

A Story a Week ...

... from woodblock printmaker David Bull

With Fresh Eyes

We've 'met' my son-in-law Ioan a number of times in these stories in recent years. Because he and my daughter Himi live on the other side of the Pacific, we aren't able to spend a lot of time together, but over the next couple of months, that has changed, as he is here for an extended visit; as I mentioned in the story a few weeks back, I will be 'stealing' him from his family for a few weeks, to help me with the construction work on the new shop I am opening in Asakusa this fall.

We begin actual construction next Monday - the 1st day of my three-year lease - and he and I are busy working on our plan of attack: where to start with the demolition work, who will do what part, and other general planning.

I talked in that previous story about how my eating habits will be affected by all this new activity, and this has already begun! He and I had dinner last night at a most interesting little restaurant - not downtown in Asakusa, but right here in Ome, just a short walk from my home.

I had intended to take him to a small *izakaya* (Japanese pub) up near the station, but when we got there found that it was full (all eight seats were taken) and we had to turn away. Rather than head back to the station plaza, where the restaurants are pretty bland, we headed off in the other direction, to see what we might run across. Now restaurants in Ome are pretty thin on the ground, as I mentioned before, but a couple of minutes down the road we saw a string of lights outside a building and stopped to take a look.

Hmm.

A very scruffy old building, with a battered and lop-sided front door. Some posters on the window advertising upcoming gigs for local bands, most of them for reggae groups. A chair outside with a scribbled menu leaning on it told us that this was indeed a restaurant, but I wasn't familiar with most of what I read on it. 'Jakku Chicken' 'Mo-mo dumplings' ...

Peering through the window we saw that there seemed to be a domed-tent structure assembled inside (was it a yurt?). We looked at each other, and then looked down the long and dark deserted street. Just how bad could it be, anyway?

It turned out to be a 'hippie haven' - the kind of place that for me was a direct throwback to the late 1960s on Vancouver's 4th Avenue. Everything was put together from scraps of old lumber, there were weavings hanging on the walls, no doubt hiding plenty of dirt and stains, and the 'master' and his wife were indeed turbaned 'long hair' types.

They gave us a rundown on the menu, which was a mashup of Jamaican, Nepalese, and Thai. Whether or not that makes any sense doesn't matter; the food was excellent! Spicy, but not disturbingly so, with a most enjoyable blend of all those influences.

A group of art students was in the tent, having dinner together with their teacher, a man I have known ever since moving to this area nearly thirty years ago. All in all, we had a very pleasant time, and we'll be back, for sure!

So ... a little lesson I guess. A visitor to one's town can come across interesting places that we residents have no idea exists. Perhaps we should all try this regularly - leave town, then turn around and come back in, trying to explore the place from a visitor's point of view. No telling what you might find!

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