

Am I ready to go home ?

歯科補綴学第二講座 Ioana Baltag



I can hardly believe that more than five years have already passed since I came to Japan. It was in January 1996, and, as probably most of the newcomers to Japan, I was very worried about my ability to study in a foreign country and to adjust to foreign customs. It was, also, the first time for me to be on my own, away from my family, and... how far away!

However, soon, all my fears vanished. I was surrounded by many kind people willing to help me in my study and to accustom to my new life. Study and research were a great joy in a faculty provided with the best high-technology equipment. The first year practically flew away and I found myself wishing to stay longer and learn more, not only in the dental field, but also about Japanese culture and customs.

Although I didn't know much about Japan before coming, I was fascinated by the very few things I knew: the cherry-blossom viewing, the tea ceremony, ikebana. I was not expecting, of course, to see everyone still wearing kimonos, but I couldn't imagine how would be the Japanese everyday life.

I was impressed to see how the Japanese

modern society managed to integrate economic, scientific and technological development with tradition. In every house, besides the most up-to-date electric and electronic equipment, I could also see Japanese style rooms, traditional flower arrangements and hand written scrolls, family Buddhist and Shinto altars. Many people still practice traditional martial arts, calligraphy, tea ceremony or the art of flower arrangement. Kimonos are not worn daily anymore, but are frequently seen in weddings, festivals, graduation and coming-of-age ceremonies. Yukatas are worn by almost everybody at summer festivals and during stays at traditional hotels. I realized how much we lost contact with tradition back home: people in the cities forgot the traditional dances; besides old people in the country side and singers of traditional music, no one wears anymore traditional clothes. Becoming modern doesn't mean to forget our roots.

There are many other things that impressed me in Japan. One is politeness and the great care that every Japanese take not to offend the other person's feelings. I still feel I do not deserve the deep bow that greets me in every store, but I wish that many Romanian store clerks could come to Japan as exchange students: shopping in Romania would become much easier and more pleasant! People insulting themselves for insignificant reasons are a common scene in Latin countries: I wish they

could see the Japanese apologizing to each other even after traffic accidents.

There are hard-workers among Romanians too, but there is no such a family feeling among coworkers, like in Japan. I felt good to be accepted in the department as a member of the family, and the department was my home for five years.

Am I ready to go home? Honestly, I don't know. I still have so many things to learn here. I long to meet again my family back home, but I feel sad of parting from the family here. I'll miss my advisors, friends, colleagues, everyone and everything that helped me to forget I was far away from home and made me feel at home here in Japan.

In the Land of Sunrise

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At the early morning of October 23, 1999, the Japan Airlines was preparing to land at Narita airport. I was awake and enjoying the beauty of sunrise from the airplane.

This was the first time I was in Japanese environment in the airplane. I was impressed by the friendliness of the Japanese passenger who was sitting beside me. At the breakfast, we were served *ramen* (noodle in soup). I enjoyed my fellow passenger's making sound by his lips when having *ramen*. Japanese people use *Hashi* to take meal while Bangladeshi people generally use right hand and fingers to take meal. I am used to have spicy foods in

our daily menu but the taste of Japanese food is completely new and different for me. While I am very proud of our different kinds of curries, I have found the Japanese food menu is a balance diet and very nutritious. Besides, I am curious to know about the longevity of Japanese people. It's still a mystery and a subject of research for me.

In my department of Oral Microbiology, I have become familiar from the student practice with the procedure of hands on learning and have observed others to be persistent with the task that make the learning process unique.

This is my first time to stay out of my homeland, Bangladesh for a longer period of time. When I came first, I was excited about this city because of its sea (Japan Sea). I watched the sea as soon as I arrived here but I was a bit shocked in viewing the sea barricaded by a dam. It seems to me that the sea has lost its natural beauty and excitement. Later on, I came to know that the sea has been dammed by this city for its existence. I used to



prefer to visit the sea every time when I felt lonely and homesick. Still I prefer to go to the sea in a fine weather, and every time I feel for the *Bay of Bengal* in Cox's Bazaar, the coastal region in the southern part of Bangladesh. Cox's Bazaar is famous of being one of the longest sandy beaches of the world. I love to watch the sunset at the beach of Cox's Bazaar. On the other hand, I can't ignore the strength and dedication of the people in here when I watched this long, strong and powerful dam in the sea to save this Niigata City. At the same time, I become sad in viewing the failure of the Bangladeshi to control the floods that affect Bangladesh almost every year and damage the

life of people, livestock and crops. Being a low-lying, riverine country in South East Asia, Bangladesh still lacks to combat its natural disasters. Besides, there are all other human-made disasters too that has been kept this country far behind of other nations. That's why; I wonder when I see the unity, honesty, loyalty and hard work of the people in here under an invisible power of discipline. From the daily life and different festivities, I have also seen the people in sharing their joy and struggle for a common interest. Then I feel a strong need to learn from Japan, the miracle of Asia.

My Stay in Niigata University

歯科補綴第一講座 Cynthia G. Gapido



When I first decided to leave my country in exchange for a one-and-a-half year research study program, I promised myself that I will not turn back and regret my decision. I always believe that an opportunity, such as receiving a scholarship, should never be treated as an ordinary thing that can happen any time. I kept my promise. In fact, I even extended my stay here in Niigata University. I am currently in my second year PhD program and my hopes are still high that I will soon return to my country proud of the degree I will achieve.

Needless to say that I can't keep my expectations high without the conducive place as well

as the presence and help of mentors and friends.

The Dentistry building, old as it may seem, is an evidence of its strength/survival through decades. It houses the equipment that spell the future. The university, in my opinion, makes sure that its staff and students are not denied of the latest technology/equipment available to enhance teaching and learning process. The library, which is the heart of the school, is spacious, quiet, and clean, not to mention the voluminous journals they have. The dental hospital is clean and well maintained. Also, the instruments and materials used are chosen to render only the best form of dental treatment among their patients.

I was especially inspired (and wondered) by

colleagues in the department because they seem to find no time for other things but work and study. Either you will find them in the dental hospital attending to their patients, working in the laboratory, doing their experiments, reading or searching through the Internet in their own computers in between towering files of reading materials. How can you not be motivated to work? I am indeed proud to be part of this group. Headed by a research enthusiast, the staff of this department are

hardworking people but will always find time to assist one another.

The Niigata University is now a second home to 341 foreign students from 37 countries with one objective—to finish a degree and bring home the “diploma” that will pave the way to their success.

For all of these, I'd like to say “Thank you for welcoming and giving us the opportunity.”