

Postcard from Japan, part 2

by Bob Tissot

As you may recall, the previous epistle ended with our intrepid travellers rather battered by their impromptu night-time mountain climbing and in serious need of some liquid pampering. So we climbed aboard another train and disembarked at Arishiyama, a small town in the foothills of the mountains near Kyoto and the location of an incredibly beautiful Onsen (hot spring/spa), where we soaked and steamed and plunged and soaked some more. Damn these Japanese know how to look after themselves.

Onsens have very strict rules regarding cleanliness and behaviour. All patrons must enthusiastically scrub themselves clean in the wash room adjacent to the hot pools. Long hair must be tied up and not “float like seaweed” on the water. Swimmers (or undies) are verboten, it’s nude or nothing. They also have a thing about tattoos and all

the Onsen we visited had “No Tattoo” signs on their doors. Obviously there are tattoo-friendly Onsen in the big cities where tourists and Yakuza are more prolific, but not where we were travelling. Hours later we poured our jellified bodies out of there and flowed back home.

The next day we’re (you guessed it) back on a train on our way to Miboro. Now... you’re probably wondering where the hell this “Miboro” place is. If you Google it, you’ll discover that there’s a bloody great dam there, and a Ryokan or traditional Japanese inn. What it doesn’t mention is that there is also a tiny village there (about the size of Nimbin – maybe smaller) and that’s where we are, staying in a traditional Japanese house with Mori, the owner.

Mori’s grasp of English is only very slightly better than my grasp of Japanese (and I’m still struggling with the full form of “thank you” – which I sometimes get mixed up with “good morning”),

so as you can imagine the conversation could never be described as riveting, deep, meaningful or possibly even comprehensible. Grunts, gestures and gesticulations are the norm. We’re sleeping on the Tatami floor with tiny, hard pillows which strangely enough one gets used to, behind paper walls painted with exotic Japanese landscapes. “Ah, this is the real Japan,” we say, but I suspect these days your average Japanese citizen lives in a high-rise apartment with all the mod-cons that they’re so deft at making.

You may wonder why we’ve picked such an obviously isolated spot, so instead of leaving you wondering, I’ll fill you in. Firstly, the village is situated high in the Japanese Alps and the scenery is stunning, surrounded on all sides by mountains, any one of which would dwarf Kosciuszko. In the wintertime the village is buried under a minimum of two metres of snow and just like in Australia where most houses have a lawnmower,

in Miboro they have tiny bulldozers or front-end loaders for clearing the driveway. They also have ladders attached to the upper walls of their houses, which I guess are necessary to get out after a solid night of snowing, in order to access the dozer.

The other reason we’re here is the village of Shirakawa-go, 15ks away, which is built in the old way with 1m thick thatched roofs at very steep pitches (steep enough to get three or four levels of living space inside), and constructed around massive wooden poles and beams. The village fills with zillions of tourists every day and ski resorts dot the hills around it. If you want to see some totally chocolate-box images, google “Wintertime in Shirakawa-go”. However, what has really blown my tiny mind is the immensity of the timbers used in these places, 500mm - 600mm square beams being the norm, but by no means the biggest. An ancient forest under a thatched sky.



And then there’s the water. Miboro is built along one of the banks of the Sho River and water seems to simply gush out from every nook and cranny in the landscape; gurgling through open stone drainage channels as it makes its way to the Sho. The constant sound of running water is everywhere, which can (for some older travellers) produce an almost permanent and irresistible desire to piss.

Mori invited us to a festival on day 2, but somehow we got the timing all wrong, arriving at about 10am to discover that the morning activities were already over

and done with and that there would be nothing until the afternoon when the serious activities like drinking would commence. Apparently the festival crew do a circuit of little villages; praising-up the local deities early and then drinking their health ‘til late in the evening. Considering the fact that we were leaving pre-dawn the next day, we decided that attempting that with a Saki hangover was probably not the wise thing to do.

Next stop is Kanazawa, which is way over on the west coast and apparently particularly beautiful. I’ll let you know. Sayonara.

The ghosts of Christmasses past and present

by Warwick Fry

Washington Bullets, Pentagon Bombs

December 20 1989, Nicaragua. We had just moved into our one room ‘house’ on a corner block of the *San Judas* suburb in Managua. The guy on the opposite corner invited us over – a kind of pre-Xmas come house-warming party.

Throughout that night and the nights before and after there was a constant deep rumble in the night sky, that overshadowed the talk of the day. It was the sound of North American bombers on their way to deliver their payload to Panama – ‘Operation Just Cause’. The ‘operation’ was ostensibly to ‘take out’ Panamanian President Noriega, but in the process killed around 5000 civilians as unmentioned collateral damage.

To the Nicaraguans, the nerve-racking drone was ominous. Given US hostility to Nicaragua and its illegal use of Nicaraguan air space, it sent a truly threatening Christmas message. Even the Australian Consul there said he thought that the imminence of an invasion could be real.

And at the Xmas street party with the *guaro* (white rum) flowing, my own laughter was a little nervous when our host pulled out a pistol, and said that as head of the neighbourhood block committee he had the authority to give it to me, if (and he made ‘if’ sound like ‘when’) the North Americans invaded.

Through independent media sources, reports came back of the massive damage inflicted on the poorer neighbourhoods of Panama City where Noriega had garnered support through his social programs. Human rights observer Grahame Russell, looking back 27 years later, remembers what he wrote at the time: “The next morning, we arrived at



El Chorrillos that used to be a poor, crowded, and lively neighbourhood close to the U.S.-designed headquarters of the Panama Army. Half the neighbourhood was a flattened, burnt waste land of empty shell buildings, and strewn rubble. Fifteen city blocks – houses, churches, stores and warehouses – had been disappeared by the U.S. ground-air-naval attack. It looked like the devil’s land development project; everywhere, U.S. soldiers were driving army bulldozers, cleaning up the remains of buildings, burnt-out buses and cars, etc.”

I was in neighbouring El Salvador a few weeks before covering the November 1989 guerilla offensive. It came to within a whisker of toppling the military controlled US backed regime. Air power foiled the guerilla offensive. In the second week, the guerilla forces withdrew as the poorer working class neighbourhoods took the brunt of the savage aerial counter-attack.

A few days later they staged an attack on the wealthy suburb of Escalon, (at one stage they took over the Sheraton Hotel) which was retaken block by block – the guerillas slowly retreating, having made their point. The government



was unwilling to bomb the mansions of its wealthy patrons.

This Christmas in San Salvador, I heard faint echoes of those days in a street fight of a different kind. At midnight of Christmas Eve, after the chicken, the jumbo prawns, Chilean wine and the exchange of presents,



the dancing to *cumbia* and *salza*, we sallied out to the street with rockets and sparklers. *Los cipotes* (the ‘kids’) – engaged in a torrid street fight with ‘invaders’ from the next block. A running retreat from a ranged attack from hurled crackers and whistling rockets, and then a counter-attack – good, clean, if somewhat noisy family fun.

Apart from the cracker fight and the *cumbia*, it could have been Christmas in Australia (or for that matter almost anywhere in the

Western world). But with a Trump Presidency in the US, who knows what future Christmasses will bring. I am left with the prophetic words of Grahame Russell:

“A much desired war is coming, in the sands of the Middle East, a war over pools of oil. Much red blood will be splattered over the black oil. The war will be fought in the name of international law, citing provisions and principles that were never respected in Nicaragua, Panama, Guatemala...”

Knock-knock-knocking on Nobel's door

by John Jiggins

In the second part of the Twentieth Century, a young Woody Guthrie wannabe who took his stage name from the great Welsh surrealist poet Dylan Thomas, began writing protest songs like *Blowin' in the Wind* and *A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall*.

After many changes in his persona, from New York hipster to spokesman of a generation, from rock god to Christian, and even more changes in his music, Bob Dylan was recognised with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016 for "having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition".

Craig McGregor, an early admirer of Dylan, was pleased with the citation from the Nobel committee and thought it was very apt. The Byron Bay writer met Dylan when he first came to Australia, more than fifty years ago. He'd attended the press conference for the *Sydney Morning Herald* that Dylan gave at Sydney's airport in 1965 and found the questions from the assembled Australian journalists were hostile and stupid, demeaning Dylan as a phony and dismissing his protest songs as fakes. Dylan tried to answer them seriously, but it was a lost cause. He finally gave up trying and improvised an hilarious spoof of his questioners. McGregor went home and wrote up a story for the *Sydney Morning Herald* about the press conference and the hostility of the Australian press to Dylan that they ran on the front page under the headline: 'Dylan's anti-interview'.

McGregor's article ended by making the observation that Dylan was the most creative and original songwriter in the world today, a view he is pleased to see endorsed fifty years later by the Nobel committee. After that article, Dylan phoned him and invited him up to his hotel room where they listened to the acetates of Dylan's next projected album,

Blonde on Blonde, weeks before anyone else in Australia ever heard it.

Since then McGregor has been through his own up-and-down relation with Dylan. McGregor apportions blame for the largely hostile relationship between Dylan and much of the media to both parties. "Partly it's his own fault because he is generally quite churlish to people from the media. And when he started out the media viewed protest songs as subversive.

When they realised he was a bigger man than that and he was a fantastic songwriter, they still criticised him because he had left the protest movement behind him. So all the way through his career he's copped a fair bit of criticism and it continues to the level that he gives very few interviews."

Although Dylan is sometimes described as a poet, McGregor believes he should be called a song poet because you need the music as well as the lyrics to get the full impact of his art as a songwriter. In the 1960s Dylan had an enormous influence on the developing sophistication of the song poem.

"Dylan turned the pop song serious and he helped transform it into the most universal art form of our time. These days most poetry is sung – which it always had been, until the invention of the printing press turned it, temporarily, into a written form. The new prophets are the song poets," said McGregor.

As traditional poetry books became largely irrelevant, poetry on the printed page was replaced by song poetry. Poetry remained immensely important to people who still remembered lines from poems but the lines were now from songs, not from a book. It was a familiar pattern in the evolution of art forms: when established art forms decline into sterility, the vibrancy of popular culture produces a great new art form.



While songwriters like Dylan, the Beatles, Gershwin and so on were poets, they also have the advantage of music and that gave them a big advantage over the poem on the printed page, argues McGregor. "The development

of the song as a common, popular art form has been amazing. Most pop music is pretty junky yet this tradition has thrown up extremely good artists like Dylan or Leonard Cohen or the Beatles or Gershwin and we've got to respect that."

McGregor has been championing Dylan as an important poet since the 1960s. He argues that because of the breadth and richness of Dylan's output (over six hundred songs), his visionary imagination, and his dazzling use of the entire tradition of American music, Dylan is the outstanding songwriter of our time, and a worthy recipient of the Nobel prize.

As a songwriter, at different times in his career Dylan has drawn his inspiration from

the many, various aspects of the American music traditions; from folk, from blues, from jazz, from country, from gospel, from rock and popular music. In many ways, says McGregor, Dylan is a great traditionalist as well as a great innovator, and he has extended and developed all these musical traditions.

As an early Dylan fan, McGregor edited the second book on Dylan's artistry in 1972, *Bob Dylan: a retrospective*. He is currently working on his second Dylan book, called *Twelve Dylan masterpieces*. The idea is to choose twelve pieces from Dylan's long career that are representative of his career and the changes he has gone through, causing him to limit his selection to only one song per album, even those considered his greatest like *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*, though *Blood on the Tracks* is given two songs. His selections are:

- 'Times they are a-changing', title track from the album *Times they are a-changing*;
- 'It's alright, Ma (I'm only bleeding)', *Bringing it all back home*;
- 'Like a Rolling Stone', *Highway 61 Revisited*;
- 'Visions of Johanna', *Blonde on Blonde*;
- 'All along the watchtower', *John Wesley Hardin*;
- 'Knocking on Heaven's Door', *Patt Garret and Billy the Kid*;
- 'You're a big girl now', *Blood on the Tracks*;
- 'Tangled up in blue', *Blood on the Tracks*;
- 'Gotta serve somebody', *Slow Train Coming*;
- 'Blind Willie McTell', *Bootleg series*;
- 'Not dark yet', *Time out of Mind*;
- 'Things have changed', from film soundtrack for *Wonder Boys*

He agrees with fellow Dylan enthusiast Christopher Ricks, former professor of English at Cambridge University, that Bob Dylan is the greatest songwriter since Homer, quoting his declaration that he was pleased to be alive in the same historical epoch as Bob Dylan.

trivia

Devised by Martin Gill

Questions

- Which US state is most Western?
- Which TV family did Lurch work for?
- What is converted to alcohol during the brewing process.
- In which Charles Dickens novel did Uriah Heep feature?
- What is an otter's home called?
- What is the alternate name for the wildebeest?
- A phlebotomist extracts what from the human body?
- What sort of bow has a frog, heel, and screw.
- What do we call a poker hand where all 5 cards are of the same suit?
- What number on physical square keypads (e.g., non-touch-screen phones) generally has a raised dot or dash to help with impaired vision or in darkness?

Answers

- Alaska. It's also the most Northern and Eastern.
- He was the Addams Family butler. "You rang?"
- Sugar. During fermentation, yeasts convert sugars into ethanol and produce carbon dioxide as waste.
- David Copperfield.
- A flush. A hot flush is very tricky business.
- The Gnu. I hope they don't go extinct because no gnus is bad gnus.
- Blood. Not to be confused with Vampires, leeches and Centrelink.
- A violin bow. Getting the hair into the frog is a very tricky business.
- A flush. A hot flush is something else, but may be caused by being dealt Heep was "Very Eavy 10. The "5" key.

Nimbin Crossword

2017-01
by 5ynic

Across

- Brown sugar confectionary
- After the fire, will the urn return?
- Persians
- Drug journey?
- South American ranches or stations
- (and 17 down) Arachnid brood? (3,3)
- Mexican (cartel capital) city
- Billen Cliffs is where?
- Yes _____ (enthusiastic)
- Graphic storytellers?

Down

- Wild pig
- Stain? Poison
- Former USSR? Not trans!
- Fax
- (5,6) British touring car manufacturer
- Reveal
- Spice burned for its aroma
- Flat bottomed boat
- (3,3) (Convinced they're) stylish, but pretentious
- Lists of odds
- Musical scales
- See 12 across

Solution: Page 33

Sean Ardern

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Story & pic by Susan de Wall

The simple answer is yes, right up until the end of high school – and there are many local families doing it. The processes are straightforward: create a plan that suits your child's needs and interests and gather resources that will fit that plan, with plenty of flexibility built in for changes that happen on the fly. As our kids get older, they can gradually be given more responsibility for their own education, choosing subjects and activities that suit them and following their interests to create an education that fits them exactly.

It is possible to begin home education at any age: many students start during high school. I recently supported several families with this transition from high school to home. While their needs were different, they all had children who had become so disengaged with school, that there was little point in attending other than to meet compulsory schooling requirements. These children are now flourishing at home – working through a course of study that suits both the student and the educational 'authorities' – and learning in their own particular style. School is a fine place for many children, but those who are

not engaged can be better off, in some cases, at home.

Covering the curriculum might seem a challenge from the outside looking in – after all, how can we cover science without a lab? The reality is there is so much out there for every subject that is easily available to anyone: ready made curriculum materials; online courses; specialist equipment, university programs; documentaries; library resources – once you start looking there is an abundance. So much science, to use that example, can be done without a lab – outside, with simple experiments or by observation – just like pioneer scientists did.

High school students often crave more social activities. In the Rainbow Region, we have special events organised each week just for teens and 10+ kids. The teens usually meet at a beach or a park and simply enjoy each others' company, forming wonderful social bonds and talking non-stop in the way that seems necessary at that age. Our 10+ group organisers have been making sure that older children and teens have exciting extra-curricular activities such as laser tag, rock climbing, ice-skating, watersliding, board game days and much more. Our wider community offers

group sports, science and robotics clubs, music and drama lessons, gymnastics, art classes and too many more to mention – all great opportunities for students to engage with specialist teachers and have fun with peers at the same time.

This month our group enjoyed an end-of-year laser tag party at the home of one of our families in Nimbin. Laser tag has been held twice this year and has proven to be a very popular event. Kids, teens and adults all get to let off a bit of steam and wear themselves

out in a big paddock, while spectators sit on the deck and drink tea. It feels pretty special to have 50+ kids and their families turn up, share a great experience and go home enriched by a big social afternoon.

Home education is on the increase in Australia and worldwide as people recognise the need to nurture a lifelong love of learning. If you'd like to know more, or would like to join our meet-ups, please contact us at: rainbowregionhomeschoolers@gmail.com



by Leanne Logan

We came. We gathered. We shared: stories about our year; picnics and food; gifts and prizes.

In the middle of this annual, end-of-year celebration – that the children excitedly know as our Twilight Picnic – there stood our tree, our "dancing tree" that we, as a community of children, educators, parents and carers, had so much fun creating.

On any given day last year, you'd find children winding, winding, winding – so much so that they swayed and got dizzy and fell over, laughing.

Often adults were captured in the winding process – not quick enough to get out before the children wound round yet again. "I've caught you," would come a delighted cry. More laughter.

Each year at Cawongla Playhouse we create something – be it mystical (the dragon), magical (the rainbow serpent), stylised (the horse) or real (Marley

the wombat).

Our dancing tree is perhaps symbolic of all that has come before it, and more. It represents who we are as a community – different, diverse and colourful – and who we want to grow to be.

This year the tree will become our Philosophy Tree. What we value. Where we want to go. How we can achieve this... all these things will be evident when looking at or engaging with the tree.

As educators we are excited to be representing our philosophy in such a way – a living, changing, evolving philosophy that will authentically reflect the journey of all stakeholders involved with our preschool.

And don't be surprised if you pass by one day and find us all dancing around the tree – we do that sort of thing at Cawongla Playhouse.

We wish all our community a safe and joyous New Year and welcome new and old families back for the start of preschool on Wednesday 1st February.

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Life at Barkers Vale Public School

"At Barkers Vale Public School we have friendly people and beautiful, stone buildings. Our playground is lush and green, and we have lots of wildlife." – Year 4 student

"The great thing about small schools, like ours is that you know everyone, and everyone knows you. It's just like one, big happy family." – Year 6 student

"We do mindfulness, yoga and Rock and Water at Barkers Vale. It's a lot of fun and we learn how to get along with each other and how to calm down when we're upset." – Year 2 student

"BVPS is becoming a PBL school. That means we're into Positive Behavior for Learning. It helps us all to stay happy and positive." – Year 6 student

"BVPS is a bully free zone. We often have big, fat, happy smiles on our faces. Our teachers are kind, friendly and easy to get along with. The kids look out for each other. Our school is amazing." – Year 4 student

"We have a fantastic P&C at Barkers Vale. They raise lots of money for us to use for our learning and our excursions. They help us a lot around the school too." – Year 3 student

"We have sport with Ronnie. She's awesome. She plays fun games like European Handball. She knows the rules to lots of games. She's great at helping us when we disagree on the handball court too." – Year 4 student

"We LOVE playing handball. Sometimes we play table tennis too." – Year 2 student

"Our school has a fantastic music teacher called Jamie. He teaches us to play the marimba's, guitars, keyboards, Ipads and bucket drums. Jamie made a lot of our instruments. He helps us with our amazing school concerts. We've also performed at the Performing Arts Concert in Lismore." – Year 4 student

"Our school hall is also amazing. We use it for concerts, sport, Rock and

Water, celebrations (like the Year 6 farewell) and visiting performances. It has an amphitheater for our audiences too." – Year 5 student

"Wren makes delicious food every Monday in our canteen. You'd be amazed by the flavor of her food. She has a wide range of food at reasonable prices. Some of our parents help Wren in the canteen too." – Year 2 student

"We have lovely gardens that Wendy helps us to plant and look after. We also have a cow (she's not real) that lives in our veggie patch. Wren uses some of our food in the canteen too." – Year 4 student

"We love our computer room. It has heaps of computers for us to use. We also have laptops and Ipads in our classrooms." – Year 3 student

"Our school is awesome. We reckon it's the best school in the world. We love it when new kids come to our school. So, if you're looking for a great school to go to, come and check us out." – Year 5 student



The children find out what type of Turtles are in care, and what the turtles need to become healthy before they are released.

Preschool art helps seabird rescue

by Barb Mills

The children at Nimbin Preschool have embarked on a mission to assist Australian Seabird Rescue, and raised \$318.60 in December from selling paintings and wrapping paper and sun-catchers.

They decided to raise the money because they are concerned about marine rubbish and pollution, and the fact that marine animals are injured and dying from eating plastics and balloons that end up in the ocean.

The children presented the money to Kathrina Southwell in Ballina before Christmas.



One of the eight turtles in the Turtle Hospital



Finley presenting the money to Kathrina Southwell

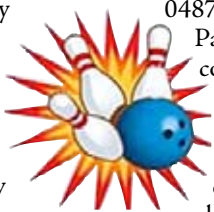
Eden and Finley counting the funds raised with Kathrina Southwell

Kids holiday club

The Nimbin Holiday Club is operating during January from the Community Schoolroom in the Nimbin Community Centre – on excursion days, meet at the Nimbin Central School carpark at 9am.

The program runs between 9am and 3pm, and is designed for children aged 5 – 12.

Please read the dates and venues carefully and book to avoid disappointment. To book phone NNIC on 6689-1692 (between 10am and 4pm, after 9th January) or you can text or call Kylie on



0487-576-281.

Parents must sign consent forms for any excursions, and ensure that children wear appropriate clothing with covered shoes, and bring adequate food and drinks.

Summer programme

- ♦ Thursday 12th January: Excursion – Movie: Sing (G) and pool \$25. Please bring food, water, hat, swimmers, and a towel.
- ♦ Friday 13th January: Nimbin Community School, park and pool, \$12 art/craft, DVDs, games, music and more.

- ♦ Thursday 19th January Nimbin Community School, park and pool, \$12. Art/craft, DVDs, games, music, library craft activity: finger puppets.
- ♦ Friday 20th January: Excursion – Lismore Roller Skating Rink and Lismore pool, \$25. Please bring swimmers, towel, lunch and water.

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