West meets East - Prologue

There are many benefits to being a member of the Arizona Library Association, but the best kept secret to its membership may be the Horner Fellowship. The Horner Fellowship is a partnership between the Arizona Library Association and the Japan Library Association that provides Arizona librarians with an amazing professional development opportunity – to visit Japan and discover how libraries in another culture function and operate. As the 2009 Horner Fellow, I took advantage of this opportunity to explore how the libraries of this technologically-oriented society provide services to their users and whether they witness the same information literacy issues that we do here in the United States.

My trip was off to a rocky start when the baggage loading equipment literally ran into my aircraft, causing a dent sizable enough to cancel my flight out of Phoenix. I eventually arrived in Tokyo, however, and my hosts from the Japan Library Association helped me feel comfortable and at home. I was especially grateful that Mr. Miura, the JLA chair, had arranged an escort – and translator as needed – to meet me each morning to ensure that I got to each of my destinations without any problems. The transportation system in Japan can be both wonderful and terrifying to a new visitor.

Over a two week period in November, I toured 15 institutions, attended the annual Library Fair & Forum conference, explored the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum and saw the active volcano Mt. Unzen with Katsuko Hotelling (retired librarian from Arizona State University), visited numerous temples and shrines, traveled to Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagasaki Prefecture, and Kyoto, and met incredible librarians who were willing to give up their precious time to meet with me. By the end of my trip I was both mentally and physically exhausted – and I'd do it again tomorrow if given the chance!

As you can imagine, I have extensive notes from my visits making it difficult to summarize everything I learned in a single newsletter article. Instead, over the next few months I will be providing you with some insights as to what I learned. I'll be covering some of the common themes that emerged relating to relationships, technology, and information. I hope you find them interesting and informative.

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