

TOGETHER, WE
INSPIRE

Seeing the same moon

Speaking not a word of Japanese, a 1972 student exchange to Osaka opened up a whole new world for Tasmanian artist Kaye Green.

By Kaye Green

It all began back in 1971 when I lived in Ulverstone, Tasmania. At school, I met a Japanese student who had come to Devonport High School as a Lions club exchange student. When the Rotary Club of Devonport announced their intention to sponsor a student to study overseas, it was Kyoko who persuaded me to file an application for study in Japan.

I was selected as the first Tasmanian exchange student to go to Japan, and set off in January 1972 for Osaka, Japan, flying from Devonport via Melbourne, Darwin then Hong Kong. I couldn't speak a word of Japanese, since, in those days it wasn't taught in schools. Students going on Youth Exchange nowadays are well prepared, but for me there was no orientation program, uniform or even a badge. But off I went!

In Osaka, I met the Doi family; my host father Kenji Doi, my host mother Teruko Doi and my younger sister, by two months, Michiko, the youngest of six children and the only child still living at home.





*Moon in a Travelling
Sky, By Kaye Green*



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Kaye in Japan in 1972; The first day Kaye met the extended Doi family; Some of Kaye's Japanese-inspired artwork (also opposite page); Kaye with the Baika Girls' School basketball team in 1972.



I had no idea at the time, but my host family had only agreed to have me for a short period, and it was expected that I would move to a number of homes during my 12-month stay. They had only agreed to have me because they lived in Toyonaka, close to the school where I had been enrolled. Not one of them spoke any English.

I most vividly remember my wonderful first night with my Japanese parents and sister. My host mother took me to my bedroom along a hallway hung with paintings by Monet, Cezanne and Picasso – I thought they were reproductions, of course, but later realised they were original paintings and learned that my host father was an important art dealer.

For me, the most wonderful thing was in my bedroom itself. Facing large windows overlooking the garden,

was a beautiful desk; I had never had my own desk before and could not believe that all this, a beautiful room, a sensational looking Japanese style bed, a wonderful view of the garden and a magnificent desk was mine – at least for a while.

My host mother could see I was moved and took my hands in hers as we stood together with tears welling in our eyes. She knew far more deeply what I was feeling than if I had been able to speak the words. It was a profoundly moving experience for both of us and she told me later that it was at that moment, only an hour after I had arrived in her home, that she went downstairs and said, "We're keeping her!"

Speaking no Japanese posed few, if any, problems and I soon settled into my new life as a Japanese schoolgirl at Baika Girls' High School. I enjoyed school life

immensely: my studies, the school excursions, sports and cultural days.

I became vice captain of the basketball team and even won a brush writing competition. Of course, I also attended many Rotary meetings and functions. There were joyous, heartfelt times with my extended host family, my school friends and teachers, all of whom extended a great deal of generosity and love to me. As time went on, not only did I feel very connected and Japanese in my mind – I even started to believe that I physically looked quite Japanese!

Memories are easily recalled: listening to the *okoto*, participating in the tea ceremony, speaking Japanese, hearing the temple gongs on New Year's Eve, watching my Japanese grandfather cut the back lawn with scissors, soaking in the Japanese-style bath tub and seeing Mount Fuji. All of these memories and thousands more continue to enrich my life and give me insights and help to hone the way I see and think about the world.



I still have the doll my Japanese mother gave me on my first night, a *haori* I made at school all by hand, the tea cup I used every day, my school graduation certificate and my photo albums. But as precious as these objects are to me, they are not nearly as significant or precious as what is inside me. I believe that I have spent the past 47 years benefiting from my exchange year as an artist, but, most importantly, as a person. I am connected to my Japanese experience every single day.

I came back to Tasmania with my eyes, mind and heart open and completed my BA at the School of Art in Hobart. Then, in 1979, I went to the United States for two years to complete a master's degree at the University of New Mexico, where I was able to complete part of my study at the world-renowned Tamarind Institute of Lithography.

After reading a review of my work, referring to a Japanese sensibility in one of my lithographs, my Japanese father offered to hold a solo exhibition for me in his gallery in Osaka. This was a huge opportunity for me, and I will always appreciate the great support and encouragement my Japanese

parents gave me at such an early stage in my career.

I had my exhibition at the Umeda Gallery in Osaka. It was incredible, I stayed in Japan for about three weeks and then finally, after being away for over two years, I returned home to Tasmania.

During my exchange year in 1972, I was never homesick, but of course missed my family, especially my mother. As a way of connecting with her I asked if she could look at the moon at certain times in a month, giving us both the opportunity of knowing we were seeing the moon at the same time. It seems odd now, with Skype, email and easy telephone access, but in those days, it was my only way of direct contact with my mother apart from writing and receiving letters.

Years later, during one of many visits to Japan, I was sitting with my Japanese father as the sun was setting. I didn't recall telling him about our moon gazing, but he looked at me and said, "Whenever I am here at

night in Japan looking at the moon, I will know you are in Australia seeing the same moon."

I had an exhibition at the Carnegie Gallery some years ago to highlight and honour the Japanese influences in my art. I called the exhibition "Seeing the Same Moon".

I lived in Melbourne for 20 years, lecturing at Monash University and exhibiting my art in Australia, Japan and Europe, before returning to live in Tasmania. Throughout my life, I have enjoyed many return trips to Japan to visit my family and hold regular exhibitions. I always attend a Rotary meeting when I visit Osaka. No matter how old I get, they still consider me their "exchange student".

I hope those Rotarians on the selection committee back in 1971, and all Rotarians, can appreciate the impact of their hard work opening up the world for young people. I am grateful every day for having been given the opportunity to live in Japan. The experience changed my life. It has made me who I am. ●