

## Finding a Home Away from Home

Division of Oral Ecology  
in Health and Infection

Dr. Nunez Phides Pangilian

I am 37 years old and a mother of one. Back in the Philippines, I started working as a dentist a year after I finished my undergraduate course, what....14 years ago. Fourteen years. Seems like such a long time, half of which I also spent teaching in a dental university. It looked like I had a good enough life, so now, what am I doing in a foreign land, going back to the rigors of study? The demands of the job is the reason why. It goes with the territory. Being in the academic field behooves you to upgrade your education. So I applied for a position as a PhD student in Niigata University and here I am.

To say that I was less than enthusiastic in coming here is a big understatement. It was the first time for me to leave my country and go off on my own. I am not the adventurous type, and never in my entire life did it ever occur to me to leave my country and stay long term abroad. I have always had a sheltered life with helpers at my beck and call that the prospect of living by myself with no one to tend to my needs presented a bleak picture indeed. Yet for all my uncertainties on living solo, none surpassed the sorrow I felt at the thought of leaving my then three-year old son behind. Nevertheless, in

April of 2004, packing my doubts and fears along with 20 kilos worth of clothes in a borrowed suitcase, I left house and home and boarded a JAL flight to the Land of the Rising Sun.

The first six months here found me in the company of other foreign students from at least eight different countries. Like most Japanese government-sponsored foreign students, I attended the Nihongo Intensive Course for six months. During that time, slowly but surely (more surely than slowly, actually), whatever doubts I harboured in coming here faded with each passing day I spent with my newfound friends. As a part of the Nihongo class, the university took us to various places in Niigata, such as to Sado island, museums and temples, as well as to other parts of Japan, like Osaka,



Outside a museum in Niigata with friends

Kyoto, and Hiroshima among others. I saw the beautiful and sometimes breathtaking scenery of the land and sea, and the wealth and breadth of Japanese culture and legacy as well. The general idea was for us foreign students to learn about Japan and experience it fully: its language, culture, tradition, and most of all, its people. I think it is a good strategy to help foreign students like me to immerse ourselves in the new environment and to assist us in the oft-difficult (sometimes painful) process of trying to “fit in”, while at the same time keeping our own individual identities, both as a person, and as a representative of our home countries.

I must say, it had been a most fruitful and wonderful experience for me. Not only was I able to better acquaint myself with the country which was to serve as my home for the next four years; I was also educated as to the beauty and diversity of other countries as presented by the other foreign students. It put me in a position that made me appreciate my own identity and the uniqueness of my own culture. Before I came here, I have never consciously and actively paid attention to the traits, whether positive or negative, that make me a Filipino.

As to my direct experiences with Japanese people, I can honestly say that I have not had any untoward experience at all. In the Philippines, it is quite common knowledge that the Japanese have a very professional and strict work ethic and that impression was not lost on me. I do

believe that this attitude is one of the key instruments that propelled this country to the high standing that it enjoys now. By studying here, I am able to directly experience that first hand and thereby learn from it. For my everyday life outside the university, despite my inability to communicate myself effectively in Nihongo to the Japanese staff of the places I frequent, I find that I could almost always get by through a delightful mixture of broken Nihongo, some English, and an often amusing series of hand signals and all sorts of body language. I have also encountered quite a good number of strangers on the bus, train, in the parks or in some street corner, who would from out of the blue, just strike up a conversation good naturedly. A couple of times I even received as a “presento” whatever they had on hand at the time, which was a pleasant surprise indeed.

Needless to say, my decision to come here turned out to be among the better ones I have made. Now, I am currently concentrating on my PhD studies in Oral Microbiology, which I hope to finish by September 2008, and have since said goodbye to the good old days of lengthy free times and easy-going life with my Nihongo classmates. In contrast to what I expected, life in the laboratory is not at all that difficult. My sensei, as well as the other professors and university staff have all been supportive and patient enough to help me get my research going. I would not deny that it involves a lot of work, but

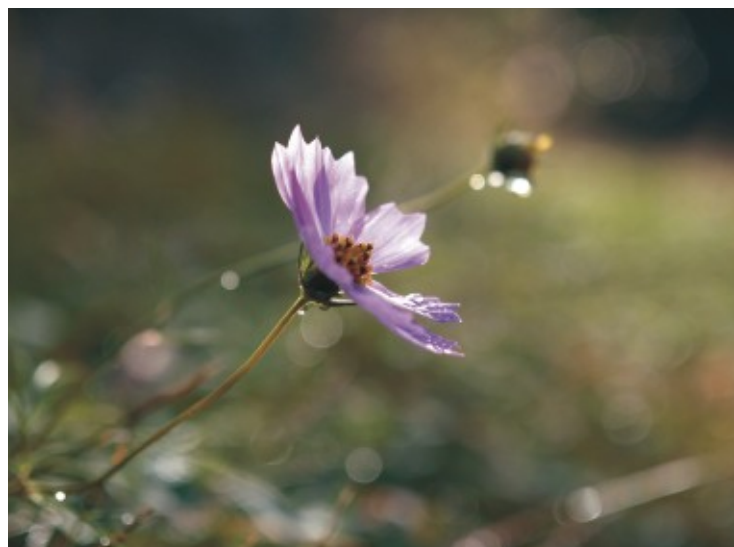
I am prepared for that. The scholarship program, by allowing that 6-month semi-hiatus, surely packed me with enough happy memories and friends to see me through. I am so grateful that even until now, I am still being provided with opportunities to have a life outside the university.

And my son? Well he has since joined me here starting 2005. And thanks to the wonderful child care and support system here, I am able to send him to a good nursery school so that I could continue my studies uninterrupted. What more can I ask for? He is enjoying every moment of

his life here and growing beautifully. And when he is happy, I could not be happier. Truly, I have found a home away from home.



With my son at a train in Niigata



# AYUBOWAN :

## May You enjoy the gift of long life.

Division of Oral Anatomy Dr. Tharanga Nandasena



I am Tharanga Nandasena from the pearl of the Indian Ocean ; Sri Lanka, who dreamt to be an architect, but graduated as a Dentist and designate as a lecturer. As things turned out like that, I received the first opportunity to do the doctoral course of Oral Life Sciences in Niigata University Faculty of Dentistry, which is implemented as a split program between the Niigata and Peradeniya universities. Then, I am privileged to have this opportunity to study under the supervision of Prof. T. Maeda in the Department of Oral Anatomy where I could gain valuable research experience and exposure to modern technologies.

Since I am from Sri Lanka, which is not so well known to Japanese younger generation, I would like to

talk much about my country.

Sri Lanka is shaped like a giant teardrop falling from the southern tip of the vast Indian subcontinent. It is separated from India by the 50 km wide Palk Strait, although there is a series of stepping-stone coral islets known as Adam's Bridge which almost form a land bridge between the two countries. It is a small island of 65,000 square kilometers.

Most of my country's population speaks Sinhala, Tamil or English. Sinhala is the most widely spoken language and the sinhala people make up the largest ethnic group. Interestingly, this language is not spoken anywhere else in the world. A good twenty percent of the population lives in the western province which is the home of capital, Colombo.

The southern and western regions have only two seasons, wet and wetter. Despite being a tropical



Sri Lankan beaches ; a white endless sand strip with coconut shield.

island some parts of the country can almost be mistaken for deserts. Other regions experience rainy and dry seasons.

Sri Lankan beaches are the most picturesque in the world. Soft sound waves lapping in to the beach, endless strip of white sandy beaches contrasting with deep blue waters, coral reefs that are home to many types of tropical fish are best described in the south-west, southern and south-east coastlines of my country. Hence, swimming, diving, surfing and sunbathing are favorite activities of foreign visitors.

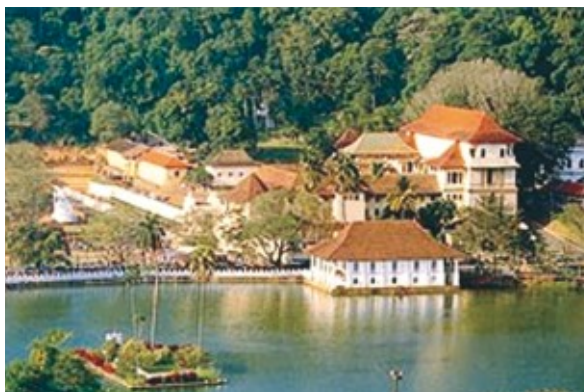
Despite being so small, the country has a wide range of geographic

features and is rich in natural beauty. Hence, it is believed to be one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Large part of the country is covered in tropical forests, with hundreds of rivers flowing through them, often cascading in awesome waterfalls. It is home to many types of exotic tropic fauna and flora. In addition, the biodiversity is really rich and make the country a nature lover's paradise.

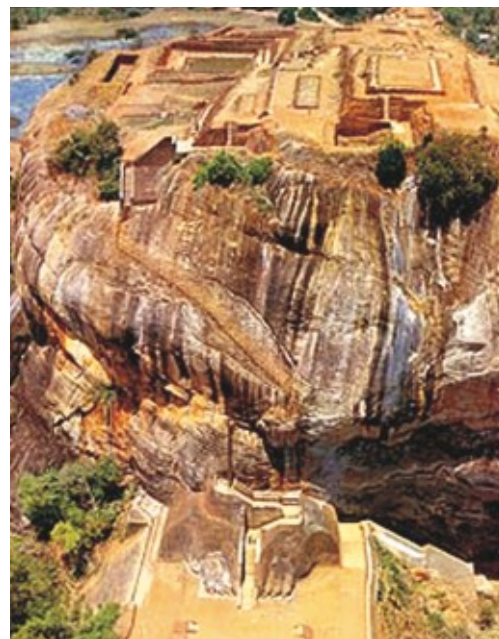
It is also the country which is famous for good high grown Ceylon tea. The central part of the country is covered with hundreds of tea estates and tea factories, where the perpetual spring temperature can be



A tea factory in a hill country tea estate with beautiful mountain sceneries.



The temple of Tooth Relic ; this shows the Temple of Tooth Relic with the part of the castle of the last Sinhala King.



Sigirya ; the 8<sup>th</sup> wonder of the world. It was a royal citadel for more than 18 years, from 477 to 495 A.D. This shows remaining staircases and basements of the main palace with water ponds of summit.

felt.

Kandy, the last capital of Sinhala kings, nestled in the foothills of the hill country, with its beautiful lake at the center, is the center of traditional Sri Lankan culture. It is the favorite city of travelers from all over the world as the sacred tooth of Lord Buddha is preserved here in its own temple "The temple of the Tooth" and a replica of this holy relic is paraded around the city, on the back of the chief elephant "Raja", for two weeks every year during the month of August. Hundreds of brightly decorated elephants, dancers and singers of the parade turn this normally quiet small town into one enormous festival during those two weeks.

History of the country spans over a period of 2000 years, which is livid with many colorful incidents of regency and their doings. Many monuments pertaining to the Buddhism and Hinduism, monuments built for aesthetic, medical purposes and for no other reason but to show off the mightiness of the rulers erected during different time of Kingdoms can be seen in many part of the country. Sigiriya is the one of them, which is

famous as the 8<sup>th</sup> wonder of the world. Since this small island is composed of all these beauties, it is a famous place for foreign visitors.

As I have finished my first year studies in Niigata University, end of March 2007, I will be back to my beautiful "tear drop" to continue my doctoral studies in Faculty of Dental Sciences, University of Peradeniya.

I greatly appreciate all the support, including financial add, that makes my doctoral studies possible. Herewith, I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Y. Yamada, Dean of the Graduate School of Medical and Dental Sciences, Niigata University, Prof. T. Maeda, Vice Dean who is also my academic advisor, and Prof. I. Saito, the coordinator of the split program. Also I give my kind gratitude to Associate Professors K. Nozawa-Inoue and Roxana Stegaroiu, Dr. Y. Kawano, Dr. A. Suzuki, Mr. M. Hoshino, and Mr. K. Takeuchi as well as to the non-academic staff of Niigata University who helped me in different circumstances, enabling me to achieve my goals while enjoying the benefits of Japanese hospitality at the same time.