

## Martin Dieu\*

It was after 3:00 a.m., and I was hunkered down in a corner of the Japanese delegation room, trying to stay below the lowering cloud of cigarette smoke. There were maybe eight of us in the room, a converted hotel room across the street from the Kyoto International Conference Hall, and I was translating into English a new draft of the Japanese Environment Minister's address to the high-level delegates.

The second class of Mansfield Fellows, of which I was a member, didn't really know what the rules were. Could we take on real work? Were we destined to outsider status with few opportunities for real involvement? When my program manager at the Japan Environment Agency, Kazuhiko Takemoto, talked over options for my first assignment, he included the United Nations climate meeting in Kyoto as one of the options. I jumped at the opportunity.

Little did I know just how intensive the work would be. Mr. Takemoto relocated me to a narrow, nondescript room where I joined seven Japanese government employees in what they referred to as the "*takobeya*." *Takobeya* refers to a small hole in the rocks that an octopus might squeeze into, or cramped, prewar labor camp housing.

For the next three months, this was our home. My wife would wake me up before she left for her work in the morning. At midnight each day, the manager of our *takobeya* would call us to a small table to discuss the day's progress and the next day's assignments, and pass around shots of whiskey. By 1:30 a.m. most of us would be filing out with our government-sponsored taxi voucher for an exhausted ride home. Government employees working past the final subway trains in Kasumigaseki, where government ministries are located, would be given a voucher to pay for the ride home. The taxis would be lined up for blocks, waiting for the early morning exodus.

Our seven-person *takobeya* team reflected a coalition of interests in Japan. We had one mid-level diplomat from the Foreign Ministry, a junior official from the Kyoto municipal government, and three other junior staffers. Hideyuki Mori, a veteran

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\* The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or the U.S. government.

of many years working overseas at the UN and the Asian Development Bank, had the task of keeping us on target.

Over time, we settled into roles. Mine was to liaison with the UN on planning, budgets and facilities. I took all foreign press inquiries, and handled much of the translation. Mr. Takemoto, I found out, was in charge of logistics and policy preparations for Kyoto. Mr. Takemoto also visited prefectural governments for consultations in the run-up to Kyoto, and it was on one of these visits that he took me along.

During this visit to Kanagawa, we were sitting opposite one another over our food when Mr. Takemoto pointed at one of the dishes and slowly and deliberately spoke the word for spinach: *ho-ren-so*. Did he think I couldn't say spinach in Japanese? Instead, he was teaching me about a central tenant of Japanese management, a Japanese abbreviation meaning *hokoku* (report), *renraku* (contact or check in) and *sodan* (consult). I had read about W. Edwards Deming and TQM (total quality management), but this was new for me. Over dinner, Mr. Takemoto took the time to explain the importance of intensive collaboration over the course of a project; how checking in and consulting on direction and progress on a daily basis is central to Japan's management approach.

Our *takobeya* staff moved to Kyoto just prior to the conference. Though I could not be listed in the government of Japan delegation, I was registered under a government NGO. Our *takobeya* staff organized several events, one of which I chaired. The rest of the time we worked with the UN logistics staff. I translated the Minister's speeches, which is why I was in that hotel room sleepless for several nights running, trying to breath around the tobacco smoke.

At the end of my Mansfield Fellowship, my spouse and I moved back to Washington D.C., and resumed our life here. The Fellowship has influenced my work ever since. I was assigned to the U.S. climate negotiations team, and participated in several of the conferences after Kyoto. When the UN Conference on Sustainable Development was announced, my experience with large UN meetings was recognized and I was asked to lead EPA's participation.

For several years after the Fellowship, I led work with Japan's Environment Ministry, including sharing new chemical testing protocols and data through the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Using close ties to the Ministry, I organized bilateral cooperation meetings in Japan. EPA's Deputy Administrator attended one of these meetings, and was the first high-level official to visit the site of Japan's Minamata industrial mercury disaster. EPA's Deputy met with the few

remaining survivors in Minamata—a visit that had not previously been possible due to the Japanese sensitivities. The meeting was supposed to last thirty minutes but extended over two hours, with the EPA Deputy moved to tears.

Over the years, the Mansfield Fellowship has influenced my work and my life in many ways. I continue to stay in touch with several colleagues and friends from Japan. In particular, I've facilitated meetings between Mr. Takemoto and EPA officials, as Mr. Takemoto moved into the most senior levels of the Japanese government.

Mr. Takemoto influenced me in another important way. Over dinner one evening, before heading back to the office, I asked him whether he had any other career goals—was he planning to move to business or a university in the near future? He stopped short a moment, and then explained that to his mind, government service was the highest calling. He could make more money elsewhere. He could work shorter hours elsewhere. But, in the end, this work provided real purpose, and there really was nothing else he would rather do. Mr. Takemoto's dedication and respect for public service remains an inspiration for me today.

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**Martin Dieu** participated in the Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program from 1996-1998. During his Fellowship year in Japan, he served in full-time placements in Japan's Environment Agency and Ministry of International Trade and Industry. He also completed a Diet placement in the office of the Honorable Tsuneo Suzuki, LDP Member, House of Representatives. He currently is Deputy Director for the Office of Global Affairs and Policy at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.