Japanese Tea Ceremony Performed for School

On April 5, the East Asian Studies Center on the Bloomington campus presented an outreach program featuring the Japanese tea ceremony, as part of the "International Studies for Indiana Schools" project being developed jointly by the Center for Excellence in Education and the Office of International Programs. The interactive video performance was broadcast from the School of Education to a fifth grade class at University Elementary School in Bloomington.

The class of thirty students and their teacher, Phyllis Perkins, were first introduced to the many pieces of an authentic tea set. The class then observed a typical performance of the ceremony itself as it was being narrated to them. They followed along, mimicking the significant gestures, and were provided with their own cups of Japanese tea and tea cakes to taste at the appropriate moment.

The ceremony was performed by Nagako Hirohashi, a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics, who has studied and taught the performing art for many years in Japan.

The narrator for the tea ceremony and discussion facilitator for the program was Jeffrey Johnson, graduate student in the Department of History. Johnson traveled to Japan upon being awarded a fellowship to conduct research on the meaning of the tea ceremony and its performance.

Primary and secondary school teachers in Indiana who are interested in participating in interactive video programs such as this should contact the Office of International Programs on the Bloomington campus (812-855-8467).

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what I thought to be a forested plain, but I soon realized the massive shape 9,000 feet below was the lake. We quickened our pace and by the time we reached the lake, my toes were bloodied from the decent. We changed into swim suits and took what must have been the most enjoyable swim of my life. We celebrated the end of the hike, our successful mission and I felt more a part of the group than I ever had.

I didn’t quite realize the significance of the hike until in the following years when I would tell other environmental groups about my hike. Astonishment was always the reaction, as well as mixed pride and awe. I was one of the gang: an accepted member of the environmental movement and someone who could help. During the next two years, it would not be unusual for my phone to ring at 2:00 a.m. with a call from Uzbekistan, “I have this idea, what do you think?” When members of local environmental NGOs came to Almaty, my small one-room apartment was a central meeting point. One night I counted five people sleeping on the floor and three in the kitchen. There was barely enough room to walk between the bodies. While I still fought credibility problems with local government officials, I had overcome most of it within the environmental movement, which was my primary focus.

The best part of this story is the result of the hike. The ideas of coalition building and increasing Green Salvation’s support base did not fall on closed ears. Green Salvation worked to include more local community groups, more international organizations working on park development, and government officials who understood the necessity of making a change to preserve the mountains. I worked with Green Salvation off and on during my time in Almaty on this project. This past February, I received an email from Almaty saying the Minister of Ecology just signed the proposed area into a national park. The new park includes the trail we took. By working with people (and not against them) and by accepting a culture different from our own, Green Salvation was successful. We all were successful.

Editor’s Note

Lynn Richards is enrolled at the School of Public & Environmental Affairs in the joint Masters of Public Affairs and Masters of Science in Environmental Science program. She has spent the last five years working as an environmental grassroots organizer to develop a civil sector and promote sustainable development in different areas of the former Soviet Union.