

# A Story a Week ...

... from woodblock printmaker David Bull

## Saying Goodbye

Yesterday evening, I made a quick trip to Tokyo and back. I'm kind of busy with printing all this week, but had to put my tools away in the late afternoon, get cleaned up and changed, and head for the train station. Work on that print would have to wait until the next day. The reason for the trip was a fax that came in a couple of days before, letting me know that an acquaintance of ours had passed away, and giving the dates and times of the *otsuya* and the funeral.

Because I am a member of a professional association of traditional woodblock printmaking craftsmen, most of whom are older than me, I receive such notices fairly frequently. This one though, wasn't related to that group, but was from the company that operated the gallery in which I held many of my exhibitions over the years. Amano-san - who had run that gallery - was ninety years old at the time he had retired from the business five years ago, so it was certainly not a shock to hear that he had now died.

But even though it was expected, it was still sad news to hear that he had passed away. None of us can argue that it is a 'tragedy' when a man passes away quietly in his sleep at age 95, but I felt a particular poignancy about this event. You see, Amano-san was one of the last remaining examples of a type of man that has pretty much disappeared from our contemporary society; he was a true 'gentleman'.

Now that I have said that though, I think I may have trouble defining for you exactly what I mean. Part of it was his background; Amano-san was brought up in an upper class family and educated at an exclusive university. But neither of those things guarantees 'gentleman' status, as we see demonstrated in our newspapers every day. Politeness and courtesy is of course an important part of the mix, and he certainly had both of those, and expressed them in a way that made one feel they were heartfelt, and not just a matter of 'going through the motions'.

Absolute honesty is another aspect to such a character, and this too, was innate to Amano-san. One day during one of my exhibitions in his gallery, he passed me an envelope with a non-trivial amount of money in it. It turned out that they had discovered an error in the billing of my account with the gallery, and I had been charged too much for the rental ... nearly ten years previously. This was the refund.

Of course it goes without saying that in his official capacity as manager of the gallery, he offered a great deal of assistance to me with showing and promoting my work. He had a vast network of contacts, stretching back to the years when Tokyo was being re-built from the rubble of the war; sometimes it seemed as though there was nobody that he didn't know!

Whenever we have cause to think about somebody for whom we have a lot of respect, the question arises of how we ourselves 'stack up' to such a model. I like to think that I share a number of the personal characteristics that I admired in Amano-san, but nobody would ever think of referring to me as a 'gentleman'.

Still, I do have a good sense of 'duty', I think. When the fax arrived, I didn't hesitate. Even though I could have been excused for not attending the *otsuya* - I live a long way away, I was not a close friend, 'merely' a business acquaintance, I hadn't seen him in a number of years, etc. etc. - I paid no attention to such thoughts. I put my work to one side, and made the journey to say 'good-bye' to a man who I will never forget, and who will always hold a position in my mind as a 'model' for how a man should behave.

I doubt that we will ever see his kind again, and that is more sad to me than his actual passing. That one man is gone is a natural part of life; that his type is disappearing, is a great loss ...

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