



Second Chance

I received a wonderful present in the mail the other day - a time machine!

And in order to tell you about it properly, we'll have to go back in time to the beginning of the story! It was the summer of 1993, when I was about half-way through the ten year project of creating the Hyakunin Isshu prints. A TV crew had come to make (yet another) program about my work on the series, and when the producer and I were planning the outline, she said that she wanted to include a scene of me 'learning at the hand of my master'. She, along with many other people, had the idea that I was actually studying the woodblock craft with experienced craftsmen, and was somewhat disappointed to find out that I was pretty much working on my own.

At that point I had *met* a couple of craftsmen, and had actually been accepted as a 'member' into the traditional craftsmen's association, but had not spent any amount of time with anybody. I had visited printer Matsuzaki-san on a few occasions, to show my recent work and to ask a few questions, and had also been to the home of printer Seki-san once or twice, but was certainly not 'studying' with anybody. And I had never had a chance to see a carver at work, beyond what I had been able to catch at a public demonstration I had seen some years earlier.

The producer was adamant that she wanted that kind of scene though, and even had it all planned in her mind - I would be sitting on the tatami mats next to an elderly worker, and as we talked about some aspect of the work, he would pass me a tool. She wanted to 'catch' that moment, as the tool passed from his hand to mine. (This lady had a very melodramatic bent, as I was to discover again five years later, when she produced a 'tear-jerker' of a one hour documentary on my work, that I can still not bear to watch even now ...)

Anyway, long story short, she made arrangements for us to visit Ito-san the carver, and the entire episode went pretty much exactly as she had planned. We were in his room for a couple of hours, with the camera running pretty much all the time, and somewhere in the middle of it, she was able to get the shot she wanted. The program was produced, aired as planned, and passed into history.

We now jump ahead to this autumn. NHK asked me to take part in a program they were planning, and as the producer and I sat down together to go over the proposed project, he made the same kind of request. I let him know that it would not be possible - because these days I very rarely have any contact with those craftsmen - but as part of our conversation I told him about the previous visit to Ito-san (who has since passed away), and I also mentioned that I have a stack of four old VHS tapes that had been given to me by that producer many years ago. This was the raw camera footage - mostly unused in the program - that she felt I would be interested in keeping. Not having a TV, I had never had a chance to look at it, and it has sat in storage ever since.

His ears pricked up at this news, and he asked if he could borrow it, with the thought that he might be able to get the proper permissions and use some clips in the current production.

As it turned out, this was not possible, but after the new program was all done - produced and aired - he returned the old tapes to me, along with four shiny silver discs ... digital dubs of their contents. My computer will play DVDs, so at last - after 17 years - I can watch the footage!

And there is a very young Dave, sitting by the side of Ito-san's bench as he demonstrates sharpening, how to carve the 'back side' of a calligraphic line, and many other interesting points. Dave back then had a much

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poorer understanding of Japanese than he does now, so many of the points Ito-san had made had sailed right over his head. But here the old craftsman is on the screen, explaining all over again. And patiently, again and again, as many times as we wish to listen.

Thank you NHK, for your gift of this time machine!

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