

My Year At Joochi Daigaku, Tokyo.

In 1986 I graduated from the University of Auckland with a brand new Bachelor of Arts degree. Still aged only 20 and with some advice from my Japanese tutors, I decided to apply for a one year scholarship to study at Sophia University in Tokyo. Sophia and Auckland had a "sister university" reciprocal agreement, whereby a student from either university could study free of charge at the other. An B+ average grade in all topics was required to be maintained throughout the year of study and the student needed to fund their own living & travelling costs.

Once accepted, I went into full swing to earn as much money as I could in the 3 months left before departure. I managed to hold down 5 jobs, all as diverse as each other. From housecleaning and nanny services, to surveying Japanese tourists as they left Auckland Airport, it was certainly an exhausting but rewarding experience. My typical Saturday started at 8 am and finished at midnight.

And to make matters worse I met my future husband at the same time and was squeezing in a date or two him as well! The weeks passed very quickly and suddenly it was time to jump on the plane and head off for my year in the biggest city I'd ever lived in.

My first month's accommodation had been organised through an English language student who was at the same time home-staying with my family. Basically I got the use of her room while she was living in my house back in Auckland! Her family lived in 4-chome, Ginza. What a shock it was for me going to such a busy, noisy environment. Sleeping at night was difficult because of all the city sounds, but my host mother was a real character. She was a very keen jogger and actually started off the official jogging circuit around the Emperor's Palace. She would get up at 4am, go jogging and then join me for a breakfast, with a beer in hand! It was never too early for her to have a beer, especially after a run!

Unfortunately after 1 month I had to move on. I could not afford to continue paying the homestay fee and their daughter would be returning soon.

Life at Sophia was very full. I studied Japanese Language, Japanese Economics and Japanese Literature at the Ichigaya Campus and played a number of sports at the main campus in Yotsuya.

I found a few jobs teaching English to businessmen, school children and housewives. I also secured a weekly job at a radio station, teaching English and New Zealand culture on a live show. Our 30 minute programme was so much fun and I even demonstrated the Maori *Haka* to our listeners. It was a fantastic experience and taught me many things about working with Japanese people and accelerated my understanding of the language.

Sometimes part-time job opportunities would come along at University too. I once did a modelling job for a department store in Tokyo. Clothes on of course! With another job I was flown down to Miyazaki City in Kyushu to sell French and German wine in a department store. In those days there were not very many foreigners in the smaller cities and towns, and so the local people in Miyazaki were very surprised to hear me speak Japanese. One guy actually hit a power pole while staring at me and attempting to drive!

These jobs were as an important learning experience for me as were the studies at university. They gave me an insight to the Japanese way of thinking and their culture.

During the year I home-stayed with another two families and moved in total six times! I definitely wouldn't recommend this to any international student!

I also took the chance to study and complete the Japanese Proficiency Exam (Level 2). It was very rewarding to be able to study the language "live", i.e. while living with the people and their language at the same time. Whatever I learned that day in class, I was able to test out it that night at home with my family. Because I had stayed in Kobe some years prior, I initially was pulled up for speaking in the Kansai tone. After a while I got used to Kanto dialect and could switch whenever I needed to. My host family in Kobe teased me about the accent whenever I travelled down to see them and then on my return to Tokyo, my other host family would tease me too! Recognising and understanding these differences in tones and accents has helped me with my present day interpreting work.

My year at Joochi was a wonderful experience and I treasure these memories. Learning another language whilst being immersed in the culture is truly the only way to really get to know a country and its people.

Good luck and all the very best to all of you who take the plunge and go to study in Japan!

Anna Fisher