Chinese, Spanish, Japanese, etc., volunteer teacher/translator/interpreter
- ◆ In planning, executing, or assisting with events
- ◆ As a computer assistant—Microsoft Windows 95 needed, with Japanese/English capabilities
- ◆ With the publishing and mailing of the newsletter
- ◆ Etc., make your own proposal

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6-1-1 Minamino, Hachioji
Tel: 0426-35-4152
Counseling Service Hours: 9:00 AM-Noon, 1:00 PM-4:00 PM
Playroom Hours: 9:30 AM-Noon, 1:00 PM-4:00 PM
Open: Monday-Saturday. Closed Sundays, national holidays, 12/29-1/3
Age: up to 6 years-old

Hachioji City Health and Welfare Department Family Support Center
3-24-1 Moto-Hongo Cho, Hachioji
Tel: 0426-26-3111
Open: 7:00 AM –7:00 PM
Age: up to 10 years-old
Charge: 700 yen/hour Mon-Fri, 900 yen/extended hrs, weekends, national holidays, & ill children

Ne-e Ne-e Club (private)
Nakano Community Center
2726-7 Nakano-cho, Hachioji
Tel: 0426-27-3732 (Ms. Watabe)
Open: 3rd Tuesday of every month, 10:00 AM-11:30 AM
Age: 4 months-1 1/2 years and expectant mothers