

# A report on Short-term Study-abroad of English and Nursing Participation in the summer programs held in 1997, at Wenatchee Valley College and the School of Nursing, Seattle University

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## Abstract

I participated in the 1997 summer program at Wenatchee Valley College and School of Nursing, Seattle University in Washington State, U.S.A. I experienced a home-stay for the first time. I had opportunities to learn about nursing education and professional systems there. Through these programs, I gained many invaluable experiences. Here I present those which deeply impressed me.

**Key word** : Summer Program, human relationship, nursing education

## Introduction

Shimane Nursing College, in Izumo, Japan, agreed to a Summer/Cultural Program with Wenatchee Valley College, Washington State, in the United States with the aim of fostering global awareness among students and faculty members. The college authority designated this program as the Short-term Study-abroad of English and Nursing. In 1996, sixteen nursing students and two faculty members crossed the Pacific Ocean and participated in the first summer program held at Wenatchee Valley College.

To this program, a new program was added in 1997 at the School of Nursing, Seattle University. Because I was interested in contemporary nursing education and the nursing profession in the United States, I decided to take part in these two programs to be held for twelve days at Wenatchee Valley College and then for seven days at the School of Nursing, Seattle University. The programs included various activities such as classroom instruction in English, lectures on nursing, outdoor recreation, a home stay with an American family, and visits to hospitals and nursing homes. Through these programs I gained many invaluable experiences ; here, I present some which deeply impressed me and made the summer of 1997 a memorable and unforgettable one.

## **1. Coming to the United States**

I left Japan together with twenty-four students and two faculty members and arrived in Seattle on July 16, 1997. This was my first time in the U.S. As I stood in Sea-Tac Airport in Seattle, I was full of a mixture of anxiety and expectation in anticipation of visiting a country completely strange to me. We then went by bus to the city of Wenatchee, 150 kilometers southeast of Seattle.

## **2. Home stay**

### **1) First meeting with a home-stay mother and overcoming the language barrier**

We planned a home stay with an American family two days after the start of the summer program at Wenatchee Valley College. On the evening on July 18, my home-stay mother came to pick me up at the dormitory where I was staying. She was Mrs. Mariann S. W. ( Mariann ), a nursing instructor at Wenatchee Valley College, North Campus. She started driving northward along the Columbia River toward Tanasket where her house was located. Inside the car for three hours, I had great difficulty communicating orally with her. By speaking, writing and gesturing, I gradually managed to achieve understanding. It was really a laborious task for me, but, frankly speaking, overcoming the language barrier gave me a pleasing sense of successful heart-to-heart communication with her.

### **2) Driving in the countryside and visits to the North Campus and a rural hospital**

Our car traveled a road that stretched as far as I could see in the huge and magnificent natural surroundings. There were no signs of people for long distances. I occasionally saw cows and horses grazing on spacious grassy fields and hills, and had a greater understanding of the vastness of the U.S. On the way to Mariann's house, we stopped over at the North Campus in Omak where she teaches nursing. As she showed me around the campus, I felt more friendly toward her because we are both teachers of nursing at colleges in rural areas. The nursing program at Wenatchee Valley College has three levels: the nursing assistant certificate, the practical nursing certificate and the associate degree in nursing. Successful completion of the two-year associate degree qualifies the student to sit for the registered nurse licensure examination.

We then visited a local hospital with about forty beds. The hospital staff extended a warm welcome to us and showed us around the hospital. I saw for the first time American nurses taking care of their patients. It seemed to me that both patients and hospital staff were all forthright and good-natured as are those in rural hospitals in Japan. They relied upon each other. I had an impression from observation of this hospital that the essence of good nursing is the same, no matter where we may be. It is that nurses should provide attentive care for patients and the patients should willingly allow themselves to be cared for.

### 3) Friendly international relations

The next day, a friend of Mariann's took me and Mariann to Canada in her car, which happened to have been made in my country, Japan. I whispered hello to the car just as I would to an old friend encountered in a distant country. At the Canadian border there was only a customs office. An official briefly checked the car and asked only me to show my passport. Then he allowed us to enter British Columbia, Canada.

It was the first time for me to pass a national border on land. I was surprised to see how simple the procedures were to enter a foreign country, contrary to my perception that there would be troublesome red tape. It seems that U.S. citizens can go to Canada in a carefree manner just as they go to a neighboring house. I saw a good example of a friendly international relationship between the US and Canada. It helped me very much to understand the meaning of global awareness and international friendship.

### 4) Beautiful human relation and family bonds

We then returned to the United States and went to Mariann's parents' house located near the Canadian border. It stood by itself on a hill in a huge area where many hills stretched one after another as far as my eyes could see. The beautiful view from the living room of the house was really breathtaking. Her parents received me in a natural and friendly manner. I was impressed with the simplicity, and quiet of their lifestyle. Although Mariann lives some distance from her elderly parents, she tenderly cares for them by visiting them as frequently as circumstances permit. I was aware of strong family bonds among them.

We bid farewell to her parents and returned to Mariann's house. On the way we dropped by a nursing home run by a nurse. The house was kept very neat and tidy. Elderly people were provided with single rooms in which each of them was living a comfortable life. Mariann spoke kindly to the residents and listened to what they said, as if



Fig. 1 Eldrly people and Mariann at a living room of the nursing home

they were her parents or friends. Nurses working there took good care of the residents. I had the impression that the individual worth of the elderly was highly respected by the medical staff and that this respect forms the basis of human relations in the nursing home.

In the evening I met Mariann's two children. They cordially welcomed me. I was told that the oldest child was adopted. Although there seemed to be a complexity about the family composition, everyone got along very well. I thought there was a love in this family with which everyone was firmly connected and in perfect harmony.

#### 5) Expression of gratitude for food

A thing with which I was impressed was the solemn ritual performed before dinner. All the family members sat at a table and joined hands. Mariann as the family head said grace and thanked God for giving food to them. I followed suit. She asked me a question as to what kind of ritual is performed before a meal in Japan. I answered it by telling her that we usually say "itadakimasu" with our hands clasped in front of our body. She said it was not a ritual but just a greeting. I could not say any more in response to her words. Later I thought of what the act of saying the word with an act of praying does mean. I realized that Japanese used to have a ceremony expressing gratitude to nature or the Buddha for merciful provision of food. The ceremony, however, became just a formality and lost its original meaning in daily life of most families in Japan. I believe that all the members of this family were devout Christians and firmly hold religious beliefs.

#### 6) Faith in daily life

The next day was Sunday. From the early morning Mariann was kept busy receiving as many as six visitors. I did not know exactly why they visited her. I thought it was because she treasures human relationships with the people in her neighborhood in accordance with her faith. She loves her neighbors and they love her, too.

We went to a church. All church-goers were dressed up. They sang hymns to the accompaniment of instruments such as the piano and trumpet. Beautiful voices of the chorus resounded in the church. And they read the bible and listened to a minister preach. Having seen the morning service, I came to understand that most people in this community have faith in God and this religious faith is the principle which guides the people's behavior in their everyday community life. During a session of the service, there was a pause. The people present in the church were allowed freely to speak whatever they had on their minds. Regardless of age and sex, many of them frankly brought their own opinions before everyone in a firm and dignified manner. The atmosphere was much different from that of meetings in my native city because attendees are usually reserved and apt to be silent. I became conscious that a church provides a place for the people to have mutual communication and also serves in strengthening and developing human relations in the community.

### 7) At the end of the home stay

Although the home stay was only two days, I was able to experience many things from it. I could see the way of life that an American nurse's family leads in a rural community. And I also came to have contact with the hearts of my host family full of sincerity and warmth based on religious faith.

I reflected on the people's way of life around us in Japan. They work busily and give priority to searching for material wealth. I deeply sympathized with the way of life in which people spend much time establishing good human relations through friendly conversation with family members and neighbors, and attentively taking care of the elderly.

## 3. Summer program in Seattle

### 1) Study of nursing

On July 26, I, along with the students and faculty members, moved to Seattle and participated in the summer program at the School of Nursing at Seattle University. I had opportunities to hear presentations on health care, nursing education, professional nursing systems in the United States.

What moved me very much were, first, the historical background in which the American nurses made a great effort in developing the independence of the nursing profession, which subsequently resulted in its currently improved social position; and, second, the fact that the roles and functions of the nursing profession have changed in response to American economic conditions at various time.

Nursing education in the United States started in the latter half of the 19th century, as a result of conflicts between nurses and physicians. Since the beginning of the 20th Century, nursing has quantitatively expanded in terms of the number of educational institutions and has also quantitatively improved in terms of spreading higher level nursing education. At present, there are 109 nursing diploma programs, 876 associate degree colleges, 523 nursing schools with baccalaureate programs, 306 of which have master's programs in 1997. It is noteworthy that the general opinion of nursing has shifted from that of a blue-collar job to a professional one.

I was told that many of the students who have had experience as nurses in various setting for some years are enrolled in master's or doctorate programs, and there are also programs available which allow licensed nurses without baccalaureate degrees to obtain that degree. Many nurses are engaged in these programs to establish their nursing careers.

Community-based nursing has become well-developed in the United States due to efforts to contain spiraling medical costs. As a result, the number of nurses working in communities has increased, approaching that of those working at hospitals. It seems to me that the scope of nurses' work will become broader, extending into other areas.

I asked the Dean of the School of Nursing the question, "What do you think is the most important thing to do for the nursing profession to become independent?" She answered, "The most important factors are to establish postgraduate nursing programs

,and the providing of health education to people.” I was impressed very much by this.

In Japan, it is a remarkable current social trend that nursing education is being promoted, resulting in an increase in the number of higher education schools: There were 54 baccalaureate degree colleges or universities, 72 associate degree colleges , 496 nursing diploma programs and 443 two year-courses(13 associate degree colleges and 430 nursing diploma programs) in 1997. These figures are still low in the number of degree courses as compared with those in the US, but the number of colleges is expected to increase in the future.

It is evident that caring for the elderly is becoming a large and important task in our society. People today have a diversified sense of value and way of life. Their expectations are greater than ever that nursing professionals be responsive to their health problem needs in various nursing settings. A new era is beginning in which people's health care will be provided for by interdisciplinary teams including nurses and other professionals. It seems urgently necessary for nursing professionals to reconsider, from the viewpoint of essential nursing, what discipline-specific roles will be for human caring in our changing society.

## 2) Visits to hospitals and nursing homes in Seattle

We had visits to four hospitals (MADIGAN MEDICAL CENTER, PROVIDENCE MEDICAL CENTER, CHILDRENS ORTHOPEDIC HOSPITAL, SWEDISH MEDICAL CENTER) and two nursing homes (SEATTLE KEIRO NURSING HOME, C. KLINE GALLAND HOME ) in a metropolitan city, Seattle.

Having an interest in hospital environments, I carefully observed the insides of the facilities. It is well worth mentioning that the environment was comfortably arranged by paying a great deal of attention to elimination of unpleasant odors, choice of favorable coloring of furniture, attentive development of the things used daily and decoration with



Fig. 2 The entrance of an inspection room (MRI) at CHILDRENS ORTHOPEDIC HOSPITAL

paintings and sculpture. I thought that the internal environments were designed to be not only function-oriented but also client-oriented by taking into consideration the comforts of living. I add here a student's comment. She told me, in a surprising manner, that there were no odd smells at all that reminded her of hospitals.

I saw many nurses at work in hospitals in the United States, some of whom proudly gave me various explanations about their hospitals. It was my impression that they were all working self-reliantly and professionally in a dignified manner. Reflecting back on the present situation in Japan, I think it important to more clearly define the mission of the nursing profession in order to make the nursing profession as genuinely independent and attractive as possible so young generations are attracted to it when considering their choices of occupations.

### Conclusion

The participation in the summer program gave me invaluable experiences I will long remember. In retrospect, I had had a dream to see the nursing education and professional systems in the United States. Participating in the program made my dream come true. What inspired me most was meeting Mariann. She is a nurse and also a teacher of nursing at a college just as I am. She was not only a home-stay mother but also showed me her way of daily life firmly based on Christian belief.

Putting the difference of religion aside, I learned from her many wonderful things such as the importance of good human relations in a family and community, including love for neighbors, tender care for the elderly, and friendly relationships between foreign countries, which are all considered very essential for nursing now and in the future. Thus the summer of 1997 turned out to be memorable and unforgettable for me. Now I feel that the United States has become much closer to me and more friendly than ever. I have a desire to see again all the people whom I met and who were very kind and generous to me during my stay there. By the time of a next visit, I will improve my English.

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### Postscript

I sent this manuscript to Mariann to ask if there were any misunderstandings about my observations of her life. It happened to be delivered to her, by chance, on her birthday. She said she had received it, considering it to be the most treasured gift for her. She also expressed her happiness at reading of thoughts about the home-visit and agreed that she was able to share very well with me in spite of the fact that we spoke different languages.

She added a comment about the Sunday morning when she had received many visitors. She said she typically did not have visitors on Sunday mornings, but that day was certainly different. They were not neighbors but her relatives and a friend. They stopped by while traveling to other destinations to say hello to her. It seems to me that she also has very good relations with her relatives.