

**Dr. Kurokawa remarks for Tokyo American Club (TAC) Distinguished Achievement Award
Ceremony,
7pm Feb. 18, 2013, Tokyo
870 words or 9 minutes**

Thank you . Good evening everyone. I am deeply honored to receive this award... but I have to say I'm also more than a bit embarrassed.

Because last Friday, three days ago, in Boston I received the Scientific Freedom and Responsibility Award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

And almost exactly two years ago here at TAC I received the ACCJ's Person of the Year Award.

As a medical doctor, all this attention led me to consult the physician's handbook to see if there is some kind of personality disorder that's brought on by receiving too many awards.

Happily, I can report that no such diagnosis exists – yet.

More importantly, I would like to tell you why Tokyo American Club's Distinguished Achievement Award has deep significance for me.

You have honored me by including me in the company of outstanding individuals who have made great contributions to Japan-US relations...

People like Haru Reischauer, Leona Esaki, Sadako Ogata, Konishiki, Donald Keene and Edward Seidensticker.

This has great meaning for me personally because the Japan-US relationship has defined my life ever since the day in 1969 when I "jumped ship" in Philadelphia. It was incidentally, a few days after watching on black-and white TV screen, Apollo 11 touchdown on the Moon and a big step of mankind by Neil Armstrong. My arrival to Honolulu was followed by touch-down of the space capsule off Hawaii.

After a two-year post-doc at the University of Pennsylvania, rather than return to the security of a guaranteed place in Japan's medical elite... I opted to stay in America and start over from zero to qualify as a physician.

I can't find it in the Japanese handbook, but I'm sure 9 out of 10 Japanese doctors would regard my decision as evidence of a personality disorder.

Absolutely no regrets on my part, however. America gave me wonderful opportunities and opened my eyes in ways that would have never appeared if I'd followed the path set out for me.

For years, having gone AWOL (absence without leave) in America I never imagined that I'd return to Japan. But – to my utter astonishment – in 1983 I got an offer from Todai to return as an associate professor –well I was professor of medicine at UCLA then, but of course Japanese hierarchical academia will not recognize such a thing.

I won't go into everything that's happened since. The point is that I returned with hybridized perspectives and behaviors. I was both Japanese and American, on the inside and the outside at the same time.

Without really thinking about it, in this way I followed in the footsteps of Japanese who, since the Meiji Era, have come home changed by their experience in America.

This flow of individuals back and forth across the Pacific has included great minds like Nitobe Inazo and Uchimura Kanzo... and ordinary people who returned to small towns across the country.

Each in his or her own way – great or small – has contributed to changes in the way Japan looks at the world.

Likewise, from the other direction, individual Americans have come to Japan and made great contributions to the evolution of our society.

What's truly inspiring is that some of the most valuable contributions have come from individuals who held no great power beyond their own insights and convictions... and their concern for the wellbeing of the Japanese.

Perhaps my favorite example is a young American woman – just 22 years old – whose gift that has profoundly influenced our society over the past seven decades.

I'm sure you've all heard of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution – the renunciation of war that right-wingers love to hate.

But how many of you know about Article 24?

It enshrines the rights of women in Japan's Constitution – something that the U.S. Constitution does not yet do for American women.

It was drafted by Beate [pronounced: bay-yat-a] Sirota Gordon, a translator on the team of Americans that was given just 10 days to draft our Constitution.

Since the men were in a hurry and considered women's rights a peripheral issue, they gave the task to the young translator.

What she created stands as a living masterpiece – one of the most important text in Japan's long history.

The article 24 reads as;

Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis. With regard to choice of spouse, property rights, inheritance, choice of domicile, divorce and other matters pertaining to marriage and the family, laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes.

Sadly, Beate Sirota Gordon passed away at age 89 earlier December 30th, last year – so you've missed the chance to give this award to her. But to me, her experience and her spirit exemplify what this award is all about.

No matter what you background, age or gender... whether you go to the U.S. as a student or come to Japan as an English teacher... the relationship between our two nations continues to give individuals from both sides remarkable – sometimes almost magical – opportunities to contribute.

So I am deeply honored to be included in their company. Thank you.

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