

Dear friends,

We realize this annual letter serves as a record for ourselves, as we reach a point where we forget things without any written record. (sigh) As always, it will make us happy if you find this letter interesting. (at least not boring) (Since we received complaints regarding font size last year, we decided to keep the font large enough for us, reading-glasses wearers.)

This year, which is Kazumi's last year in his 40s, has been an eventful year for him both professionally and personally. (I worked hard this year. Really.) He was on his sabbatical leave until June, so his schedule was flexible. (This does not sound like a good way to begin, after I said I worked hard this year.) In March, Takahiro and Ami Iino and we made a trip to Belize, as Taka was finishing his study at Purdue. We enjoyed beautiful ocean and beaches. Iinos went diving for the first time and enjoyed a wonderful underwater world. (I was of course tagging around.) Takahiro and I went to the same high school and university, and played for the same basketball coach. He was sent to Purdue by his company to earn his MBA. They were supposed to go back to Tokyo, but he was assigned to work in NY. In April, Kazumi went back to Tokyo to shoot video footages of cherry blossoms for our video project. Kazumi was originally planning to stay until May, but the condition of Chibitan (the dog) deteriorated rather badly. So he was called back to US early. The last two weeks must have been difficult for Chibitan since she could not walk or eat by herself, but Kazumi was able to take care of her. She passed away on May 4 at the age of sixteen. In a sense, Chibitan helped Kazumi since his new job at Middlebury was to begin shortly. Taking an old dog would have been difficult. Kazumi started his summer work as a rookie director of the Japanese School at Middlebury College. Eighty students and eighteen instructors lived together and studied Japanese intensively for nine weeks. Students pledged to speak only in Japanese at the beginning of session. The work was undoubtedly very challenging, but very rewarding. Kazumi was truly impressed how hard instructors worked. The school planned many co-curricular activities in addition to teaching the language. This year marked the 60th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Students folded two sets of one-thousand-cranes, and one of them was sent to Hiroshima to be displayed at Hiroshima Peace Park. We also invited an a-bomb survivor living in LA for a talk. Lastly, a recent Japanese film called "Face of Jizo" was screened. The movie is about a father who got killed by the bomb and a daughter who survived. Student's language skills improved tremendously and their cultural understanding deepened. The Japanese School had an added bonus this summer. A world famous young concert violinist, Ms. Hilary Hahn, attended the school in the first year level. She was a hard working student and very nice young lady. She kindly gave private performances for the school. (I had a chance to observe her in a practice room. Looking at the top class performer that close was amazing. It was like watching Michael Jordan practice at a court side.) My associate director, Ken'ichi Miura, played a piano to accompany her. (Boy, he was nervous, but he did a beautiful job!) Kazumi, who is usually not into classical music, became a big fan of hers. Video footages and pictures from this year's session can be seen at <http://community.middlebury.edu/~khatasa>. (Next year, Kazumi is planning to invite *rakugo* player from Japan. *Rakugo* is a traditional story telling.) After the summer job, Kazumi went back to Purdue and resumed his normal duty. Thus, he did not have any time to scuba dive this summer. (I told you I worked hard.) But, he is planning to go to Palau in December. (ouch!) The development of computer programs for the new edition of Nakama has been moving along. He also has begun to develop a database for video footages that we shot in Japan. At a conference in November, we presented this video project, and Kazumi presented the development in applying voice recognition technology in Japanese language instruction. He also had a meeting on instructional application of computer graphics animation. (I was, of course, able to see old friends and had a good time.)

Yukiko came back from Japan in January, and resumed her duty at Iowa. The transition turned out to be a bit tough for her after she spent six months in Tokyo. While Kazumi was in Japan in April, Chibitan's condition worsened and she was diagnosed to have the final stage of cancer. She took care of Chibitan until Kazumi came back. One week after he came back, she passed away. From May to July, Yukiko went into the study mode. In May, She attended a conference in Tokyo, and in June she attended a two-week workshop on testing and assessment at the University of Hawaii. Although she had experiences in this area, the workshop gave her a good brush up as well as up to date information. The schedule was very tight on weekdays, but had some relief time on weekends. Her long time friend, Sayuri Kubota, joined her and had a relaxing time by going to a day spa. They also drove up to the north shore, rode a train in a pineapple farm, and visited a botanical garden in Wailua. (I recommend the north shore highly if you like a beautiful beach and quiet atmosphere.) There was a fire near a freeway. Yukiko only got caught in a bit of traffic jam, but her co-participants got trapped badly on a freeway. They ended up spending a whole afternoon in the car without being able to reach anywhere at all. In July, she visited Middlebury for a week. She then attended another conference in Madison, WI. After the fall semester began, she made a trip to England to attend yet another conference of British Association of Teachers of Japanese. She was invited as the keynote speaker by her former student, Mr. Morimoto. This was her first trip to Europe on business. It turned out to be an excellent opportunity to meet new people working in the same field. In November, we attended the annual conference of ACTFL (association for foreign language teachers). Yukiko gave two presentations. One was on the video project Kazumi mentioned above, and the other was how to incorporate controversial issues in language classes, in particular, Japanese history textbook controversy. Since this was totally outside Yukiko's expertise, she had to read quite a bit of literature on the issue. But, she enjoyed reading descriptions of the same events from different perspectives. At the conference, she finished her three-year duty as a board member in the organization called NCJLT (national organization of Japanese language teachers at all levels). Although the assignment made her busy, she enjoyed working with other board members who have been diligently working to advance their field. It was refreshing her to know people who are outside college academia. Kazumi and Yukiko had wonderful time dining with our professor, Dr. Seiichi Makino (Princeton) and our colleagues (Oka-san, Kubota-san, Tabuse-san, Kakutani-sensei, Kuriya-san, and Souda-san, etc.) Yukiko continues to keep herself busy in working on the second edition of Nakama 1 and 2 and another book project.

We will be spending our Christmas and New Year in Japan, but Kazumi will be running around with a video camera for additional footages for our project. (I need to shoot some party scenes, but they are easy ones to come by this time of the year. I just have to stay sober.) Miitaro (the cat) is perfectly playing a role of a relaxing agent, (except that he miaos and brush her tail to Yukiko's face around 5 a.m. every morning.) We would like to close this letter by thanking Chibitan for sixteen years of constant calming effects. Thank you.

As always, we wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. (Thank you for reading this until the end!)

Kazumi & Yukiko

***** ***** ***** A Happy New Year 2006 (year of dog) ***** ***** *****