

# Rocky Mountain JETAA Newsletter



June 2009

Spring/Summer Edition

## Spring, Summer... Spring!



Wow, what a crazy six months this has been...

Gale-force winds in January, summer temps in February, major snow in March and April, record amounts of rain and lots of tornadoes in May and June. Just another winter/spring/summer/spring in Colorado!

Despite all the craziness, RMJETAA is going strong. We had another hugely successful Shinnenkai in February (see page 3) and a great turnout for the elections in March (see page 2). We continue to grow... Our March meeting hosted a record 14 attendees and welcomed some new faces.

May brought our annual (in?)famous Sing into Spring event (see pages 4–5) and now we're making plans for the summer: JET Q&A, Sakura Matsuri, Pre-Departure Happy Hours, all gearing up to seeing another generation of JETs off to Japan. Now is a great time to get involved. We welcome new people and new ideas, and look forward to growing RMJETAA in 2009. You can check out our website for the latest details, updates, and future meetings at [www.rmjetalumni.org](http://www.rmjetalumni.org).

### RMJETAA on Facebook

RMJETAA is now on Facebook! Search for "Rocky Mountain JET Alumni Association" in Groups and click to join. We'll post meetings, events, photos, and announcements. Stay connected... Join RMJETAA on Facebook!

### Monthly Meetings

After months of playing "musical locations" we finally found a great place for our monthly RMJETAA planning meetings, so please plan to join us for our July 12th meeting at Fluid Coffee Bar at 501 E. 19th Avenue, Denver 80203 (near 19th and Broadway).

Come for the company, come for the fun, come for the free coffee, come and see what your RMJETAA is all about!

### Inside this issue...

- 2009 Elections, 2
- 2009 Shinnenkai, 3
- Sing into Spring, 4–5
- Regional Conference, 6
- JET Interviews, 7
- From the Consulate, 8
- JET Happy Hours, 9
- RMJETAA Stories, 10–12
- RMJETAA Calendar, 13

# 2009 Elections

## 2009 Election Results

— Katherine Buranapiyawong (Aomori 1999–2002)

Change is in the air...Elections were held Sunday, March 8, 2009 for the executive and member-at-large RMJETAA positions for the 2009–2010 year. There was a great turn out of old and new members who voted at Café Caliente in the Highlands.

We are happy to announce that Stephen Cacciatore is our new President; James Barron and Sam Goodman will both serve as Vice President, with Sam also continuing as Webmaster; Katherine Buranapiyawong is the new Secretary; Jessyca Wilcox is returning as Treasurer; Cami Cacciatore is continuing on as Newsletter Editor; and a new position for Events/Public Relations was filled by Jessica Oppenheim. Finally, Cathy Ishida and Gina Carosa were confirmed as Members at Large. We'd like to officially congratulate everyone who was chosen and thank everyone who participated by coming to the meeting as well as providing their feedback in the process.

We are all looking forward to the coming year with a number of old and new events in the making. We would also like to recognize the hard work and dedication that Gina Carosa has provided to RMJETAA as she steps down from the President position. Gina was a motivated leader and played such a large part in the success of the organization over the last several years.

Please contact any of the board members at the addresses on the back of this newsletter with any suggestions or comments you may have for the upcoming year. We hope 2009 has gotten off to a great start for everyone, and to see some new faces at our next event!



## Welcome New Meeting Members!

RMJETAA would like to welcome our newest members who have joined us regularly for meetings and event planning. Some have just returned from Japan recently and some have moved to Denver from other alumni associations. We welcome them to RMJETAA and thank them for their time and support. Thank you!

Nick Fabrizio (Miyakojima-shi, Okinawa-ken 2002–2007)  
John McMillen (Maruoka, Fukui Prefecture 2006–2008)  
Kim Butler (Maruoka, Fukui Prefecture 2006–2008)  
Julie Rodriguez (Hyogo-ken, Sanda-shi 2005–2007)



## 2009 RMJETAA Board and Meeting Members

Nick Fabrizio, Cami Cacciatore, Stephen Cacciatore, John McMillen

Cathy Ishida, Kim Butler, Jess Wilcox, Yumi Yamagata

Katherine Buranapiyawong, Jessica Oppenheim, Sam Goodman



# Recent Events

## 2009 Shinnenkai

As usual, the Shinnenkai was held at the International House on the DU campus on Sunday, February 8th, and this year it seemed everyone and their brother came. It was a time to say goodbye to the woes of having left Japan as well as welcome the opportunity to re-enrich our lives through the common experience of Japanese culture and food.

Speaking of food, this year saw the consumption of a record amount of sushi, which disappeared in what seemed an instant. Good food never lasts long. Next everyone gathered around the main room for a little after-lunch shamisen. The performer played a selection of songs in different styles, all with their own unique tunings. In the final folk tune, he even had the crowd sing along with the chorus.

Following the shamisen groove was a break to socialize, a chance to reminisce about old and new times in our second home and find new avenues to pursue common interest in all things Japanese. This being somewhat less than stimulating for the younger generation, the organizers came prepared with a table stocked with origami paper.

A little later, everyone was welcomed around the main room again to witness an inspired performance by Taiko with Toni. Three members of the ensemble were there, and they kicked things off by giving a brief history of taiko in the Denver area, followed by the U.S. as a whole. Then it was time to drop a beat. Several of their pieces were even composed by the team members themselves. All the JETs and FOJs cheered excitedly throughout the performance, especially for the youngest member who incorporated his yo-yoing into one of their numbers. It was quite an act to follow, but they also had volunteers from the audience come up and try out the drums afterwards.

Finally, ending the party with a bang, came the long-awaited raffle. There were beautiful gift bags for a number of lucky attendees. Even the kids were rewarded for their patience over the long, but fun afternoon. It was another successful shinnenkai, which undoubtedly will lead to another successful year.

—John McMillen (Maruoka, Fukui Prefecture 2006–2008)



# Sing into Spring

## Satisfied Sushi Singer

RMJETAA held its annual Sing into Spring on Friday, May 20 in the Highlands neighborhood of Denver at Sushi Hai. The event gives people, including former and future JETs and friends of JETs, a chance to sample the flavors of raw Japanese cuisine and then demonstrate their vocal stylings, usually after imbibing generously.

I spent the months before the event in much anticipation as I hadn't partaken in karaoke since returning to the U.S. My excitement to get my sing on was mixed with a bit of anxiety because I knew that karaoke here is not quite the same as in Japan or China, where they take it upon themselves to protect innocent bystanders from the screams and yells of ordinary people trying to make, or at least imitate, music by enclosing the would-be singers in a room that could well become their own audio prison. Here, however, karaoke is set up in an "America's Got Talent" atmosphere where singers perform for, or force into submission, the entire bar. I had sung U.S. karaoke once before in Florida. I was there to introduce a couple of friends of mine who were both musical artists and somehow got pulled up to the front of the restaurant to sing Backstreet Boys' "I Want It That Way". I learned quickly that singing in the car with the radio does not always equal being able to sing a song on your own.

In Japan, I was a big proponent of karaoke, always joining friends and colleagues at the karaoke box. I was looking forward to reliving my karaoke experiences here in the U.S. I hoped they would have some of the Japanese songs that I knew, so I could share a little bit of my nostalgia with the audience. I was relieved of this hope by Jessica Oppenheim on the way to the event, when she informed me that most karaoke deejays don't have any Japanese songs. After drying my tears, I started the car and continued down the road, which I am sure made the line of drivers waiting behind me on I-25 very happy.

This year's Sing into Spring was held at a quaint little place in Denver called Sushi Hai. Leading up to the event, I wondered what the Hai in Sushi Hai meant, and after spending the evening there, I still don't know what it's supposed to mean. Anyway, the restaurant has a nice atmosphere and even gives an air of prestige (No, not the Hugh Jackman and Christian Bale type) to those who enter as their entrance signifies that they know the geographic location of the restaurant. However, finding the restaurant is not the entire trick. Navigating the

labyrinth that composes the full restaurant/bar to find your friends is the icing on the prestige cake. The RMJETAA function was strategically located in a VIP-like section of the bar around the billiards tables and in front of the restrooms. This location must have been chosen to ensure that any people desiring to attend the event who got lost in the labyrinth would find it upon locating the restrooms. The "VIP" area was also strategically located slightly above the rest of the bar no doubt so that we could look down on the masses of people trying to fight their way in, if we so chose. Ok, maybe it wasn't that prestigious, but it was a great choice of venue.

Several trays of sushi and sashimi supplemented by edamame, gyoza, and tempura were elegantly laid out on a table for people to drool over until the invisible barrier holding them at bay was removed by RMJETAA's president, Stephen Cacciatore, who opened the ceremony with a brief explanation of the event and a thank you to the attendees (I would love to give a detailed description of the sushi and sashimi, but whether it was due to the low lighting, my place near the back of the line, or the dizziness caused by my severe hunger pangs, I can't really remember too much about how the food looked. I can verify, however, that it was delicious). Once it was clear that it was open season on the food, the people lined up to set the Guinness Book of World Records on how fast they could make several hundred dollars worth of sushi disappear. Thankfully, especially for the people at the back of the line, RMJETAA collected \$5 from each person attending so that more sushi could be ordered if the initial offering was insufficient. This was inevitable, but Jessica was able to fend off the hungry hoards long enough to put in the second order.

By the time the sushi was gone, half-empty stomachs and pints full of ale had put most people into the mood of carrying on conversations with people they knew, and even people they didn't. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw it. The bar staff were setting up the karaoke booth. The time had come. I managed to procure a karaoke book of songs from one of the billiards tables. Unfortunately, it was organized by song title, so I had to arrange a trade with another table that had a book organized by artist. They had a list of demands, but I promptly ignored it, took their book, and deposited mine. I think everything happened so fast that they didn't realize how they had been duped. Back at my table, I scoured the pages of the book looking for a song that would please the crowd. Celine Dion? No, this wasn't the usual Japanese crowd

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that would be transfixed by the Canadian diva's lyrics. Oasis? No, there weren't any Brits that would appreciate it. Michael Jackson? I didn't want to find out if anyone would appreciate that. I finally settled on Hootie and the Blowfish, which was my warm-up at karaoke nights in Japan. The song doesn't traverse too many octaves, which makes it easy on the vocal cords.

I quickly jotted my selection down on a slip of paper and handed it to the karaoke deejay. She informed me that my song was about 20<sup>th</sup> on the waiting list. I was shocked, but I'm a patient man, so I grabbed a seat and prepared to wait it out. I passed some of the time by playing billiards with Sam Goodman, some of it playing games with my used chopsticks, and most of it by cheering on my fellow karaoke-ers. A trick I learned in Japan was to cheer and whistle for people singing when they were struggling or their sound was getting lost among conversation. Apparently, this is one of those things that is trans-cultural as it seemed to spur others in the crowd to do the same and encouraged the singers.

As the night wore on, people from the party gradually made their way out of the bar in groups of twos and threes. After saying goodbye to a few of the people that I came with, I realized that I was one of the last people from the party left to uphold the RMJETAA reputation, luckily for those who left. When I checked with the karaoke deejay, my song had jumped from 20<sup>th</sup> to next in line. The people who left had either just missed out on the greatest performance of their karaoke lives or had just escaped with their eardrums intact. The rest of the night was a combination of karaoke songs and deejay grooves that turned the bar into our own private dance party. As I walked out of the bar and into the light of a new day, the bar staff said, "Thanks for coming", but in my mind I heard "Arigatou gozaimasu!"

—Nick Fabrizio (Miyakojima-shi, Okinawa-ken 2002-2007)



Nick says "Hmmmmm...."

**See you  
next  
year!**

## Regional Conference

*RMJETAA vice president James Barron attended the first regional conference for the central United States in Kansas City (MO/KS), March 6–8. Following is his report of the event.*

The conference was organized by Heartland JETAA. I believe there were about 30 of us, and it was a really good time. There were people from Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Texas, Kentucky, and several states. There were quite a few subchapters represented as well as the main chapters. There was even a girl who is trying to start a subchapter in Waco, Texas and has only 9 members including herself at the moment. So there was quite a large variety represented. The accommodations were nice, with a chef making us breakfast including pancakes, omelets, french toast, and other goodies. The evening dinners were quite nice including Midwestern BBQ (yum!) and more sushi than we could eat.

All the talks were on Saturday, and they covered a lot of topics. We talked about recruitment, working with other Japanese related groups, and so on.

Some groups have been doing volunteer/community outreach. Nothing terribly major, but they would line up to cheer the Japanese runners in a marathon and a few other small things. I think branching out to more community involvement might be a good thing to try.

Status of CMS (North American JETAA database): The tech is mostly done. Just a few cosmetics need to be ironed out. The next stage is a beta test where they will ask officers like us to enter ourselves in. Once bugs are found and fixed, the system will go live. There is only one significant snag. The database must have a legal entity that owns it, and the British Colombian JETAA has decided that it no longer wants that responsibility. So they are looking for a new group. Warren volunteered Heartland JETAA, but since it is currently in Canada, moving it to the U.S. or having a U.S. mirror might pose some legal issues. But Paul (the man currently in charge of CMS, but not for long) says he thinks this will get resolved quickly.

Changes to GIA money (CLAIR) are coming. Currently, we have to get budgetary permission from New York. But New York must first ask Japan before approving. So we get two vicious cycles. We ask for money from New York, they tell us what we need to fix in our request, and we fix and continue until they think it's good. Then they go through the same malarkey with

Japan. So the proposed new system is that Japan will just give a fixed amount to each region, and the regions can autonomously decide who gets what. So we only get one crazy cycle instead of two. This should speed up the reception of funds. Also, we will be getting a new category for spending if we choose to use it. The purpose is to fund working with Japanese communities in Japan. So for instance, if we wanted to do something with Yamagata or Takayama, we could use it for that. The details are not finalized, but they are supposed to be finalized and in place soon. Most of the rules will stay the same. And the forms will largely stay the same. The biggest changes will be for the New York office and not the chapters.

We also talked about non-profit status, of course. Warren has a CPA/attorney who specializes in non-profits working 10 hours pro-bono and then a small fee afterwards to get a solid proposal going. They want to be able to get something solid enough for this year's national conference for a vote. The New York guys seemed to be very much behind this and the attitude by everyone was that this is going to happen. With the economy the way it is and CLAIR apparently being a political hot topic in Japan (politicians are complaining that it is a waste of money), our funding is going to go away someday, and that day will probably be within just a few years. The current idea is to create a parallel organization that's 501c6 that will collect member dues. Something on the order of \$5 to \$10 a year. This money will then be doled out to the chapters in much the same way as we get funding from Japan today. Also, all the chapters will then need to become either c3 or c6. They want to create a guide for all the chapters to help them figure all of this out. Also, this would solve the CMS ownership issue. It could be under the parallel organization. There is also talk of adding benefits to this organization to make it like an AARP or AAA. We could get insurance, for example. This would be especially great for returning JETs without jobs.

No one has officially stepped up to do the national conference this year, but the delegate from Chicago said he would discuss it with his group. So it may be in Chicago this year. If not, it may not happen. That would be the first time in our history.

Warren wants this regional conference to be annual. So he wants someone else to host next year and all eyes were on me as we were the next biggest organization in the region. Hmmm...



## 2009 JET Program Interviews

Another round of JET Program interviews came and went this past February. We had a 30% increase in interviewees this year through the Denver Consulate. Both myself and my co-worker, Yumi Yamagata, like to pretend that the increase is solely due to the hard work, energy, and sweat we put into recruiting in our four-state area this past fall, but I think the economy might have pushed the numbers up as well. Most Japanese consulates across the U.S. saw an increase in applicants this year in general.

Interviews in Salt Lake City took place at the University of Utah's Conference Center on February 11th and the following week saw interviewees in Denver at the 17th Street Plaza Building in downtown Denver on February 18th and 19th. We saw graduating students and young professionals from all over the United States- the farthest one coming all the way from Hawaii! (They must have heard fabulous things about Denver, is all I can say. Hawaii sounds pretty good to me this time of year.)

Our panelists in Salt Lake City consisted of consulate staff members, professors from both University of Utah and Brigham Young University and JET Alumni from the area. We interviewed about 20 JET hopefuls in Salt Lake and nearly 100 folks in Denver this year. In Denver, our panels consisted of the same make up, but we had professors from Colorado State University, Denver University, US Air Force Academy and professor emeritus from University of Wisconsin. We had a great crew of RMJET Alumni help out as panelists this year, with many folks acting as panelists for the first time. And we had our reliable annuals of people who (luckily) joyfully serve as panelists year after year. Without this great mix of people making up our various interview teams, we would never be able to execute these interviews successfully. So, I extend my sincere thanks to each and every one of them!

Last year, I served as a panelist, but this year I put my skills to work in the reception area along with volunteer Kevin Rehman, which gave me the chance to chat with the interviewees before and after their interviews. It was great to field questions and find out what their concerns and curiosities were going into the interviews. It was two days of living in the past as both Kevin and I shared our experiences and lives as ALTs in Japan. Hopefully the candidates didn't want to run from the room as we relayed stories of the mountains of snow in Hokkaido and process of going from the town gaijin to everyday

town community member. We got a lot of great questions from candidates about life in Japan ranging from school classroom sizes to driving on the opposite side of the road to what kind of foreign foods they'd be able to find (good luck with this one!). They have no idea that this is the least of their worries! They should be asking questions like, How many times a week will I be expected to drink copious amounts of alcohol and how many extra livers should I bring with me as back-up? or How many speeches should I have planned so that when I'm put on the spot I can pull one out of my back pocket? But, I digress.

All in all, we had a very professional group of panelists this year and we are hopeful that we have an equally professional group of JETs from this area to send off to Japan this summer.

— Jessyca Wilcox, JET Program Coordinator



# From the Consulate General of Japan at Denver...

## Community Outreach!

The Consulate currently has a school visit program where JET Alumnus and JET Program Coordinator, Jessyca Wilcox, visits schools along with Yumi Yamagata, Consulate Attache, to teach students about Japan, Japanese culture and share her experiences on JET. These requests come mostly from elementary schools, but also come from junior high and high schools. On rare occasion we also get requests from Girlscout and Boyscout troops and similar groups. The demand for school visits have slowly been increasing and we would like to engage JET Alumni in this type of Japanese cultural outreach. If you are interested in being on our contact list for possible school visits and this type of community engagement, please forward your contact information to:

**Jessyca Wilcox at: [jet.program.denver@gmail.com](mailto:jet.program.denver@gmail.com)**

## Japanese Government Scholarships

Mombukagakusho , the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), offers five different scholarships for non-Japanese nationals wishing to study in Japan. The Consulate General of Japan at Denver oversees this scholarship program for our four-state region (CO, UT, NM, WY). These are competitive, but excellent scholarships offered for the following areas:

- **Japanese Studies-** offers applicants the opportunity to spend a year continuing their study of Japanese language or culture at one of several universities in Japan.
- **Teacher Training-** offers US primary or secondary school teachers (or academic staff at teacher training institutions) the opportunity to study at a Japanese university for professional improvement.
- **Research-** offers applicants the opportunity to spend 18 or 24 months conducting independent research under a Japanese professor. Any field of study is eligible for the scholarship, but applicants must find a Japanese professor willing to supervise their research. However, this does not guarantee that the applicant will be placed with that professor.
- **Professional Training-** offers applicants the opportunity to spend up to 3 years at a Japanese professional training school studying one of several fields. (see website for list of fields)
- **Undergraduate Studies-** offers applicants the opportunity to spend up to 5 years at a Japanese college or university as an undergraduate degree student.

If you or someone you know may be interested in any of these scholarships, please apply or encourage them to apply! Applications are due far in advance of the potential departure date, so look into these great scholarships now! JET Alumni are often looked upon favorably, having demonstrated a sincere and genuine interest in and dedication to the US-Japan relationship through their time on the JET Program.

Please visit the following webpage for more information and applications:

[www.denver.us.emb-japan.go.jp/EN/jet.htm#scholarship](http://www.denver.us.emb-japan.go.jp/EN/jet.htm#scholarship)

If you have any questions regarding the application or the scholarships in general, please contact:

**Jessyca Wilcox at: [jet.program.dever@gmail.com](mailto:jet.program.dever@gmail.com)**



# RMJETAA Happy Hours

Rocky Mountain JET Alumni Association will be sponsoring two happy hours in coordination with the JET Program Office for this year's JET participants and local JET alumni. We will have one in Boulder and in Denver.

The purpose of these happy hours are to give this year's JET participants an informal venue to meet each other, meet RMJET alumni, get a better idea of what to expect and ask all those questions they've been dying to ask, but don't feel comfortable doing so in a more professional environment. You all have been on JET and have more wisdom than you might guess when it comes to those little things in life like, where to find oatmeal, what Japanese students are like, what to expect from your JTE's, and how to work your microwave/toaster/grill/oven contraption (or that such a thing even exists!). Plus, it's a great opportunity for RMJET alumni to connect with each other to reminisce about the good old days!

Date	Time	Establishment	Address
<b>June 19</b> (Friday)	<b>5pm</b> (Happy Hours 4-6:30pm)	<b>B.side Lounge</b> www.thebsidelounge.com	2017 13 <sup>th</sup> St. (between Walnut & Spruce) Boulder, CO TEL: 303.473.9463
<b>July 2</b> (Thursday)	<b>5pm</b> (Happy Hours 4:30-6:30pm)	<b>My Brother's Bar</b> (no website)	2376 15th St Denver, CO 80202 TEL: 303.455.9991

**RMJETAA will cover a part of the food & drink cost. You do not need to RSVP.**

You are welcome to arrive at any time (which is why I posted the happy hours for each establishment), but we will have an "official" start time of 5pm. If you can't make it until later or want to come early, that is perfectly fine!

If you have any questions, please contact: Jessyca Wilcox, RMJETAA Treasurer and JET Program Coordinator at: [JET.Program.Denver@gmail.com](mailto:JET.Program.Denver@gmail.com) or 303.297.5335.

## Upcoming Japan & JET Related Events

Date & Time	Event	Location	Website
<b>June 27</b> 9:30-1:00	<b>JET Q&amp;A Session</b>	<b>Consulate General of Japan</b> 1225 17 <sup>th</sup> Street Suite 3000 Denver, CO 80202 TEL: 303.297.5335	Please RSVP to: <a href="mailto:JET.Program.Denver@gmail.com">JET.Program.Denver@gmail.com</a> for more information if you would like to attend
<b>June 27</b> all day	<b>Sakura-matsuri</b>	<b>Downtown Denver</b> between Lawrence and Larimer, and 19th and 20th Streets. <a href="#">View map</a>	<a href="http://www.tsdbt.org/cherryblossom">www.tsdbt.org/cherryblossom</a>

# RMJETAA Stories ~

Now that the RMJETAA newsletter is electronic and we are no longer limited to the printed format, we would like to extend an invitation to you to share some of your personal stories and experiences with us. Any articles submitted by non-board members will be entered into a quarterly drawing for a \$25 gift certificate. To submit a story or article of interest, please send an e-mail to [newsletter@rmjetalumni.org](mailto:newsletter@rmjetalumni.org).

## “To Whom It May Concern: JET Coordinator for Hire”

A little over a month ago I embarked on a 4-day drive across the country, through the Great Smokey Mountains—the only American mountain range I’d ever experienced—across the plains of Missouri and Kansas and through to my new home of Denver, CO. Now, while I’d experienced snow and mountains in Japan, nothing could have prepared me for the awe I would be struck with upon traversing the Rocky Mountains. Wow!

But I digress... In spite of being the JET coordinator at the Miami Consulate and loving my life as a true Floridian, I am a traveler at heart and happy to have relocated to beautiful Colorado. (With the exception of eastern Colorado, which seems to me to be an extension of Kansas.) While I came out here without a job, I feel confident in my investments in the St. Ives lotion company because I’m going through that stuff like water here! I’ve gone from 90% humidity to single-digit humidity and am convinced it’s only a matter of time before I wake up as a Julie-bouillon, desperate for some hot water to revive me. Dryness aside, after a few weekends out hiking in the mountains I have to say I’m quickly falling in love. While I will always love gazing out over the crystal blue waters and white sand beaches of Florida, the majestic splendor of the nature you have in your backyard here is wonderful.

On a separate note, while it’s been about two years since I’ve returned from JET, I find Japan still present in most aspects of my life. Upon returning I became the JET coordinator in Miami and now I’ve relocated to Denver and have had the privilege of meeting some of the Rocky Mountain JET Alumni members at the last couple gatherings. No matter where I am, be it superficial, saline-filled Miami or rugged Denver, JET Alumni are always a great bunch of down-to-earth, fun, and interesting people who I enjoy meeting. JETAA is something that many probably take for granted—I know I certainly did from time to time in Florida—but as a transplant, I’ve come to appreciate it even more. (By the way, if any of you know of any job openings for sharp former Consular employees like myself, please do send them along and I’ll love Colorado and RMJETAA even more! Seriously.)

All jokes and sales pitches for work aside, I’d like to say “Hello” and “I’m fine, thank you, and you?” to all of you. I’ll see you at the next RMJETAA gathering. Just look for the girl coveting the craft beer.

— Julie Rodriguez (Hyogo-ken, Sanda-shi 2005–2007)

## Winter Haikus

Oh, Efficiency  
Japanese lips sing you praise  
Through open windows

Four syllables can  
Express my only real wish  
It’s insulation

Each snowflake unique  
A miracle to behold  
But not in my room

Americans think  
Walls are made to keep things out  
Like the f-ing cold

The foreigners who  
Might complain about the cold  
Are all frozen stiff

The heater struggles  
But there are holes in the walls  
Someone get on that

Japanese hate heat  
All summer they banish it  
And all winter too

You are always warm  
Hours we spend together  
Precious *kotatsu*

— Van Milton  
(Tsuyama Okayama-  
ken 2008-?)



## My New Doctor

All kinds of thoughts floated through my head as I waited to board a plane heading to Tokyo. I felt nervous anticipation, excitement, a hunger for new experiences, bittersweet memories, and an adrenaline rush. I was thrilled that I was about to embark on a new journey in life and that I would be teaching English to high school students in Japan! “We live in a wonderful world that is full of beauty, charm, and adventure. There is no end to the adventures we can have if only we seek them with our eyes open,” said Jawaharal Nehru. Moving to Japan and starting on a new path through life was truly going to be an adventure that I would never forget. I was ready to go to the Land of the Rising Sun! The JET Program would change my world forever, but challenges lay ahead. I would have to adapt to a different culture, food, customs, and a language I did not know. I was going to be living in Osaka, Japan and I knew that it was going to be very different from my home in Denver, Colorado. I knew I could manage most of the changes, but was a bit worried about how I’d communicate with the most important person of all, my new diabetes doctor in Japan.

Learning another language is always strenuous, but add that to moving to a country where you do not even know how to ask, “Can I have that to go?” and it brings on a whole new challenge. In the past, I had traveled to many countries and learned the basic phrases in the local language, but living in Japan as a resident was going to be an entirely different experience. Mark Twain once said, “The existing phrasebooks are inadequate. They are well enough as far as they go, but when you fall down and skin your leg they don’t tell you what to say.” I knew it was going to be difficult living in another country, especially because of the language barrier. But, since I was placed in a big city, I thought I could still communicate with people using English and the few phrases of Japanese that I knew. I was in for a huge surprise when I went to the hospital for my first doctor’s appointment and no one spoke any English. I could not even ask the front desk staff where the doctor’s room was located. Luckily, my liaison and sister were with me and were able to assist me in translating Japanese to English.

Even before I arrived in Japan, I had made arrangements to visit a diabetes doctor, Dr. Tanaka, in one of Osaka’s big public hospitals. I was happy to learn that Dr. Tanaka spoke English, so I would be able to communicate with him. I knew it would take me time to learn how to say, “I have a fever,” in Japanese, so until I increased my

knowledge of Japanese, I planned to speak in English. My father and sister were visiting me at the time and decided to accompany me to the hospital for the appointment. In addition, the Board of Education liaison accompanied me to ensure that my first doctor visit went smoothly. As I approached the hospital front desk with my liaison, she spoke quickly to the receptionist in Japanese and then explained to me that my appointment would begin at 11:00 AM. The hospital staff informed me that I would have to wait for a long time to see the doctor (anywhere from one to three hours) and they gave me a pager which would vibrate when it was my turn. As my father, sister, liaison, and I sat waiting in the lobby, we decided to have lunch in the sandwich/coffee shop inside of the hospital. Just as we ordered our drinks and lunch and settled in for the long haul, the pager began beeping and vibrating and it was time for us to go to see the doctor right away!

All four of us went inside the doctor’s office to visit Dr. Tanaka, but to our surprise, a Dr. Hosoi greeted us! We were all confused as to why I was meeting Dr. Hosoi and not Dr. Tanaka. Through various translations from the nurse to the liaison and my sister, we learned that my doctor would be Dr. Hosoi from then on and not the elusive Dr. Tanaka. I had built up an image of Dr. Tanaka in my mind for over a month. I thought he would be a short, slim, and older Japanese man with a deep understanding of how to best treat diabetic patients. To my amazement, I was introduced to Dr. Hosoi who was younger, taller, and wore glasses, not at all like the doctor who I had imagined. My new doctor greeted me nicely and I finally relaxed as we discussed my medical history. Dr. Hosoi spoke English well and I was relieved that I would be able to speak to him with confidence. In addition, Dr. Hosoi also had a deep understanding of the best treatment options for diabetic patients. Somehow we were able to communicate across language barriers through translations, and I forgot my worries.

The one thing I love about Osaka is its people! Osakans are some of the friendliest people on Earth (and that is not an overstatement) and they will go out of their way to help you. Even though I am still learning Japanese, they make an effort to speak to me in English and elementary Japanese. I appreciate how they go out of their way to assist me when I need help. I now visit the hospital without my liaison, but the hospital staff makes an effort to assist me by speaking to me in English and Japanese.

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Helen Keller once said, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” I believe that my experience in moving to Japan and learning Japanese has been one of the biggest adventures of my life. Every day living in Osaka, I experience a new adventure, whether it is visiting the doctor’s office, traveling to Kyoto to see Nanzenji Temple, or making new Japanese friends.

I always dreamt about living in Japan ever since my sister worked as an ALT in the mountains of Gifu prefecture five years ago, but it is surreal to actually be experiencing Japan for myself. My sister frequently sent me photos and e-mails describing the festivals she attended, the beautiful scenery (including pictures of astonishing cherry blossoms), and the awe-inspiring temples. I visited my sister while she was living in Japan and since then had wanted to participate in the JET Program. During my train travels through Honshu, I explored the important and beautiful temples of Kyoto, admired the scenery of the Japanese Alps in Hida, stared at the skyscrapers in Nagoya and Tokyo, and felt the warmth of the Japanese people. I enjoyed meeting the teachers and students at my sister’s school, in northern Gifu-ken. At that point in time, I did not know that one day I would move to Osaka and meet amazing people and teach English to great students.

I truly enjoy listening to and understanding people, and I hope to gain more knowledge of the Japanese culture, customs, and traditions by studying and learning Japanese. As I learn Japanese, I will increase my confidence in speaking and will gain more of an understanding about my surroundings. I have already signed up for Japanese classes at the local international center and am learning new words and phrases every day. In the future, I hope to be able to speak to the front desk staff at the hospital on my own and explain who I need to see and for what reason, without substitute hand gestures and broken Japanese phrases.

Mark Twain once said, “Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” I know that 20 years from now when I look back on the past, I will be happy that I lived in Osaka and discovered my passion for teaching English to students in Japan.

As I stand looking at the clear night sky and the beautiful skyline and bright lights of Osaka from my balcony, I cannot imagine my life any other way. Every day I set

out to my high schools and enjoy teaching the students English. I look forward to seeing my students smiling faces and those who are eager to learn English. Although I face new challenges and difficulties, I also am learning how to overcome these and discovering new things every day!

— Monica Narang (Osaka-shi 2008—)



# RMJETAA 2009 – 2010 Calendar of Meetings and Events

Although RMJETAA meetings are scheduled for the second Sunday of each month at 10:00 a.m., dates, times, and agendas are subject to change. Please visit our website at [www.rmjetalumni.org](http://www.rmjetalumni.org) or **Facebook** for updates and announcements.

Quarter 1	April, May, June
Quarter 2	July, August, September
Quarter 3	October, November, December
Quarter 4	January, February, March

<b>Meetings</b>	<b>September</b>	<b>September 13 (TBD)</b>	
<b>July</b>	<b>July 12 @ Fluid Coffee Bar</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>October 11 (TBD)</b>
<b>August</b>	<b>August 9 @ Fluid Coffee Bar</b>	<b>Novemeber</b>	<b>November 8 (TBD)</b>
		<b>December</b>	<b>December 13 (TBD)</b>

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