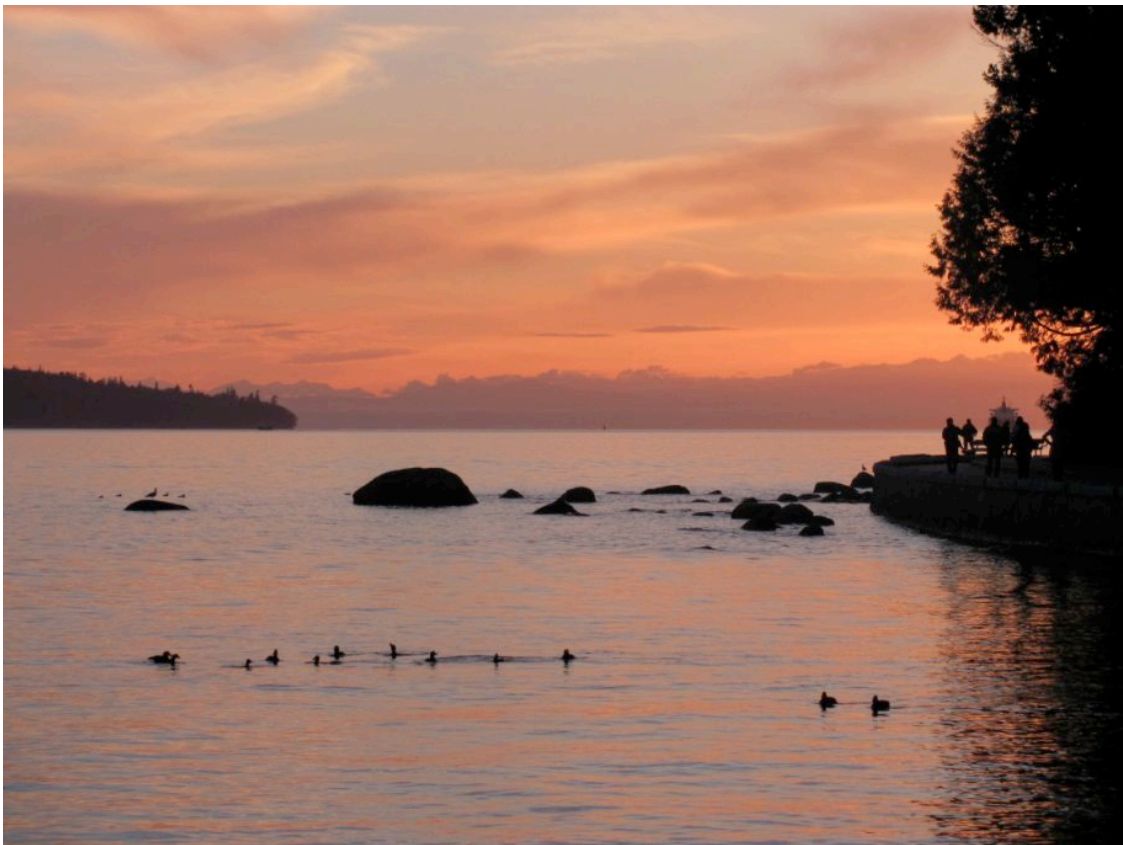


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Volume One

Vancouver Memories: A Certain Attraction



Wendy Bullen Stephenson



APRIL # 1—Leaving Home

Finally I'm leaving! Fortunately Dad hadn't offered to drive me the whole way to Narita Airport. I had heard enough of his disapproval.

"How can you postpone studying architecture now, Erika? Having done your BA first, you are already too old."

"But we've talked about this so many times, Dad. I will do architecture when I get back."

"By the time you get through all that, no one will hire you as an architect or want you as a wife."

"If I don't go abroad now, I may never get another chance."

"So what? You already speak excellent English. And look at me. I'm successful, and I've never set foot outside of Asia."

"Studying internationally was essential to Mom and Yoko becoming who they are."

"So that's the reason you're going away? To find your identity?"

"That's not the reason for me. But choosing to live away from home must do that for some."

"What did going abroad really do for your mother and your sister except make them out of place in Japan?"

I didn't dare respond. I was thinking that the unusual circumstance that enabled Mom to study in England didn't give her time, on her return, to choose a husband she truly wanted.

"Look at your sister. Was she really studying business those four years? She ends up a designer preoccupied by some Englishman back in Britain."

While silently acknowledging that studying overseas had disadvantaged Mom and Yoko regarding men, I stated, "Yoko learned enough about business to launch her own clothing line."

"Fashion! Who needs that? She should have trained in electronics to work with me."

"But she needed some choices, Dad."

"Choices! What are you talking about?"

I bit my tongue to keep from replying.

"I just hope you don't return with grandiose, Western ideas like your mother did—thinking every minute about expanding the business when she should have been at home."

I felt impelled to say, “I know how much Mom enjoyed designing her new premises—doing the sketches and floor plans for Mobility Elite.”

“She should have left all that up to her brother.”

More silence. I was struggling to keep Dad from dampening my enthusiasm. Besides, he was driving so aggressively, as usual, that I just wanted to get out of his car. Yes, I was relieved when we reached Mom’s building. Stepping out at curbside, I leaned over and said goodbye. Dad responded as if I would be back next week rather than next year.

I pulled my large, silver suitcase behind me. At the front entrance, an elderly woman on two canes was struggling with the door.

“Oh, here. We have an automatic button for you.”

“Ah, thank you. I didn’t see that,” the senior said, as the door swung open.

“May I have someone show you what you are looking for?” I offered.

“Yes, a bath chair.”

“Certainly. Mr. Tamaki, could you assist this lady? She would like to look at bath chairs.”

“Of course, Miss Yamashiro.”

“Thanks, so much dear,” she said to me as she headed off with the sales assistant.

My daypack, slung over my shoulder, was pinching my hair. I walked past wheelchairs, walkers, dressing aids. Reaching the elevator, I adjusted my pack and my purse that was heavy with two architecture books that I’d decided to bring along at the last moment. Stepping out onto the mezzanine overlooking the retail showroom, I saw a scene that was so familiar, because I had drawn it many times for my art portfolio.

Will I miss this place? Will I manage in Canada despite never having travelled outside of Japan alone?

Passing the open staircase, I reached the first door: “Yoko Yamashiro, ChicLooks.” My sister rents this office as Mom gives her the space at a reduced rate. A mannequin, dramatically dressed, and accompanied by Yoko’s original sketches, was in the display window even though there is no retail traffic on this floor. I am still amazed at my sister’s sophisticated-looking drawings, considering she has a business degree whereas I was the one who took fine art.

I passed two more office doors—those of my uncle, who is my mom’s partner in Mobility Elite, and my cousin, who serves as manager of international sales.

I parked my suitcase and daypack beside the door of Mom's office with its glass front providing a view of the showroom. I was relieved to see Mom and Yoko inside.

Yoko, who is 25—two years older than me—was looking stunning as usual. Around her I always feel too casually dressed. But comfort is important when you are going to be sitting on a plane for ten hours, right? Yoko was wearing one of her own designs, a bold black and red suit. With buttons low on the jacket, it revealed considerable bareness despite her permed hair clustered around her shoulders. She was holding a black leather purse and impatiently shaking her keys.

Mom was talking on the phone. "The promotional material for those electric scooters has already gone out. We simply must have them next week."

She turned and smiled at me. Yoko pointed to the clock that showed 6:10.

Yoko whispered, "Erika, aren't you going to check your desk again?"

I smiled because I'd cleaned every inch of it the previous day. I was surprised to see a proof there for a layout of an advertisement I'd done recently. I approved it and put it in Mom's in-tray.

Finally Mom put down the phone and took a hurried sip of tea.

"So Dad's not coming?" Yoko asked.

"No. He dropped me off."

"He has to prepare for his conference in Osaka tomorrow," Mom said.

Yoko commented, "I should have known. When did he ever drive any of us to the bullet train let alone to the airport?"

Yoko disapproves of Dad's lack of devotion to the family.

"He regrets that he can't come," stated Mom, always the peacekeeper in the family.

"And Kiri?" I asked of my younger sister.

"No, in the end she decided she couldn't cancel a master class. If it had been a regular piano lesson, she definitely would have come with us."

That twigged a memory for me, and some guilt.

"Now I remember why I didn't see you off, Yoko."

"When I left for London?"

"Yes."

"You mean besides being too choked up to say goodbye?"

"Four years did loom as an incredibly long time to be without my older sister," I admitted.

"So what was the other reason?"

"I had a flute rehearsal for that AIDS benefit concert. Remember?"

"I'm surprised you've figured that out. That was six years ago."

"Six years.... It's hard to believe," Mom commented gathering up her things.

Leaving Mom's office, the three of us headed back toward the elevator. Dashing up the staircase, Uncle Kenji, called out, "Erika!..."

"Hi!" I responded in surprise.

"I'm so glad I made it back in time to see off my prettiest niece."

"Uncle Kenji!" Yoko challenged him.

"Oops!" He smiled sheepishly.

We all laughed.

"Yes, right. One of my three prettiest nieces."

"Your only three nieces...."

Facing me, he remarked, "We're going to miss you around here, Beautiful. You know you can have your job back any time."

"Thank you, Uncle Kenji. I'm going to miss you too and Aunt Mieko, Hisako, and Akira."

"I'm here! I'm here!" cried my cousin Akira, taking two stairs at a time, his jacket flying open.

"Hey, you did get back!" I responded. "Last night you said you probably wouldn't be able to."

"With supreme effort...and only just," he laughed. "The traffic is wretched."

"So we must be on our way," Yoko stated.

"Of course, of course," Uncle Kenji commented. "Just don't go changing too much on us, Erika. I'd like to keep you exactly as you are."

All of a sudden I felt like I was going to weep.

Seeing this, Akira, who is three years older than me, patted me on the shoulder quipping, "We'll miss you, Kid. Things won't be the same for us."

Managing to smile at him, I commented, "Especially if you become a famous rock star, Akira,"

"Not likely while keeping my day job."

"And we need him in his day job," Mom stated.

"So you'll be okay with your luggage?" Uncle Kenji asked, obviously wanting to do something for me.

"Yes, I'll be fine."

"Take care of yourself," he said, lingering. Was he feeling that he might never see me again as the same person?

"And don't forget to keep that diary that you've talked about," Akira added.

"I will."

Yoko said, "Now we really must be on our way."

Mom pressed the elevator button firmly. The door opened. Yoko guided me inside.

In unison, everyone cheered, "Goodbye! Goodbye!"

"Send us news when you get there."

"I will."

The elevator door closed behind us.

"Maybe by now, rush hour traffic will be settling down."

"Mom, since when has Tokyo's traffic ever settled down?"

Yoko challenged.

Smiling at me, Mom asked, "So, how are you feeling?"

"Maybe a little nervous...but great actually."

"You should be. I'd be thrilled if I were going abroad again as a student," she added.

"Yeah, Eriko San. You know I'm envious," Yoko admitted, "although I'd choose London again rather than Canada."

"But we've heard such good things about Canada," Mom said. "And with Vancouver's lovely, long springs, April should be a good time to arrive."

"I hope so."

I smiled feeling a pang of excitement.



Above photograph courtesy of Yuki Yajima, Tokyo, Japan



APRIL # 2—Arriving in Vancouver

Visuals: Photos of city from plane, from Burrard Bridge, of Beach Avenue, of West End apartments

Long flight. So glad when puffy, white clouds thinned to reveal blue ocean meeting green land. Vancouver at last! The plane banked steeply showing a view of harbour, mountains, beaches, and a river. The city looked small—worth coming so far for just this? We touched the runway. After the loud rush of air with brakes straining, the plane bounced and finally came to a stop.

I waited in line to go through customs—two young men in front of me—with a problem speaking in English—were questioned a lot. Officers went through all of their luggage. I feared they would do the same to me. I stood there clutching my passport, my acceptance letter from the school, and my homestay form stating: “Non-smoking, no pets, close to school. This host, Mary Henderson, a semi-retired art instructor, is kind, friendly, and helpful.” I worried that with this delay she might give up and return home without me.

Eventually I emerged from the automatic, glass doors into the arrivals area lined with groups and individuals straining to catch sight of their friends and family. How will I ever find her? I just hope she will recognize me from the photo I sent, if she received it.

I looked at the people holding up official school signs naming students being met. I found myself silently praying, “Please don’t let that one be her. And... not that one.”

But what about that woman wearing rather too much purple? Pleasant enough. Searching for someone. Yes, she was holding a sign with my name and school written in purple ink in western calligraphy. Good thing I learned to read handwriting!

“Erika?”

“Yes, hello.”

“Welcome to Canada,” Mary said, as she hugged me around the shoulders.

She seemed as shaken up as I was as she said, “Don’t worry I always get a little blurry-eyed when I meet a new homestay daughter.”

I apologized for keeping her waiting.

“Oh, that was one of the briefest delays I’ve ever had in meeting a homestay student.”

That comment made me feel better.

“If you’re as nice as you look, we should have a very good year together,” she added.

Mary apologized for her homemade sign saying she couldn’t locate the official one in her unexpected rush to meet a Korean student arriving half an hour before me—a last minute request by the school.

“Come and meet him,” she said, leading the way to where a tall, thin (moody-looking?) young man—probably a few years older than me—was standing alone with his luggage.

He didn’t say much when Mary introduced us. Nor did he respond when I asked what area of Korea he is from. I thought to myself, is he anti-social, shy, or does he just have very limited English?

My sister had told me that international language students tend to be relatively dynamic except for the young ones whose parents just want to get them out of the house. So has this guy’s parents banished him to Canada to avoid dealing with him for a while? Seems a little odd for that.

Mary guided us outside into cool air, fresher smelling than at home. It was raining lightly. We drove a long way on one street. Granville Street. Mary said it’s a main street. But it’s not a freeway.

Passed some beautiful, large, old homes made of wood and stone. Lots of trees along the route. That’s what struck me most: all the trees.

As we approached a bridge, the rain was gone and the sun finally came out. The city became clearly defined with white-topped mountains behind.

“Ah, so the weather finally cooperates,” Mary commented.



We headed over the bridge. Mary pointed to tall apartment buildings by ocean, forest, and beach—the West End, the area where she lives. We turned and drove along a tree-lined street following the shoreline. I was amazed at the size of some of the trees and the thick moss on them. Another noticeable thing: fancy cars. Imports cost a fortune in Japan—but they are everywhere here. Mary then drove along colourful commercial streets with one- and two-story buildings, restaurants mainly, on each side.

We dropped off the Korean guy (Bae, I think his name is) in front of a low-rise office building with a sculpture made of five-foot high, stacked, blue metal letters spelling “Love.” (A greeting? A command?) His homestay mother was waiting for him. He spoke simply again to thank Mary.



Closing the car door, he said to me, “See you at school.” Likely? How big is the school? Don’t want to seem conceited, but I doubt that we will be in same class. He doesn’t seem to speak much English.

Mary seemed to backtrack a few blocks and then parked in front of her apartment—a small building. I was surprised it isn’t a house. The brochure sent out by the school shows houses. But I had asked to stay downtown, and there don’t seem to be many houses around.

I struggled to get my large suitcase up the broad stairs (no elevator!) while Mary carried my daypack. The apartment has wide hallways with plants, tables, benches, and baby strollers. A mezzanine seating area has a ten-foot-tall plant, small rattan sofa and matching chair, and a tall sideboard that looks somewhat like an altar.

Mary's suite is on the top floor. Has high ceilings. Serenity and austerity apparently are not the goal (no tatami room). To me it seems comfortable, but Dad would go crazy! Looks and smells freshly cleaned, but a sign on the fridge says: "A spotless house signals a squandered life." I think that means being super clean wastes one's life energy.

Books overflow the bookcases and on the walls there are many art pieces, mostly by Mary. She told me they are hanging because she has no place to store them. There is a Canadian native print (like some I've seen in my textbooks on the history of Western art) hanging next to a Chinese calligraphy painting. And just inside the main door there is an alcove suitable for a small Buddhist shrine, but instead there is a large, open dictionary with a lamp beside it. There is also a dictionary in the bathroom!

(I'm mentioning all this, Yoko, because you told me to record my observations—the way you and Mom didn't document anything when you were abroad.)

The apartment building is on a hill so there is a thin strip of distant ocean visible from the dining room window. My room is spacious. A bowl of fruit and vase of daffodils were on the dresser for me. Mary says daffodils are her favourite flowers because they are among the first to emerge in the spring.

I must have been noticeably struck in seeing two beds in my room, because Mary reassured me that the room is just for me. Also a bit strange—the room has a TV set, but Mary said it is just for watching movies, as there is no cable. She said doesn't want American advertising being piped into her home. She reassured me that homestay students are so busy they don't have time for TV anyway and that chatting with her should make up for watching the news. She does talk a lot!

My bedroom belonged to Mary's daughter before she went away to university. She explained, "She works in Toronto now, Canada's largest city, five hours away by plane."

(Canada must be very wide.)

I explained that my favorite English teacher taught in Toronto briefly.

"Was she Canadian?"

"No. From England, but she had been on exchanges and encouraged me to study in Vancouver."

"Ah, generous of her."

"She told me that Vancouver is clean, safe, and has beautiful weather."

Mary laughed, "It was just raining when you landed!"

"Only lightly and just for the first few minutes."

"True, and actually we do usually have lovely summers."

I phoned home. Yoko answered. It felt good to hear her voice. I spoke briefly to avoid expense for Mary.

Then Mary and I sat down and had a sandwich and tea. She said something about dinner and supper that confused me, as I've forgotten the difference.

Mary lives by herself. She says she was only married briefly and that was in her twenties when her daughter was born. I've heard that there is a lot of divorce in Canada, so I am not surprised that she no longer has a husband.

Mary commented, "You speak English extremely well, and you have a slight British accent."

"When my dad isn't at home, my mom, sister, and I speak English. They have British accents because they completed their Bachelor's degrees in London."

"Really! When did they go there?"

"My sister returned two years ago. Mom was there in the 1970s."

"Really!"

"Yes, Mom had had a twin brother who was killed in a car crash when they were seventeen."

"Oh, dear! How tragic."

"Because her twin died, Mom's parents let her go overseas in his place, with her slightly older brother." (I can't believe I've told Mary this already!)

"So there was opportunity along with loss."

"Yes. Also my elder sister has a British boyfriend so he's had an influence."

"Yes, that would make a difference. Still, you will likely have a Canadian accent by end of the year."

"I'd like that."

"Are you going to keep a diary while you are in Vancouver?"

I was surprised at this question but admitted that I hope to. "My mom and sister have encouraged me because they regret having no record of their time overseas."

"In the past, I have encouraged my homestay students to keep a journal. What about a visual journal since you are good in art?"

"I'm not sure how much time I'll have, but I do intend to take photos and collect mementos too."

"Good idea. Sometimes I keep a visual journal for a few weeks at a time and I am always sorry when I stop."

Mary retrieved a couple of her journals from books stacked on a shelf. We looked at them together.

In setting them aside she commented, "When I stop keeping a journal in a committed way, I feel empty...like I have not lived those days."

"That's how I felt after I stopped drawing almost every day for my architectural portfolio...."

"You feel like you've lost those unrecorded days."

"Exactly."

All of a sudden I felt tired from listening and trying to think constantly in English. Mary suggested I have "a nap" (a short sleep). She said we could then go for a walk to see the neighbourhood and learn the shortest route to school.



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APRIL # 3—Exploring the West End and Visiting the School

Visuals: Mary's map of the route to school; photos of English Bay Beach, Denman and Robson streets; architectural examples

When I woke up, I did some unpacking. Mary drew me a map of the West End. Then we headed off down the street. Not everyone in Vancouver is white. There are lots of Asians, so I don't feel as conspicuous as I expected, but I didn't see many black people. American movies had me expecting more.

Also I saw two men holding hands (I looked twice to be sure), but nobody else seemed to notice. I felt awkward when a brown-skinned couple sitting on the street held out a cap and asked for money. Mary just smiled kindly at them and said, "Sorry, not today." That happened another time before the end of our walk.

Mary and I headed toward the beach. I am amazed that a beach is so close, that the waterfront is not all industrialized. I drew a line on the map that revealed we were walking toward the corner of Davie and Denman Streets. Beautiful. One side of the street has shops and restaurants; the other side has shrubs, flowers, and a lawn leading down to sand and the water's edge.

Mary and I walked on a seawall, which she says goes many kilometres along the ocean. After a few minutes we left the seawall and went into a park, past tennis courts. Lots of heron nests are in the trees. Large, bony-winged herons were cruising into and out of the bare branches. Folding their wings. Drawing up their long legs in preparation for getting into their nest or landing on a branch next to it.



We walked past apartments built in several different styles. Mary knows I hope to become an architect. She pointed out a variety of buildings revealing 100 years of Vancouver’s architectural history. Still the city seems mostly new. But it is the older buildings that I want to photograph.

We walked back to Denman Street—a major street in the West End Mary says. Many people on the street carry coffee cups, sipping from them. So many coffee shops and international restaurants!

I asked Mary which restaurants are Canadian. She laughed and said most Canadians can’t even say what Canadian food is.

“Try?” I said smiling.

She thought for a moment and said, “Well, I guess Nanaimo bar, which is a delicious chocolate square, and poutine, which is French fries with gravy on them with maybe some cheese.”

I did not expect to see so many Japanese restaurants. Reassuring. If I don’t like Mary’s cooking, I will be able to go to a Japanese restaurant occasionally. Seeing them made me slightly homesick.



Soon we reached the school, and my thoughts changed to what I have dreamt of for so long...attending a language school in Vancouver. Because it is a weekend, the school was closed. We stood at the glass front doors peering in. Flags from all over

the world are high on the wall. The Japanese flag is there. I was moved.

Mary says that I will make friends quickly at school because everyone wants to have companions to do things with during their stay and they realize their time here will be short.

Getting back to Mary's apartment, we met a couple, slightly older than me, coming into the building carrying guitars and equipment. These two have a band and live immediately below Mary. Suddenly I missed Akira and his music, and instantly I made a commitment to keep up my flute practice while I am in Vancouver.

Mary encouraged our conversation and mentioned that I have my BA in fine art, play the flute, and intend to become an architect when I return to Japan. They seemed pleased. I certainly wouldn't have brought all this up myself.

Apparently the husband, Larry, the leader of the band, plays guitar, sings, and writes music. Leah sings and manages the band. With long blonde hair, she is lovely and so graceful she reminds me of a ballerina. I was surprised when they invited me to visit them tomorrow night to watch the band practice. Mary said I will have time because the first day at school is just a placement test, so there is no homework. So I agreed to watch the rehearsal at Leah and Larry's place.

When we got back upstairs to Mary's apartment, I completed unpacking. Mary made an interesting dinner that I ate with a fork. Good practice.

I asked Mary if it was going to be all right for me to practice my flute in my bedroom, and she said that it should be fine, especially if it is before 11:00 at night. We talked a little about my classical training but I admitted to enjoying many types of music.

Since dinner I have only had the energy to tape this. Feels strange to go without drawing as I've seen so much I could have sketched today!

It's still early in Vancouver, but it has been a long day. I just want to get into bed. I'm so glad to be settled and feel safe.





APRIL # 4—Placement Test and Rehearsal of the Band

Visuals: Cherry blossoms at Burrard Skytrain/bus terminal area

Mary's map marked a route to the school so I got there easily. I was nervous taking the written test. But the speaking test teacher was so pleasant I was able to relax. For the test, two students talk together with her. My partner was Sabine. She also arrived in Vancouver this weekend. She is from Switzerland, is about 28, and is in banking. Despite looking rather businesslike in a somewhat severe, tailored navy blue suit jacket and pants, she is very friendly and her soft, curly, wind-blown blonde hair keeps her from looking tense. She seems optimistic and enthusiastic about being in Vancouver.

After the test, Sabine and I took our lunch into the lounge. She admitted that her homestay mother has jokingly referred to her as her "conservative banker daughter." She said she hopes she'll have time to relax more in Vancouver than she can at home where her life is scheduled and controlled. (As mine would be if Dad were home more.)

While we chatted, we were fascinated by the different personalities (stereotypes?) of the international students around us. We were struck most by the Brazilian and Mexican females, as they talk and laugh constantly and seem to enjoy life. They dress in short skirts and tops with necklines that reveal... well, cleavage. All of their conversations with guys seem to be a kind of flirting, or is that just the way the males and females relate?

After watching one of these young women (with noticeable eye makeup, silver hoop earrings, and a plunging

neckline) conversing with a guy, she said she had to leave. She proceeded to kiss four friends on both cheeks.

By comparison, most of the Asian students in the lounge seem quiet and they stick together as a group. This was true except for one beautiful Japanese woman (about my age) who was friendly with students of several nationalities including a Taiwanese, a Korean, and some Europeans as well as a Japanese guy.

As Sabine and I were eating, I noticed this good looking (and aware of it!) Japanese guy draw the pretty Japanese woman off to the side to speak quietly to her. He seems to be a would-be businessman (short hair, three-piece suit—yes, really!). I couldn't hear their conversation but it was apparent she was turning down something that he was offering. As her response became apparent, he looked up and saw me watching them. I felt awkward, especially as he sauntered over and, without introduction, said he had a pair of complimentary tickets to an electronics fair.

"Would you like to come? It's at Canada Place Convention Centre. My father's company has an information booth there. It's only a few blocks away."

"Your father is here?" I responded, off guard in being approached by this guy who I had never met.

"My father? Oh, no. He has people he sends over."

I was glad to have a reason to decline (watching the rehearsal).

Why would this guy approach me when he doesn't know me—just because we are both Japanese?!



Sabine and I left the lounge and walked down Robson Street. Without being aware of searching for boots (which I needed to do soon), I saw a flat, leather pair in a store window that really appealed to me. They fit and happened to be on sale, so I bought them.

I was glad to find these because I had been dreading wearing some high heeled boots that my sister had given to me when I was packing. She had insisted that I couldn't take what she had come to call my "old faithfuls." Yet the boots of hers

looked like they were meant to be worn by someone deliberately trying to appear sexy—definitely not me.

We also went into a “drug store.” I managed to buy batteries for my tape recorder as well the makeup (a lipstick, eye shadow, and blush) that I forgotten at home. Sabine and I were surprised at how friendly the retail clerks are. They overlooked our imperfect English and seemed not to mind when we were just looking.

Satisfied with my purchases, the two of us then went for tea at Blenz, a Canadian café. Mary had emphasized the difference between these and the American coffee shops.

Sabine’s homestay is somewhere on the North Shore, which is on the other side of the harbour. I walked with her to a bus stop surrounded by tall buildings, raised flowerbeds, and a waterfall (yes, it’s true!). It was across from a Skytrain station.

Why is it called *sky* train when it is part of the subway? Cherry trees covered with white blossoms, which looked like delicate snow, surrounded the stairs going down to the entrance of the station. Momentarily I missed home as I thought about the sakura, the front of blossoming cherry trees moving northward up the length of Japan.

Sabine waved goodbye. I got out Mary’s map and headed back to the apartment but not by the shortest route. Again I am amazed at trees with so much moss on them. I saw more old houses, which Mary calls heritage buildings. I wish I had time to draw them. I had no problem finding my way back. I feel I already know something about Vancouver!



Mary played the message on the answering machine. Someone from the school said I am in the advanced class and my classes will be from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm.

“The advanced class!” I said, feeling happy but somewhat nervous.

“Of course you would be in the advanced class. You are probably the best speaker I have ever hosted.”

“Really?”

“Yes, and that means your written language is probably impeccable. The Japanese always write better than they speak.” It is the Mexicans who speak better than they write.”

“Such standards to keep up to....”

“Don’t worry. You’ll do extremely well.”

Apologetically I brought out of my bag the unopened, Oriental-style soup that Mary had packed for me as a snack. I explained to her that I couldn’t eat it because there were no chopsticks.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t think.” Mary commented.

“Canadians don’t eat soup with chopsticks.”

Then I felt sorry that I hadn’t tried using the spoon Mary that had provided.

In helping Mary make dinner, she confirmed difference between “chopping,” “slicing,” “grating,” and “shredding.” She says I am welcome in kitchen, because preparing meals, eating, and doing dishes are the best times to talk.

We discussed what I hope to do in Vancouver. I said I want to go to Stanley Park. Mary laughed saying that was not a big outing as it is so close.

“Actually that was the beginning of Stanley Park where we saw the birds in the nests.”

“Oh, by the seawall.”

“Yes, the seawall totally surrounds the park. In nice weather I walk on the Seawall or in Stanley Park at least once a week and you are welcome to join me.”

After we finished dinner, with Mary’s encouragement, I went downstairs to Larry and Leah’s apartment. I hesitated at the door. Maybe they had just been polite in inviting me to the rehearsal. Would I regret it if I did not go in? I had to dare myself to knock. Maybe they wouldn’t even remember that they asked me.

Not true. Slender, graceful Leah opened the door with a welcoming gesture. She seemed glad to see me.

“Come into the dining room and get some tea. We’re just finishing dinner and waiting for others to arrive.”

I could hear someone playing a guitar. Larry gave me a cup of tea but then immediately took me into the living room to introduce me to this band member.

“Erika, I’d like you to meet Sandford Gibson.”

“Hello, Sandford Gibson.”

“You may call me Sandy,” he smiled as he extended his hand for a gentle, fitted handshake that didn’t crush my fingers or remind me of the advantages of bowling! In fact, his touch was so...tender...that it stirred the pit of my stomach. What was that about?

Larry indicated a comfortable chair saying, “This is probably a good place to sit.”

Larry returned to the dining room to finish eating.

Sandy has a medium build with blond-brown, slightly curly hair.

"I hope you don't mind me watching the practice."

"No, it's fine," Sandy said.

"So you are staying with Larry and Leah's neighbour upstairs?"

"Yes, she is my homestay mother while I am attending an English language school here."

"And you are from Japan?"

"Yes, Tokyo."

"How long will you be staying?"

"A year."

"But you already seem to speak so well. You'll be more than an expert by then," he said.

"Oh, thank you."

"You have a slight British accent. Have you studied in England as well?"

"No, just in Japan, but I suppose I have been influenced by my mom and my older sister. They both did their university degrees in London, and we often speak English at home."

"No wonder you speak so well then."

"My homestay mother has said that after a year of being here I will likely have a Canadian accent."

"I'm sure you will."

As he turned over a page of sheet music and began plucking the strings again, I noticed that his olive-coloured, short-sleeve T-shirt was imprinted in gold and outlined in black with the words, "The Alums Canada-wide Tour," and a date in gold only that was obliterated so I could only read the first three figures saying two thousand and (something).

Despite not wanting to interrupt Sandy further, I blurted, "Is 'The Alums' the name of the band?"

"Yes," he answered, still strumming. "A bit strange, eh?"

I started to deny this, but he looked up as he explained, "Larry and I started the band when I was in first-year university and he was in his final year. We were trying to earn money by playing in campus pubs and for weddings and frat parties (I think that is what he said). Danceable music mainly."

He smiled as he added, "We called ourselves 'The Future Alums.'"

"Alums?"

"Alumni. People who have graduated."

"Oh, yes."

"So after we both had graduated, we thought we needed to change our name, but, well, we never came up with a good alternative. So we just dropped the word *Future*."

"So your fans won't lose track of you."

"Ah, our fans," he smiled.

"My cousin is in a rock band...."

"Really?"

Sandy suddenly seemed self-conscious. Why now? Is he shy? Could he be a performer and still be shy? He looked down and started picking and strumming again as if he were dealing with a difficult passage where he needed greater concentration.

Hoping that Larry and Leah would come into the room soon, I remained sitting there for a few moments. But I felt awkward watching Sandy alone despite all the times I've watched Akira practice or even joined in with my flute. I went back into the kitchen and sat down with Larry and Leah.

"Was Sandy not welcoming?" Leah asked.

"He seems to need to concentrate on what he's practising," I answered.

I could not read the look that passed between Leah and Larry.

"What kind of music does the band play?" I asked.

Then Larry and Leah laughed. "Ah, that question...."

"We like to think of ourselves as being a progressive pop rock band."

"We grew up listening to our parents' rock records, which we actually liked."

"Still like...."

"We're trying to carry on from there, writing emotionally charged songs that ring true for us."

A doorbell ended this conversation and two other members of the band filed through the hall and assembled in the living room. I went back into the living room with Leah and Larry and sat on the chair Larry had suggested earlier. In a few minutes I realized that location was in Sandy's direct line of vision.

Of the five in the band, Leah is the only female. Besides Larry, at least one of the other guys is married and he is somewhat older. He warned the group that his wife is expecting to go into labour at any minute, so he might have to leave early (although this didn't happen).

Larry led the practice. Sometimes he and Leah sang alone, sometimes with others, including Sandy. Between songs, all discussed (and sometimes argued) how some piece should sound and what songs to include in their next performance.

I watched Sandy mostly. He plays guitar and keyboard. He is quieter than the others, but when he speaks they listen (and what an appealing voice!). He doesn't move around much when he plays, but still I could feel his musical energy.

More than once when he glanced up, he saw me looking at him. I was embarrassed. I decided I would only watch him when he was absorbed and looking down. Still, while he was standing at the keyboard, our eyes met again. More than once.

At the door as I was leaving, Leah said I am welcome to come to another rehearsal if I should want to, but more

importantly she said she hoped I would attend the gig they had been practicing for. It will be in Kitsilano. Apparently this is not far away. She said there would be a cover charge—cost to get in—but it is not much. As she and I were talking, Sandy walked past the door.

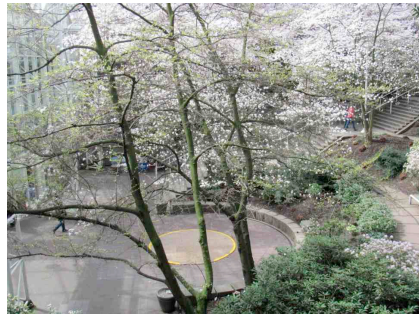
“Goodnight,” he said, without pausing.

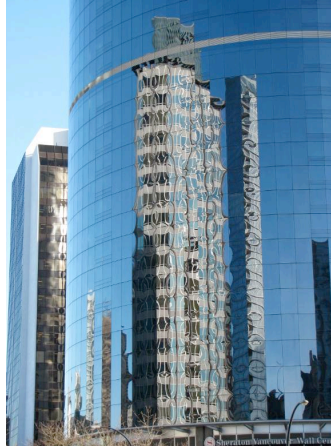
“Yes.... Goodnight.... Sandy,” I stammered, wishing I could think of something more to say to him.

As I walked up the stairs, I wondered: had Sandy gone out of his way to say goodnight to me or had he just been retrieving his jacket?

Also I thought, I have only been in Sandy’s presence for two hours and... I miss him. How can that be?

When is the gig? I want to go. I hope I can see Sandy again.





APRIL # 5—First Day of Class

Visuals: photos of heritage and modern architecture on route to class

Well, Noboru, the aggressive Japanese guy who asked me to go to the trade show with him, is in my classes— so there will be no avoiding him. But then, so is the awkward Korean from the airport. He (Bae) apparently must know more English than he revealed. So, is he shy or what's his problem? He hasn't volunteered any answers in class and teachers seem to expect students to speak up. This is not the case with Noboru. He seems to thrive on attention and takes every opportunity to give his opinion.

Students call teachers by their first names and seem to treat them as friends. How long before I can do this? Seems so disrespectful. "Barry" is an engaging teacher, but he was casually dressed in fitted jeans and a cream polo shirt (no tie or jacket). And during the class, he sipped from a can of "Canada Dry" (strange name for a beverage since Canada has so much water).

Many students eat and drink in the classroom. A Mexican girl sitting next to me sauntered out of the class to fill her water bottle. On returning she proceeded to eat an apple— very distracting as I was trying my hardest to concentrate on what was being said. Yet Barry (I'm forcing myself to use his first name) didn't seem concerned about any of this.

Four of us are new in the class so we had to introduce ourselves saying where we are from, something about our family, our studies or work, and why we are studying English in Vancouver.

We also had to write our name on a blank little flag and pin it to a map of world to show where we live.

Sabine said she is from Switzerland, speaks Swiss German, and is in the international accounts department of a bank, which requires her to use some English.

Fernando lives in Monterey, Mexico. When he mentioned this, the girl eating the apple showed her surprise, saying she is also from Monterey. Fernando, the eldest of five brothers and sisters, lives at home as he has just completed his Bachelor of Science degree. He said knowing English will help him when he studies medicine.

Painfully, or at least slowly and quietly, Bae said he just finished his Korean military service and decided to study English in Vancouver before looking for a job. On Barry's prompting, he also said he is an only son but he has a younger sister.

I told the class I am from Tokyo, have an older sister and a younger one, and since completing my Bachelor of Arts degree a year ago, I have been working in my mom's medical-aids business while studying at night.

"What were you studying then?" Barry asked.

"Mathematics and physics."

"Oh, challenging. Why those?"

"As preparation for doing an architecture program when I return to Japan."

"I see. Very ambitious," Barry responded.

Barry explained the English-only policy of the school. Anyone caught speaking another language in the school is suspended for a day. He told us to avoid sitting next to someone from our own country so we aren't tempted to speak our own language.

"For example, Erika, you should stay away from Noboru as he is a potential danger to you."

Tokyo would-be businessman Noboru seemed pleased to be seen as danger to me. I was embarrassed by this comment, whereas others found this humorous. But why did the teacher say this about Noboru when Sumi is also from Japan? He never mentioned her as threat to me. She is the beautiful, friendly Japanese student who had turned down Noboru's request to apparently accompany him to the trade fair.

When I placed my name flag on the world map almost touching Noboru's, I again felt self-conscious.

At the end of class I regretted taking so long gathering up my things because Noboru stopped me while Barry and my classmates, including Sabine, were filing out the classroom door.

"So, Erika, we are from the same city," Noboru said quietly in Japanese.

"Along with several million others," I responded in English.

“But being from the same city and in the same class, well, that reduces the odds significantly,” he again said in Japanese.

“The odds?”

“Of meeting.”

“Did you find the trade show interesting?”

“It was fine, but it would have been more enjoyable if you had come with me,” he added in Japanese. “I hope we can do some things together another time.”

“Look, I am not willing to speak Japanese.”

“Alright, I can speak English. We’ll be going to a movie on Friday.”

“The class?”

“Yes, the class. We all do everything together.”

“Well, I hope that I can be included then.”

“Of course, you can....”

Sabine came back into the room looking for me, luckily rescuing me from further conversation with Noboru.

At supper I told Mary I felt nervous about being in the advanced class, that most of my dozen classmates speak English very well. Mary reassured me that I speak well too and that if I can understand her I will be able to understand almost anyone. She does speak quickly, so I am pleased that I understand most of what she says. Mary was surprised also to hear that the Korean guy from the airport is in my class.

“But he was so quiet, we couldn’t know his speaking ability,” she said.

I asked Mary about her former homestay students. She has hosted so many and has loved the experience. She said she enjoys seeing the students gain in self-confidence, independence, and the ability to think for themselves, outside the expectations of their own culture. I wonder if being here is going to change me in that way.

From: erico.yamashiro@mobiylite.co.jp

To: yoko.yamashiro@chiclooks.co.jp

Date: Tues., Apr 05 22:15 PST 2004

Subject: Reporting in after the third day....

Yoko San....

Love Vancouver so far, even though it seemed so small as I flew in. (Long trip.... wide ocean!). Lots of parks. Much green. I like waking up to the sound of seagulls cruising overhead and birds chirping, instead of traffic roaring.

Vancouver people rush less than those in Tokyo. Studying English should be more relaxing for me than doing math and physics after work was for the past year.

There are many fascinating people here—students from several countries are in my classes. And at my homestay apartment, I have just met a lovely young couple and my first Canadian guy (kind of cute!). Probably a couple of years older than me. They are in a band that practises in the suite below my homestay. Nice to have contact with some native English speakers....

I should start from the beginning. But arriving here seems so long ago! And I'm tired from documenting my stay here as you've recommended, Yoko.

Sorry I couldn't talk much when I phoned home on arrival. Didn't want a big bill on my homestay mother's phone.

You didn't say in your email why Dad got home unexpectedly early from his convention. Hope he won't wrongly assess your friendship with Koji and be pressuring you into marriage.

Next week remember to take lots of photos at the 20th birthday of our baby sister! (I know Kiri hates me calling her this!)

Love,

Erika

(p.s. Don't let Dad know I'm using Erika as my English name in Vancouver. Part of Mom's revenge?)

From: yoko.yamashiro@chiclooks.co.jp
To: erico.yamashiro@mobiityelite.co.jp
Date: Wed., Apr 06 22:15 PST 2004
Subject: Re. Reporting in after the third day....

Erika,

Revenge.... Mom might not call it that, but she is pleased that you are using your intended name in Vancouver.

As soon as I found Mom alone in her office, even though she was flipping through some invoices, I read your email to her. You might have smiled if you had heard the conversation. It went something like this:

“So it sounds like Erika's fine, and I'm pleased to think that she has her eyes open,” I said.

“Her eyes open?” Mom asked.

“Well, the fact that she mentions meeting the cute guy in the band.”

“A musician isn't the most stable potential date material,” Mom commented somewhat distractedly.

“Never mind that. I just hope she at least has some social life while she’s away. Not studying every available moment like she was this past year. Never going out. Sure, she’s been accepted into architecture for when she returns, but there’s more to life than just that.”

“So now you’re the expert despite having to leave Andrew behind in London?”

“Well, Erika will only be away one year, not four. Not enough time to question her whole future. Not enough time to be confronted with what she wants to do with her life and who, if anyone, she’s going to share it with.”

“Speaking of one’s life partner.... Your dad’s not going to be home for dinner.”

“What’s new?”

Ignoring this, Mom added, “And Kiri is staying over at a friend’s tonight, so it’ll just be the two of us for supper. Can you pick up something for us on your way home?”

“Sure.”

So things here go on as usual....

Stay well,

Love,
Yoko



APRIL # 6—Attending a Movie after the First Week

Visuals: Photos of movie area and Japanese restaurant

I can't believe I have been here more than a week! Mary was right — all students want to make friends quickly. My classmates have included me in everything. We all eat lunch together and tonight we went to an early movie.

Let me see if I can name everyone, most of them being in their 20s. As I indicated, those who arrived the same weekend as I did are Sabine (Swiss), Fernando (Mexican), and Bae (Korean). The rest have been at the school at least a month. These are Sumi and Noboru (Japanese), Nicole (Mexican), and Daniel (Swiss), Marina (Liechtensteiner), and Song (Korean—she's the youngest at just 20). Those in their early 30s are Juliana (Brazilian), Se-Eun (Korean), and Claudia (Taiwanese). The last two have been here the longest and have the most advanced English—they study translation even!

While standing in the movie lineup, Fernando and Sabine talked to each other. Arriving at the Vancouver airport at the same time, they got a ride together to their homestays in the school's van, so they had a head start on friendship. Fernando, cute with bright brown eyes and a wonderful smile, is friendly and kind to everyone. Sabine is in the process of trying to break up with a boyfriend she works with at the bank in Switzerland.

When we were alone in the washroom before the movie, Sabine said that both Noboru and Daniel seem to be aware of me. They did sit on each side of me in the movie theatre. As good looking as Noboru is, he irritates me for seeming so self-confident in his three-piece suits with his worldwide watch and shiny blue cell phone. A materialist. Definitely not my type.

And Daniel, while pleasant enough with his Swiss-blond hair and clear blue eyes, seems conceited but also insecure (is this possible?). He seems rather settled in a banker-ish way. Anyway, both Daniel and Noboru are a fair bit older than me—about 27, I think.



The movie was over before 9:00 pm so Noboru led us to a Japanese restaurant near the bottom of Robson Street. We stood just inside the entrance waiting to be seated while Noboru negotiated with a server about which table he wanted.

Song, wearing only a light jacket, began to shiver from the draft coming in around the door. Se-Eun put her arm around Song's shoulder. She looked as if she could be Song's older sister. Both being from Korea, Se-Eun may feel it is her role to look out for Song.

Once we were settled in the booth, I was surprised that again Noboru and Daniel were on each side of me at the round table. The group teased Sumi who says she doesn't want a boyfriend in Vancouver. Apparently she just wants to enjoy friends, as she has become tired of dating, having gone out with so many guys in her last two years of university in Japan. She'd done this, she explained, to make up for not dating at all in high school or her first years of university.

"Not dating.... Why?" asked Nicole, who can't see how someone as beautiful as Sumi would have missed out on hanging out with guys.

"I trained as a gymnast from when I was eight to almost 20."

"But still, you could have...." Nicole continued.

"I spent all my time practising and travelling to compete. My whole life was scheduled."

"Other things can do that too. Like work," Daniel added.

"Or studying," I added.

"Yes, of course. But for me, well, I had to try to excel in gymnastics just because I was good at it."

"You sound as if you did gymnastics against your will," Juliana commented. "Why did you do that if that wasn't what you really wanted?"

"That's what my parents and my coach expected of me."

"I understand that," Bae dared to add quietly, looking approvingly toward Sumi.

"Still," Juliana commented, "it was your life."

"Perhaps. But if I had quit, well, I could not have lived with the guilt."

"But you did eventually get out," Noboru commented.

"Yes. After I won second place in an international competition, it was apparent I couldn't go any further."

"Second sounds pretty good for that level," Nicole commented.

"Not good enough for my coach. I was already older than most other top gymnasts. So then it was okay for me to quit gymnastics and begin studying commerce."

"But you do judo now," Se-Eun commented.

"Yes, but that's just for exercise. I am not driven. I don't get up at 5:00 am every day to practise."

"Still, you have a brown belt," Marina said admiringly.

"Yes, but judo and gymnastics use similar muscles. And the balance.... Well, judo came pretty easily."

"An ex-gymnast, brown belt, with a business degree.... You do have a fascinating profile," commented Daniel. Apparently he is a wealth management advisor at a bank.

Throughout the meal I realized that Bae seems to be coming out of his shell a little when he is around Sumi. She is particularly kind to him. (Could she feel sorry for him?)

Anyway I'd say Bae seems fascinated by Sumi judging by the way he looks at her when she is not noticing. At the movie theatre, Sumi sat next to him and offered to share her box of popcorn with him. Sumi mentioned to me how shy he is—that when their hands accidentally touched in the popcorn box, he withdrew his hand immediately.

While eating our sushi, tempura, rice and sushini, we laughed a lot because Juliana can find something funny in anything to do with interactions between males and females. Also she seems jaded toward romance. Apparently she is married, a fact that she hides (she doesn't wear a wedding ring). Everyone in the group knows, but nobody mentions this.

Juliana had moved aside the horoscope section of a newspaper that was lying on the bench of our booth. When Nicole saw it she began to encourage Juliana to read the forecasts.

"No. Who would believe them?"

“Just read the romantic ones,” Nicole urged her.

“No way,” Juliana stated.

Finally Daniel agreed to read them but “only for our entertainment,” and he did so in a mocking way.

Song said she heard she is a Libra. Daniel looked down the list, “Libra... Libra...” He read out loud, “Libra: The moon is in your house of relationships. You will soon fall in love with a Virgo.... Virgo!” Daniel snapped the newspaper and looked up amused. “I’m supposed to be a Virgo!”

Song put her fingers over her mouth and laughed. But Song is easily delighted. Despite being shy, she often claps her hands and laughs like an innocent child. It occurs to me that she is a few months older than Kiri, but in some ways she seems so much younger.

For Sabine, an Aries, the horoscope read: “Getting rid of a boyfriend may be more difficult than you think.”

Everyone laughed as she snatched at the paper. “It doesn’t say that, does it? My boyfriend and I broke up just before I left Switzerland,” she commented, as she quizzically confirmed what the horoscope said.

“Read mine. Read mine. Sagittarius,” Nicole pleaded.

“Okay,” Daniel said getting the paper back from Sabine and scanning the column. “Sagittarius: A friend will become more than just that.”

“What does that mean?” Nicole asked, obviously disappointed.

“I guess it’s up to you to figure that out,” Daniel said.

“That’s the trouble with horoscopes. They could mean anything you want them to mean, or, more likely, they mean nothing at all.”

Noboru had made the decisions in ordering for us. In setting out food at our table, the waitress spilled some soya sauce on the cuff of Daniel’s shirt. Silently perturbed, he immediately set about rubbing the stain with his dampened cloth serviette. This made me realize that he, like Noboru, was wearing a business suit. Daniel wears his business clothing as if out of habit, dressing in the expected “uniform” of a banking employee. Noboru’s flair for business apparel seems to come from wanting to suggest that he has a promising future.

We continued with some serious eating. I enjoyed the food even though it wasn’t exactly like home. The group sipped an endless supply of green tea, everyone that is except for Song, who surprised me by ordering coffee. As kids, my sisters and I weren’t allowed to drink coffee, so I always associate coffee drinking as an adult activity. Was that true in Korea too? Did Song need to assert herself as an adult? She looks even younger than her 20 years.

A lot of food was left over. I worried that some in the group had expected to buy a snack only (Nicole seems especially conscious of money). Noboru, however, seems to have no shortage of funds. When the conversation started to fade, Noboru silently held up his hand to signal to the waiter that he'd like the bill. Noboru paid significantly more than his share (on his credit card) and added a \$10.00 tip as the others put out some coins.

While the waiter was processing our payment, Noboru received a call on his cell phone. In Japanese he asked the caller to phone back in couple of hours. But apparently that person insisted on talking then. Reluctantly Noboru retrieved a list from his wallet and unfolded it. Again in Japanese he read out several words and numbers that sounded something like this: "Microwave 28899, notebook 127986, stereo 187928, DVD player 17995, roller blades 18994, cell phone 35999."

On saying the last number, as if anticipating a reaction, Noboru held the phone the away from his ear. Sure enough, I could hear a loud expression and then something that ended with the tone of a demanding question.

Noboru responded fairly calmly, "I dropped it."

Another loud expression from the caller.

"Well, it's not as if I did it on purpose," Noboru again said in Japanese.

More commentary on the other end of the line.

"Yes, yes.... I appreciate that."

I had no idea what all this meant—the numbers after the words. Later in the washroom, Juliana explained that once a month Noboru's dad calls for a list of the biggest expenses he has put on his dad's credit card. Apparently the numbers I heard were prices of items Noboru had bought recently.

"And does his dad always yell when he hears what he has bought?"

"No, not at all."

"Well, what about Noboru's comment that he had dropped something."

"Oh, that would was his third cell phone."

"Third cell phone?"

"He's had bad luck with cell phones. He arrived with a new one from Japan, but he has bought two more since then."

"He's dropped them?"

"Yeah. Seems like they break so easily. Although one did drop out of his pocket into a toilet, so that one had water damage."

"No wonder his dad raised his voice."

"True. But probably more about what he sees as Noboru's carelessness than the amount of money. Otherwise his dad seems generous. And rich, I assume."

“You seem to know Noboru well.”

“Quite well. We arrived in Vancouver at the same time, and our homestays are close to each other. On the North Shore. We bus to school together, so we have a chance to talk at least an hour a day.”

When we left the restaurant, it was 10:30 pm. Daniel and Noboru insisted that the group walk me home despite my living only a few blocks from the restaurant. I worried about how much noise we were making as we walked along laughing under the street lights and the branches of trees with fresh, unfurling leaves.

From: erico.yamashiro@mobilityelite.co.jp

To: yoko.yamashiro@chiclooks.co.jp

Date: Wed. Apr 06 20:15 PST 2004

Subject:Another thought....

Hi Yoko,

Notice that I have taken your advice about having a social life while I'm here. Please don't let anyone, including Mom, have access to my emails or my taped journal entries from now on. Otherwise I may get into censoring myself, not that there's been anything to censor so far—other than my irrational fascination with the guy in the band. And Sandy probably won't even recognize me if we meet at the band's gig in a couple of weeks.

Also, Yoko, I've decided to send you my duplicate cassettes as I complete them. It's okay to listen to them when you receive them—if you have time. Maybe you can even transcribe and translate them into English as you receive them—just kidding!

Such a lost opportunity that Mom and you didn't document your four years at university in England for us to compare with my time in Vancouver. Oh, well, at least I am doing my part, even if we can't bring back your experiences in some written form.

Also, I'm keeping my mementos and photographs in order and listing in my diary entries what I have collected. Later I might do something with the material. I'd love to create a visual journal of my stay in Canada if I ever have time! Forgive me, Yoko, for thinking of your disorganized box of keepsakes, unidentified photographs, and printed ephemera as something I want to avoid!

Are you keeping track of who is who in my group as I talk about them? I'd love to create a visual representation of each of my classmates, but will ever get around to doing that? Meanwhile, I'll attach an abbreviated description of the way I have come to think of each of them.

Hope this helps.

Love,
Erika

- Bae (Korean)**—the tall, awkward (or anti-social?) guy,
about 27 years old
- Sabine (Swiss)**—enthusiastic, my first friend, in banking,
25 years old, fleeing from her boyfriend
- Barry (Canadian)**—our favourite teacher, apparently 31
- Song (Korean)**—the innocent, youngest (20) and smallest
member of our group
- Noboru (Japanese)**—the 27-year-old materialist
businessman who thinks he's so cool!
- Nicole (Mexican)**—21, guy crazy but seems to be kind
- Se-Eun (Korean)**—the drama enthusiast/high school
teacher, about 31
- Juliana (Brazilian)**—the jaded, married one who seems
to want to be our relationship counsellor, about 31
- Marina (Liechtensteiner)**—sporty, fun loving, enjoys
outdoor activities, about age 22
- Fernando (Mexican)**—cute, quiet guy, about 22, who just
graduated in science but looks more like a humanities
type
- Daniel (Swiss)**—the rather too settled (uptight?), 27-
year-old banker
- Sumi (Japanese)**—the sophisticated, sociable, brown-belt
beauty who is tired of dating, about 24
- Claudia (Taiwanese)**—early 30s, teacher/private school
director with jet-setting boyfriend

And the ones outside of class:

- Mary (Canadian)**— semi-retired artist teacher, homestay
mother
- Leah (Canadian)**— band manager and singer, about 27,
wife of Larry
- Larry (Canadian)**— guitarist/singer/songwriter, early
30s, husband of Leah

And last (but certainly not least!)

- Sandford/Sandy (Canadian)**— cute, mid-twenties,
guitarist/keyboard player and architecture student

[To read the next section, return to the Table of Contents and click on
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