
Confessions from a Travel-worn Briefcase

1. Bodies move through time & space on the curved edge of the Earth. We travel to be not here: no email, voicemail, memos, faxes, taxes, pagers, no cellphones, no bills; we travel from possessions, relations, wives, lovers, ex-wives, ex-lovers, onto the vivid open road.

Early bland spring San Diego
airport bardo rush
behind me
palm tree surfers.

747 to Edo,
LCD show duty free
champaign, sake, whisky,
gold, silk, leather:
symbolic consumption
above the great sky-blue Pacific.

Narita. Rice fields resist jet-noise, tourists fatigue, machine guns terror. Tokyo bullet express. Speed is everything.

Basho walked years for a few page journey, his days, months, years eternal travelers, with simple sandals, cotton clothing, only attached to poetry & friends. Now each golden moment rides a rocket-driven hearse. Instant links subvert time & place, nothing fast enough. Yet we are always here & here is always different; we cannot escape.

2. Saitama hotel, past white-on-white dress, red floral dress, cloth flower cluster, makeup center, bluewhite ribbon hallway, photo-op lobby,

Newgreen buds crack
aging concrete pool &
full silver moon echoes
drunken wedding party.

Our algebra's lost here, no fancy clothes, no useless gifts, & the cherry blossoms holding back.

3. Aoyama Dori business buildings, heavy Palace wall, police HQ mock-medieval concrete fort, Sogetsu Kaikan, almost missed it, so blends-in steel & glass; 6 story lobby, hardhat chainsaw Ikebana, whole bloody blooming trees.

Two foreigners first lesson, fifth floor view Imperial roofs & gardens. Thai princess with embassy minder, heavy denim skirt & jacket, awkwardly aging, one more in a lifetime of lessons, cannot balance hikae, bowl keeps tipping. Minder taking notes, so eyes on her pad serious, not to smile.

Underground CyberScapeCafe, ten thousand yen internet access, 500 yen coffee; Java lessons & sex adventure logo. Newest technology meets oldest human drives.

4. Rural near Kanazawa, graduate new all computer science school,

Wallsized window, black, large, floating,
Hawk,
hunting, as we plot our
software.

Perhaps enlightenment is great passion with great detachment.

5. Not so large, central Kanazawa, aristocratic craftwork, samurai house district & green tea microgarden. Jazz cafe, vinyl disks & double ancient MacIntosh gunmetal gray & polished silver glass vacuum tube amps, cappuccinos & 60s pop music. Nothing is stable.

Inner Kanazawa, large apartment numbered blocks on concrete riverbed, uniform schoolkids. Pierrette casual cafe, 98-3999, rough tables, slickpaper napkins, 150 yen mug coffee.

Once wanted cars, kids, homes, debts, investments, friends & honors. Now wants come & go like winds, & simple things seem best: clouds, shadows, grass, the glue on the back of a chair.

6. Kanazawa International Hotel lobby cafe, delicate cakes, fragile cups & cinnamon sticks, high ceiling windows.

Cardboard roof concrete box house hillside vista
sluggish every blue-gray shade of cloud,
tiny lighted tree parking lot,
European wedding chapel.

Never saw such status awareness.

7. Holiday weekend Ueno, Aizu trains no standing room. Far from elegant deep under ground transport cafe, waiting with Mori-san, talk of tea, guitars, tourists, soft drinks, emptiness.

Train uncrowds & snow appears `tween ugly square ski resort hotels. Late nothing open semi-rural Aizu, not even the railway restaurant. Tiger, lion, guruda, dragon railway square underpass tunnel mosaics. Hotel so near not worth taxi, wide smiling driver; wedding dress & gifts again; computer science school, lecture & banquet again. Such cold nights.

8. Hazy-hot backstreet Shinagawa: steep step paths, old stones, small gardens & gravesites, fresh white blossoms, hidden gems of houses. Lost, late & sweating. Distant huge hotels. Old persons stream towards temple; building site workers -- no English. Accidental taxi to Toni-san's Sony robot learning cardboard mazes with basins of attraction & autonomous closure. The artificial gains one step more on the living.

Sogo fifth floor Franco-Turkish tres elegant cafe, 5 foot graceful brass curving urn, ornate little tables, tiny French paper flags, 2 pretty tea girls surprised to see us, rugs, tapestries, paintings, sipping thin inlaid cups in wingback chairs. Such intense shopping outside mahogany frame no glass window, tiring just to see it.

9. Tokyo BlueNote, Tokoro-sensei host.

Such lovely so tight
such fine-dressed girls,
such lovely so loose
Ron Carter quintet.

Delicate octopus salads on crowded shared tables. I am a hermit within my own life.

10. Cafe Arabica, back alley central Shinagawa, huge black wrought iron gas flame lamp, yellow stucco descending wooden staircase, large empty room, heavy wooden tables. Coffee & small orange cake, 2400 yen. Research chemist barista, thick black horn rims, thin black tie, white lab coat, brass balance coffee weight, beaker water, Bunsen burner background Mozart floor show, old man head on back corner table one cup more please. I wonder what crowd comes here in the night.

colophon

Dedicated to Allen Ginsberg, died 5 April 1997 during the trip described, and taught me poetry. Fevered beat poets dug Basho's open Buddhist road, intense compressed style; used common US speech, made poems from lists; Kerouac riding his breath with dank nightclub saxes, Ginsberg donning a tie for the picket line, Burroughs reciting on pop records, Basho trudging backroads dressed as a monk, fusing verse-prose to catch passing moments, linked by subtle likeness & difference. Basho & beats dug crazy old Han Shan Cold Mountain man. Though I cannot write like them, I hope respect shows through my clouds of ego. Travel supported by CafeOBJ project. Writing completed 23 September 1997, La Jolla, California.

chronology

- 1: 11-12mar: SAN -> LAX -> NRT -> Tokyo
- 2: 13-15mar: Saitama
- 3: 17mar: Akasaka, Tokyo
- 4: 19mar: Japan Advanced Inst Science & Technology
- 5,6: 19-23mar: Kanazawa
- 7: 23mar: Kanazawa -> Aizu
- 8-10: 27-29mar: Shinagawa, Tokyo

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