

Haruko Numata
Coordinator, Suginami Association
for Better Lives in an Aging Society,
Association to Provide
Friendship Lights
Tokyo

I was unexpectedly given the valuable opportunity to be a member of the Japanese delegation to the United States on the Japan-US Women Leaders Dialogue program. I learned a great deal during the very busy two weeks in the United States. The fulfilling experiences I had were made possible by the Institute of International Education and the Japan Center for International Exchange, which carefully arranged the study tour. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership for its consideration and support. I cannot find words to properly express my appreciation for the warm hospitality we received from each of our hosts in the United States, including Ms. Peggy Blumenthal, Vice President of Educational Services at the Institute of International Education.

Our learning process began in the bright sunshine of Los Angeles, our first stop of the tour. The streets were lined with palm trees and jacaranda trees with purple flowers. With its favorable climate, it is no wonder the aerospace and film industries chose to locate here earlier this century.

In peaceful Spokane, a city dotted with forests and lakes, our minds and bodies were refreshed by the embracing clean air we felt immediately upon landing at the airport. Gulls that came by the Columbia River rested their wings in the park. The ducks swimming in the river beneath the Expo pavilions composed a tranquil scene. In the beautiful breezes and sunshine of Spokane, the people had expressions of relaxation on their faces. Like the birds, we too enjoyed our short rest here.

Chicago, with Lake Michigan to one side and a vast plain extending on the other, is the world's largest lakeside city. It is a beautiful, modern city surrounded by only the horizon and the skyline. The city blocks as seen from the top of the Sears Tower were clearly marked by blinking lights below. The bands of light radiating across the city were breathtaking. Picasso and Calder sculptures and Chagall paintings were placed, as if casually, here and there, giving the illusion that the whole city was a modern art museum.

In New York, America's economic and cultural center, tall skyscrapers stood as monuments to civilization, and the rapidly walking pedestrians produced a vibrating

rhythm that caused this immense city to seem as if it were breathing. Everything was vibrant and stimulating in this cosmopolitan city. The streets were filled with people representing a diverse multitude of races and ethnic groups.

The Community Activities of Women Leaders

Each city had a different atmosphere and appearance, and each greeted us with its own unique character. What these cities had in common, however, were the enthusiastic activities of the influential women leaders who were devoted to the betterment of their communities.

While the Japanese tend to look to the government for solutions to social issues, Americans take the initiative in social improvements and reform without relying on others. This attitude, and the expectations Americans have of their government, differ from the situation in Japan. This is apparently due to the autonomous life Americans had before the formation of the federal government. The activity of the women we met gives testament to this.

The staff engaged in the daily administration and operation of the organizations we visited—Project Info Community Service in Los Angeles, Northwest Regional Facilities in Spokane, the Chinese American Service League of Chicago, and the Art Institute of Chicago—were mostly women. The majority of the women leaders we met defined problems for themselves and took the initiative in working to solve those problems and to better society. We were deeply impressed by the energy and activity of these women leaders.

A well-organized, broad-based information exchange network that both satisfies the needs of the community and that functions effectively in a coordinated fashion, is of extreme importance, not only for the betterment of a single organization and the improvement of its staff, but also for the development of an entire community. When such a network is available, all involved receive many benefits.

The Role of the Government, Corporations, and the Public in the Community

I am currently engaged in community welfare activities for senior citizens. I work with the slogan, "to lead a decent life in a familiar community." One of my objectives on this trip was to discover the roles that the government, corporations, and the public play in welfare activities. I soon realized that private organizations and individuals play a large role in US society, with nonprofit private organizations, not the government, often taking a leading role in dealing with various social problems. While nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are still limited in number and are often not officially recognized in Japan, the reverse is true in the United States, with nonprofits making valuable contributions to American society.

The success of an organization depends on a combination of human and financial resources. For Japanese NPOs, beset by financial difficulties, American NPOs are

in the enviable situation of receiving contributions from individuals and corporations. Although Japanese private NPOs make various fundraising efforts, such as bazaars and demonstrations by group members, these efforts alone are not sufficient to raise adequate funds.

I was surprised to learn that in the United States \$124.7 billion (approximately 15 trillion yen) is donated to nonprofits each year—a figure larger than the entire welfare budget of Japan. I was further surprised by the fact that, in 1991, 88.9 percent of the total was from private donations, 6.2 percent from foundations, and the remaining 4.9 percent were corporate contributions. On learning that more than 70 percent of all households made an average yearly charitable contribution of \$978, I became aware of the difference in attitudes toward donation to charitable causes in the United States and Japan.

The important factor in the United States is the tax deduction received for donations to NPOs. Tax deductions are allowed when a corporate or individual contribution is made to a government-recognized NPO. However, similar benefits are not available for donations in Japan, and regrettably as a result, there is no incentive for people to make donations. While there are more than 900,000 tax-exempt organizations in the United States, there are only 15,000 in Japan. Moreover, in Japan it is difficult to qualify as a NPO.

On several occasions during the trip I heard about the United Way, a prominent nationwide joint fund-raising organization which initiated a matching fund scheme whereby a company's employee contributions are matched by a donation from the company itself. This money is then used towards solving a community problem of concern to the donor. I believe that this is an effective system. A similar system called "Matching Gift" was started by the *Keidanren* (Federation of Economic Organizations) in Japan, but as of 1991 only ten companies had joined the scheme. This number needs to be increased in the future.

The idea that companies have a social responsibility to the community or should make philanthropic contributions as a member of the community is almost unknown in Japan. This may be because it is generally understood that Japanese corporations contribute to society by taking care of the welfare of their employees and their families, by providing quality products and services at low prices, and by paying taxes.

In the United States, companies are strongly expected to make social contributions, and accordingly, Japanese companies in the United States are also expected to make similar contributions to the local community, which in turn has led to philanthropy becoming "fashionable" among Japanese companies. As a result, companies in Japan have recently begun to make social contributions by supporting the arts and cultural events. In the process of internationalization, Japanese companies are the subject of worldwide attention which I believe is beneficial for both Japanese companies and society.

The Activities of Nonprofit Private Organizations

In each city we visited I observed examples of NPOs working to further the public interest. Described below are some of the organizations we visited and their activities.

Los Angeles

Project Info Community Services (PICS) in Los Angeles showed us the importance of smooth communication between family members. The Executive Director of PICS, Ms. Irene Redondo-Churchward, and the female staff members and volunteers of the organization explained that serious problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, and family violence can be effectively dealt with by establishing strong family ties, by treating each person as an irreplaceable individual, and by communicating with words and body language (such as encouragement through hugging). I could see their enthusiasm in the way they spoke about their daily activities and the ways in which they were making valuable contributions to the organization. With drug abuse on the rise, child abuse is also increasing. My heart sank when I thought of child abuse victims abusing their children when they themselves become parents and that the cycle will continue in successive generations. The respect in the United States for one's freedom to do as one pleases may be a cause of the spread of these problems.

At Foley House, a shelter for female substance abusers, I met many women—juvenile girls, young mothers, pregnant women—fighting to overcome their addiction to drugs and alcohol. The women are allowed to live there with up to two children, and when they leave they are provided with housing for a year to help make them self-reliant. Similarly, to help recovering substance abusers readjust to society, Foley House hires women who have left these shelters. These plans were conceived and implemented by Ms. Lynne Appel, the activist running Foley House. I was impressed by her outstanding performance and her leadership and equally impressed by the attention given to small details which could only have been done by a woman.

Spokane

Northwest Regional Facilitators (NRF) in Spokane mobilizes the public to get involved in the public policy process and operates many programs for improving the quality of people's lives, including housing projects to improve the living environment; programs which help relieve serious food shortages when food stamps alone are insufficient; and programs where employers bear a portion of an employee's child rearing costs.

Ms. Susan Paula Virnig, a senior consultant at NRF, and the staff, the majority of whom are women, were actively involved in many of these community activities. The operation of the Lindaman Nonprofit Center taught me much about the importance of networking between NPOs to strengthen the structure of individual organi-

zations. I identified with their relentless pursuit of change and reform through their activities to improve the community, as I have always believed that maintaining the status quo leads to backward progress.

When we visited the Spokane YWCA, I witnessed firsthand the results of poverty, homelessness, child abuse, and family violence. I was very concerned for the homeless children we met. In desperate need of a family, these children were overwhelmed by a sense of denial, filled with worries about life, suffering from low self-esteem, and in danger of self-destruction. Seeing the mental suffering of these homeless children, I realized the importance of a safe environment for children, and the responsibilities of parents with small children.

At Safe Shelter, tears came to my eyes when I saw a mother who had run away from her abusive husband with her baby that morning. They were asleep on the bed, both exhausted and relieved. Another young woman told me she was almost shot and killed by her lover. It was painful to see the vivid reality of a country where people carry guns.

The Shelter is open 24 hours a day, and to protect the women, men are prohibited by law from entering certain areas. It is difficult to fully understand the pain of those who seek refuge in the shelter. The women are provided with donated clothes, shoes, and handbags available in a variety of sizes and colors, which they are free to wear when looking for a job or attending a job interview. As a mother with a daughter of the same age as these women, this was a rather difficult visit for me.

Chicago

There was much to learn from the Chinese American Service League (CASL) in Chicago, which operates large-scale activities for the 70,000 Chinese-Americans of the community. I was impressed by the energy of both Ms. Bernarda Wong, Executive Director of the organization, and the more than 70 professional multi-lingual staff members. The staff have experience operating in different cultures and in administering a wide variety of programs that help others become self-sufficient. Programs include care services for children and senior citizens, counseling, vocational training and job placement, and youth programs.

It is noteworthy that this group was able to identify the problems of unemployment and poverty faced by immigrants and refugees, and set up programs which offer a diverse variety of services in just 14 years. It also showed me the importance of overcoming the problems of living in a different culture. The chef training program in particular was an innovative and effective example of a program for those who do not have the opportunity to receive proper job training, and thus do not possess the skills necessary to lead productive and independent lives. It is no wonder why CASL received the "Chicago Spirit Award," which is given to outstanding organizations.

Female Participation in Politics and Government

I learned from briefings by government officials in Washington state and Illinois that women in the United States play an active role in politics and government. They stressed the point that the balance of male and female members of Congress affects policy-making. It was refreshing to learn that the mayor of Spokane and 40 percent of the members of the state legislature in Washington are women. After attending breakfast meetings and civic gatherings, I saw that women consider politics a personal issue, an attitude reflected in their lively discussions. Japan could learn much from their example. Breakfast meetings of the Spokane Club are open to anyone for five dollars, and are used by women engaged in political and business activities as a means of exchanging information.

Women offer constructive criticism in the Illinois government, which has produced programs focusing on the family, women, and children. In Illinois, female executive staff are responsible for investigating problems in the state to be addressed by the Governor. When I saw these young women holding managerial positions in government, hired on the basis of their ability and working with men as their equals, I saw a society which has achieved sexual equality. Unfortunately, due to the lack of time, I was unable to ask these women about problems the government faces with welfare and housing for the elderly, or about how NPOs influence the government.

Volunteer Activities

I saw many examples in the United States where the community was supported by the activities of volunteers, and where even children learned about the social structure and communication with the community through volunteer work. Through educational volunteer groups such as Big Brother and Big Sister, students teach and play with young children every day. I met volunteer gardeners, beauticians, and cooks at the senior citizen's home. The driver for the physically handicapped, the medical student at the daycare center monitoring blood pressure, the guide at the museum, and the attendants at the voting booth were all volunteers.

While most volunteer work in Japan is done by middle-aged women, in the United States I saw senior citizens and men doing volunteer work as well. I was especially interested in "peer counseling," where senior citizens assist others of the same age. It was explained to me that this benefits both parties: By talking to someone of the same generation with the same life experiences, the emotional needs of the care receivers are satisfied, and at the same time elderly volunteers are given an opportunity to be involved in the community.

In the United States, over 20 percent of the total population is involved in volunteer activities. Japan, on the other hand, is still a developing country in this respect, with only 3.2 percent of the Japanese similarly involved. The concept and practice of volunteer work has yet to take root in the general population in Japan, making it difficult to engage in volunteer activities. However, according to Ms. Ruth J. Hinerfeld, former president of the League of Women Voters of the United States,

volunteer activity among women is on the decline as they enter the workforce and insist on compensation. Ms. Ronne Hartfield, Director of Museum Education at the Chicago Art Institute, insisted that volunteer activities in the United States are not as vigorous as the Japanese think, but are probably still much greater than in Japan.

Activities of the Elderly

Because I am concerned with community welfare activities for senior citizens, it was instructive to talk to Charlie and Ann Wood, a retired Anglican priest and his wife with whom I spent the weekend in Spokane. They introduced me to other elderly Americans as well, enabling me to learn about their different lifestyles.

By sleeping and eating at the home of the Woods, I was able to see firsthand how American senior citizens live their daily lives. I will never forget their smiles and warm personalities. I was greeted by a welcome sign in the entrance hall of the retirement community, and Japanese hanging scrolls, dolls and paper cranes inside their home. I was touched by their hospitality.

Father and Mrs. Wood, who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary a few years ago, live in a comfortable retirement community complete with swimming pool, gym, 24-hour medical facilities, and a restaurant. The couple introduced me to other members of the retirement home with whom they meet frequently. As is often the case in Japan, the men of this community represent only 8 out of 100 occupants. A good friend of the Woods' said that, since he is able to enjoy the company of and share experiences with others his own age, his happiness is doubled and his sorrow is halved. I sensed that relations among members of this retirement community are very intimate.

There are over 2,000 adult daycare centers in the United States, visited by over 50,000 senior citizens in any given week. The Holy Family Adult Day Health Center is one such daycare center. The Director of the center, Ms. Marie E. Raschko, described to me the programs including bus services, health checks, lunch services, recreational activities, counseling for families with seniors at home, educational seminars, and other programs. The programs she described resemble those found in Japan. The Center plans to expand the programs to allow seniors to receive assistance at home.

I was impressed by the system called "Gatekeeper," proposed by Ms. Raschko's husband. So-called "gatekeepers"—postmen, electric company meter checkers, supermarket clerks, etc.—receive special training, make regular rounds, and report cases of illness to the appropriate authorities. The success of this program has been recognized, and the program has received a \$100,000 grant from the Ford Foundation. There is also a system in various Japanese communities where "friendship helpers" check on seniors when they deliver food to their homes, but most of these helpers are untrained housewife volunteers.

Mr. Hugh L. Burleson, our interpreter, and Ms. Noriko Takada, a professor at Northwestern University, kindly provided me with the opportunity to see how the elderly live in various environments such as housing communities for senior citizens, life-care and continuous nursing-care retirement communities, assisted-care facilities, and nursing homes. These facilities also revealed a difference in living standards according to economic and health status. In spite of my unannounced visit, most of the elderly people kindly invited me into their rooms when they learned of my work with senior citizens. Each of the eight homes I visited was very neat and decorated with family photos.

Even though I was able to see only very limited aspects of the lifestyles of US senior citizens, I would nonetheless like to give the impressions I had. After meeting with senior citizens in the United States, what was clear to me was that all of them naturally accepted life as their own responsibility. It appeared that the "spirit of independence" was an important factor in determining their plans and living environment after retirement. I also saw a large gap between the rich and poor after viewing the various facilities I visited. There was the old lady with wrinkles etched in her face, living alone and dependent on the food provided at the daycare center for her only meal, and then there were those living comfortably and worry-free in deluxe apartments like The Waterford which could easily be mistaken for a five-star hotel.

When I asked a number of senior citizens about their present living conditions, most replied that they are satisfied, but they voiced their concern about increases in living expenses, declining health, rising medical costs, anxiety over long-term care, private medical insurance, and swindlers. Medical fees under the national insurance system in Japan are minimal. This system is one the Japanese can be proud of. However, I feel that the American situation is a serious problem because medical insurance is handled by private insurance companies with no government guarantees of universal coverage or price controls.

I learned about Medicare (medical insurance for the elderly) and Medicaid (medical assistance for low-income families) but feel that these programs are not adequate as medical insurance, since there are restrictions on the conditions and areas covered by the insurance. Medicare covers medical expenses only for those being treated at home, while Medicaid mostly covers expenses for nursing homes. A large-scale reform is expected under the Clinton administration.

I spoke to a woman who had come to visit her elderly mother at a nursing home. After taking a year of unpaid leave from work to look after her mother, she had to return to work for financial reasons, and was feeling guilty for leaving her mother at the nursing home while the mother wished to be taken home. Seeing this woman worry about work and the care of her mother, I realized that in the United States, as in Japan, the burden of taking care of the elderly rests with women.

A nurse at the Extended Care Center spoke of her experiences with seniors at another home for the aged. She told me of a lonely elderly women whose family

never came to visit, and of another who pleaded to be taken back to her house some 50 miles away. I realized that there are many elderly people who want to receive care in their own homes.

There are many types of nursing homes in the United States similar to the special nursing homes found in Japan. Although these facilities are designated as medical institutions and not welfare institutions, the inadequacies of the medical service are of concern to the staff.

I realized that the elderly in both Japan and the United States wish to live in well-equipped facilities and in a familiar environment. My group in Japan has been working hard to create a special nursing home and I am convinced that we are heading in the right direction.

Epilogue

As a participant in this program, I met active women leaders in the various cities we visited. I was greatly stimulated and encouraged after witnessing their activities firsthand.

I learned of the similarities and differences between Japanese and US societies through various briefings, visits, and conversations, and as a result I was able to develop specific ideas to extend and develop future activities of my group in Japan. From the broad perspective I gained on this trip, I have renewed my resolve to do my utmost for the development of the community.