

**Mayor's column for
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It's 5:30 Saturday morning and I've had my first glimpse of Hekinan, Japan in the daylight. The cherry blossoms are just spectacular as I look down at them from my twelfth floor room at the Kinuura Grand Hotel. I also see Akashi Amusement Park with its Ferris wheel to the west as it spreads to the Port of Shinkawa and then on toward the Pacific Ocean. I glance down to see my laptop is still set to Edmonds time where it's 1:30 Friday afternoon. It's odd to think that I've already lived through Friday and all of you have not.

We left Seattle at 2:30 Thursday afternoon and arrived in Hekinan at 10:30 Friday night. That sentence makes it sound simple enough, though that was hardly the case. The 14 folks in our delegation took off in an Airbus330 to Tokyo and actually enjoyed a very smooth ten-hour flight over the Pacific as we skirted Canada, Alaska, and Russia before touching down at 4:30 at Narita Airport. After our son's wedding in Italy three years ago, I promised never to fly to another continent in the narrow seat of coach class ever again, so Dolly and I spoiled ourselves in first class on this trip.

I was entertained with a couple movies that I hadn't had time to see, I started a new book—again, something I hadn't had much time to do—and I ate! And then I ate some more! I'll need to do two-a-day walks when I get back if this keeps up. For airplane food, it was actually pretty good. For a long flight, the trip from Seattle to Tokyo wasn't as bad as I expected.

Our next leg was to take us from Tokyo to Nagoya, typically a 45-minute flight. Our gate for the flight was not too far from gate 23 where we arrived, and we stopped and changed our dollars to yen as we walked through the airport. We soon saw that we would be boarding a bus to wherever our Nagoya flight would leave from. Even that went fairly smoothly as the bus dropped us at the jetway on to the plane, an older Boeing 757. We began to taxi to the runway after a quick boarding process, and our next leg was underway. For the next 45 minutes we toured Narita Airport in the 757, and I began to think we were driving to Nagoya! I asked the flight attendant if this was normal and she said, "Oh, yes. We often have to wait to take off at this time of day."

So our 45-minute flight has an added 45-minute drive attached to it! Finally, we took off. I think the pilot must have been frustrated as well as he took that 757 straight up in the air like a rocket ship. The flight went by quickly, similar to a flight to Spokane from Seattle, I guess. It was dark now and the pilot announced that we would be landing soon at the brand new Central Japan International Airport, a "floating airport," I might add, that had only opened a few weeks ago. A manmade airport in the ocean, sort of like an island green for you golfers.

We seemed to be surfing the ocean as we approached the airport and finally I saw land under the plane and we began to touch down, at last the end of a long in-flight day. How wrong I was! The wheels never touched down as the pilot pulled back on the throttle, and we were airborne again, straight up, shot into space. I asked the flight attendant if "that" was normal and this time she replied with a curt "no." Fifteen minutes later, seemingly all the way back to Tokyo by now, we tried it again. Successfully this time, but not pretty as the plane bounced down on the runway. As I departed the plane I asked the pilot about the landing and his short reply said something about the winds weren't cooperating. There was some passenger speculation, however, that he overshot the runway and had he landed, we would have run out of runway and ended up in the ocean on the other side of the airport. I guess we'll never know.

Glad to be safely on the ground, we passed through immigration, baggage claim, and customs and found ourselves outside the terminal to be warmly greeted by the Hekinan Sister City delegation. It was odd, I'll admit, to be so far from home and yet, I recognized so many faces from previous Hekinan delegations to Edmonds. Though it took more time than anticipated, we finally found ourselves on a bus from the airport to the Kinuura Grand in Hekinan where we were again met by some more familiar faces from their delegation. Our luggage preceded us and we gathered it up, found our room on the top floor of the hotel, unpacked, and fell asleep at 11 p.m., some 26 hours after waking in Edmonds on Thursday morning.

After an early breakfast, we were escorted to the harbor where we were given tours of several waterways by boat. We were aboard the Bohemian 3, which we quickly learned was owned and operated by Mr. Watanabee, who is a local legend for having skippered the Bohemian 2 around the world to 24 countries in just two and a half years . . . by himself! He donated that boat to the Hekinan Seaside Aquarium, which we would visit later in the day. It was a glorious morning on the water and I quickly forgot about the long travel day that had come before.

In the afternoon, we participated in a traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony and, in fact, our hosts dressed us in traditional Japanese attire. I'm certain that photos of the event will show up sometime, somewhere. Then it was on to the aforementioned aquarium. It was a special treat but it was also plain to see that we were wearing down from the pace of the day and we still had the Welcome Party and Dinner yet to go. So it was back to the hotel for some down time before dinner and to practice my speech, which I had prepared in Japanese. But after days of practicing, I decided to use a translator rather than offend our hosts by butchering their language.

Mornings are hazy here but the afternoons bring warm sunshine with temperatures in the 70s. Last night's welcoming party was spectacular. Gifts exchanged, speeches, photos, food and beer! Did I mention photos? Our hosts were most gracious and the Midori-Daiko, a Japanese Drum band was wonderful, if not ear piercing! The most surprising gift I received was a framed photo of me with a previous Hekinan delegation when they visited Edmonds alongside another photo of me that they took at Halloween that same year when I dressed up as a woman! Good to know I made such an impression.

Unusual sights so far were dolphins in the bay, heated toilet seats, vending machines everywhere, and Haakenson in a hakama in Hekinan. A hakama is a men's kimono and, as I said earlier, I'm sure that photo will show up in Edmonds at some point! Today it's off to the golf course and then to the Nagoya Dome to watch a Japanese baseball game. Still to come before we begin our long journey home is a visit to the Expo (World's Fair), a day-long tour of Hekinan City Hall and facilities, including dinner with the Mayor and a trip to Kyoto to visit many temples. And I would guess . . . more photos!

Police Chief Dave Stern and I were picked up early Sunday morning and taken to the Handa Country Club where we met up with our hosts. We played nine holes of uneventful and, in the Chief's and my case, not very good golf. Then it was off to the hot springs for a soak before lunch. Then just as quickly as we arrived, off we went again, this time to Nagoya for the baseball game. The game was very exciting and the home team won. Japanese baseball fans are very much like European soccer fans: loud and cheering, the entire game! At times it seemed as if the visiting team had as many or more fans than the home team. It was a great experience.

Many of the ladies in our delegation spent the day touring and shopping in Nagoya, and we all met back at the hotel wondering where dinner would be. Once again, our hosts surprised

us. At 7:30 we had a picnic dinner in the park next to our hotel, under the cherry blossom trees. They had prepared quite a spread for us, complete with entertainment. They brought out a drum from the previous night's program and began to play.

Then an amazing thing happened. As they banged on the drum, kids began to appear out of the darkness in the park. First a couple, then more, until they numbered over a dozen. Some carried soccer balls, some were just curious. Then a couple of them asked to play the drums. They were very good. Soon it was an impromptu concert with kids from six to 12 years old. A few parents also came to see what was up. It was an unplanned moment but easily the highlight of the day. I spent some time with the kids and parents, talking in broken English and broken Japanese. They were amazed to find an American Mayor in their park on a Sunday night. Our hosts began to feel uncomfortable with the size of the crowd so they suggested we call an end to the night, which I was glad to do since I'd had only about eight hours sleep in three nights. Day two had come to an end and it seemed like we've been here a week already.

In next week's edition I'll continue with part two of our exciting trip to our Sister City of Hekinan.