



Meow!

Everybody here in Japan who knows me, knows me as a woodblock printmaker, but I was living here for more than three years before I earned a single yen from prints. Most of my income in those early few years came from the English conversation 'school' we opened in our apartment, but there was a time in the first half-year or so when I didn't yet have enough students to support my family. Luckily, I was able to get some help from a friend - Kitty-chan!

I have written before in these stories about how we made many friends very quickly after moving to Japan. My then-wife and I became members of an informal play circle that met daily in one of the many local parks, and that soon led to a new venture - making wooden toys. I began to become somewhat known for my ability to make things, and this in turn led to another job offer.

Another of the parents in the group was a bit of a 'free spirit' type, not being able to hold down any kind of regular job, but working part time here and there wherever he could. He called me up one day with the suggestion that I go with him that morning to a place that he had heard about that was looking for people. This was a company that made such things as displays for department stores, or props and decorative items for movie sets. Their business was very much a 'feast or famine' operation and at the moment it was feast. They had landed a huge order to fill and needed a lot of temporary staff to help build it. As they needed people who were handy at making things, my friend thought of me. It sounded like fun, so I went off with him to see what it was all about.

I took a couple of samples of my toys with me to 'prove' my ability to make things, but that wasn't necessary - there was no kind of formal interview session at all. It was just "Oh Hi. Pleased to meet you. You two guys head over there and get busy helping those people ..." And that was it; two minutes later we were in the thick of it. I would be with them for nearly three months in all, and when my brother visited Japan during that time, I roped him into it as well.

During my time there I worked on a number of interesting projects, but the one that played the largest part in feeding my family was making a number of installations for the brand new head office building under construction for the Sanrio company.

The architects and designers responsible for the building had come up with the concept of turning many of the office spaces into a kind of Fantasy Land of Sanrio characters. Walls were to be covered with large 3-D constructions that brought the characters to life, and walking along a row of cubicles would be like walking through a movie set. No matter how small a character - and Sanrio even back then had *hundreds* of them - he/she would have their place in the office. The Star of the Show was of course the Hello Kitty character, who was absolutely everywhere you looked.

We had a completely free hand in how to build these things, working from generic 'concept' drawings sketched out by the Sanrio designers. Plywoods, plastics, fiberglass, fabrics ... you name it - we used it in our construction work. All in all there were a couple of dozen of us working on the project, which took us a couple of months to finish, and the final couple of weeks - over the new year period - was spent installing everything into the brand new building, which was to have its official opening at the turn of the year.

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>

As that deadline approached, we spent plenty of 'all nighters' on the project, and really racked up some impressive totals on our time sheets. The income was a wonderful help, the crew was great to work with, and the job itself was a ton of fun.

In later years, as my daughters grew older, I suppose plenty of that money made its way back to Sanrio coffers, but at the time, it was a tremendous help.

Thanks, Kitty-chan!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>