



## Accepted at Last!

Summer is here in full force, and our printers are sweating through the long days of work in our 'naturally air conditioned' workshop. We keep the screened windows wide open of course, and would like to improve the ventilation even more by keeping the door open too, but the ladies have forbidden me from doing so. They would rather sweat it out than put up with the mosquitoes that then find their way inside.

We actually don't have many mosquitoes down there. The workshop is in the level just above the river, and as that water is full of small fish and other very hungry creatures, I don't think that many mosquito larvae can survive in that environment. What mosquitoes we do have - as I wrote in one of these stories about this time last year - nearly all come from containers of standing water that have been carelessly left here and there in the residential area up at street level.

But these women are crazy - nearly paranoid really - about the threat from mosquitoes. They bring lotions and sprays, and if they happen to hear one buzzing nearby, they instantly down tools and call for help in killing it. And if one of them happens to get a bite, you would think it was a pit viper that had bitten them, the tremendous fuss they make.

All of this reminds me of an episode from back in the mid 1980's, when I - partly in fun - sent a 'Letter to the Editor' to a major English-language newspaper in Tokyo. I asked the readers if any of them were having the same experience as I - that my (Japanese) wife and our two daughters were severely bitten by mosquitoes all summer long, but I was rarely bitten, if at all. Were Japanese mosquitoes xenophobic in some way?

The newspaper ran the letter, as well as a few replies that it received over the following week or so. The first respondent shared the same experience: Japanese bitten, but Westerner immune. She attributed the phenomenon to the differences in diet. Perhaps it was something in miso soup or *natto* that provided the attraction to the mosquitoes? It would indeed make sense that these mosquitoes - bred and reared in Japan - would find such domestic 'food' to their liking.

The next respondent had a different suggestion. His children were also daughters, and he suggested that it was a matter of gender, not ethnic background. Our wives and daughters have softer skin, and they smell better than we males do. This definitely makes sense, I think. But it leaves me wondering why such a phenomenon should be present only in Japan, because I can testify that mosquitoes back in Canada show no such gender preferences at all!

There were other responses to my question, but from that point on they degraded into parody and foolishness, including such suggestions as that the mosquitoes were attracted to people with 'slanted eyes' (as one writer put it!)

Now these days, here in our workshop, I can no longer claim that 'I am never bitten,' as I did in my letter all those years ago. It seems that I have now become so acclimated to the Japanese environment that I am considered a 'local' by these insects. If so, it took me more than a quarter of a century, and I think if you asked other foreigners who have been in Japan for many years just how long it took for their 'neighbours' to accept them ... that might be a common answer! :-)

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