



Topless!

The other day, I received an email from a magazine editor, asking if I would agree to be interviewed for an item in his publication. At first, I wasn't quite sure how to respond to this request, but after a little bit of 'investigation' - making a trip to the local bookstore to look at a recent copy - I agreed, and we went ahead with the interview, which consisted of a questionnaire for me to fill in, and a follow-up visit from one of their reporters.

Why did I hesitate at first? It was because the publication was a men's magazine, and quite a well-known one - Playboy. For the benefit of overseas readers I should mention that although the two magazines - the Japanese edition and the (very famous) US edition - share a name, they share no content at all; this one is completely locally produced. But having said that, I do have to add that the basic idea is the same: a selection of photos of nude (or nearly so) women, interleaved with articles of more general interest.

Now I knew this before I went down to the bookstore, but what I particularly wanted to check before giving assent was the overall tone of the magazine. Many such publications here in Japan use photographs of 'models' who are clearly not fully adult, and indeed, some specialize in such material. If Playboy was doing that sort of thing, then I wanted no part of it. But in the copy I checked, although all the women were (of course) 'young', there was nothing that made me feel like this was child pornography.

So we went ahead, and in due course the item was published. (I should mention that the story was nothing all to do with the 'girlie' content of the magazine, but was part of an ongoing series where they select a particular 'job' each week, and interview seven people about their working life. This week was 'artist', which is why they called me.)

But far more interesting to me than the little story that resulted was a memory it brought back to me of my first encounter with 'naked ladies' in a magazine. And no, it wasn't Playboy, but the venerable Life magazine.

It was the second week of July, in 1964 (yes, I know the date exactly!). I was 12 years old, and had just come out of Grade 7 for the summer holidays. My friends and I spent the long lazy days reading comic books on the front porch, exploring the nearby countryside on our bicycles, and just generally 'hanging out'. (Japanese readers should note that - contrary to the Japanese school custom - there was no such thing as 'homework' in our summer holidays.)

Down at the corner where our quiet back street intersected a main road was a small strip mall anchored at one end by a drug store. One day, one of the boys in our group took us all in there, saying that he had something to show us. I guess his parents probably subscribed to Life magazine; he had seen an article in their home copy, and was now going to show it to the rest of us. We went to the magazine rack, where he opened up the current issue of Life to the particular photo he had in mind.

We could not believe what we were seeing. It was a photograph of a naked woman! Or more accurately, it was an underwater photo of a woman wearing a 'topless' swimsuit. I can't speak for the rest of the boys, but I for one had never seen anything like this before. So *this* was what was under those blouses!

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I guess we made a bit of commotion, because a moment later, the owner of the drugstore came over to see what was going on. We beat it, scattering in all directions and running outside ... just as though we had been caught in some illicit activity.

There isn't much more to the story, of course. Back issues of that magazine are online now, so it is easy to find out what it was all about - a publicity/promotion story on a fashion trend that never took off. And the photo is as 'mild' as they come - certainly nothing that would shock any modern 12-year old!

But it was one big step - er, *two* big steps! - in *my* 'education'!

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