

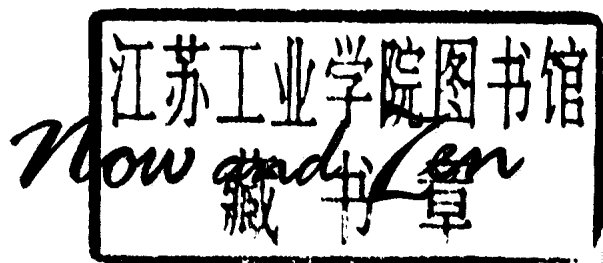


Now and Zen



ADVANCE UNCORRECTED PROOF NOT FOR SALE

Linda Gerber



Linda Gerber

speak

An Imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my Yas and to my online creative support, without whom I would be lost: Marsha Skrypuch, Karen Dyer, Kate Coombs, Polly Capriotti, Jen McAndrews, Barb Aeschliman, Nicole Maggi, Ginger Calem, and Lee Cutler. And to my editor, Angelle, for making it all work. Domo arigato!

SPEAK

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc.,

345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3

(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland

(a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,

New Delhi - 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), Cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland 1310,

New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196,

South Africa

Registered Offices: Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Published by Speak, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2005

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Linda Gerber, 2006

All rights reserved

Interior art and design by Jeanine Henderson. Text set in Imago Book.

CIP DATA TK

Speak ISBN 0-14-240657-0

Printed in the United States of America

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party Web sites or their content.

ATTENTION READER

This is an uncorrected galley proof. It is not a finished book and should not be expected to look like one.

Typographical errors, pagination, format, etc., will be corrected before the book is published.

UNCORRECTED PROOF



Now and Zen

by Linda Gerber

ISBN: 0-14-240657-0

September 7, 2006

Ages: 12 up

224 pages—5½" x 8¼"

Rights: WOO

\$6.99 (\$9.99 CAN)

speak

An Imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

Home is where she least expects it to be.

Inside the gate it was like another world. Every centimeter of the yard was laid out with container plants, rock formations, and perennials. Just how Nori had imagined a samurai's garden to be.

"It's perfect," she breathed.

Jiji chuckled. "*Domo arigato*. I am pleased you like it"

As Jiji secured the shed, Baba led Nori up the pebble walkway to a house with smooth stucco walls beneath the swooping gables of a blue ceramic-tile roof. "Welcome to our home," she said in gentle, halting English.

Standing in the step-down entryway, Nori could smell an old-house mustiness beneath the peppery straw of the woven tatami mats.

Nori had a room to herself. Against one wall was a recessed platform that almost looked like a shrine except that there was a flower arrangement and another painted scroll there instead of an idol or something. Her window had a thin film over the glass made to look like rice paper. Baba opened one side.

"Here, Nori-*chan*. You can see Jiji's garden."

Nori peered out the window. A little stone pagoda and a collection of bonsai trees surrounded the lily-filled koi pond, complete with a graceful arching footbridge. Under a bent Japanese maple sat a bench where Nori could imagine spending a lot of time just thinking.

"I leave you to privacy," Baba said. "You rest. We eat soon."

Nori sat by the window and rested her chin on the sill. Even though she hadn't wanted to come, Nori felt strangely comfortable here already. Like she'd come home.

**Application for the Students Across the Seven Seas
Study Abroad Program**

Name: Noreli Tanaka

Age: 16

High School: Olentangy High School

Hometown: Powell, Ohio

Preferred Study Abroad Destination: Tokyo, Japan

1. Why are you interested in traveling abroad next year?

Answer: I want to make a difference in the world and I believe that the leadership skills I would gain by participating in the Global Outreach program would prepare me to take the reins and lead my generation to a better tomorrow.

(Truth: I don't really care where I go, just as long as I can get away. My parents are making me crazy!)

2. How will studying abroad further develop your talents and interests?

Answer: I hope to attain a global perspective on the social, political and economic issues facing countries outside my own in order to achieve a better understanding of the resulting environmental impact to our world.

(Truth: Me getting out of the house for the summer might just give my mom and dad the space they need to reconnect. Plus I could do my own thing without every move being scrutinized and analyzed and argued about endlessly.)

3. Describe your extracurricular activities.

Answer: At school, I serve as the Student Body Secretary and am the leader of the local chapter of Global Green. I also support the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society and the National Geographic Society.

(Truth: My best friend Val thinks I should be adding more social activities (read: dates) to the line-up and I'm beginning to think she's right.)

4. Is there anything else you feel we should know about you?

Answer: As a Japanese-American, I am eager to connect with my heritage and to learn more about my ancestors by immersing myself in the unique culture of Japan.

(Truth: . . . just as long as my mom keeps her nose out of it and lets me make my own connections!)

Chapter One

Seventeen hours. That's how long it takes to fly from Columbus, Ohio, to Narita, Japan, when you make three stops along the way. Seventeen long hours stuck on a plane with a bunch of losers. Not exactly the experience Nori had envisioned when she signed up for a summer abroad.

This was the first time SASS—Students Across the Seven Seas—had sent students to the Global Outreach program, and from what Nori had seen, it might well be the last. Outreach students were supposed to spend this term in Japan learning the leadership skills necessary to combat global challenges. If her traveling companions were the



leaders of the next generation, the world was in trouble.

There were six in their group: Nori, one other girl, and four completely dorky boys. Not dorky-looking, necessarily; the tall blond from New York and the football captain from Atlanta were actually kinda cute. But looks don't count much when you're throwing food or trying to slap the backs of one another's heads.

She shook the remnants of trail mix from her long, straight black hair and shot a glare at the boy in the window seat. He just grinned and flipped a peanut past her face at the guy seated in the aisle. The flight attendant had to ask them all to settle down. Nori was so embarrassed she wanted to rip the Global Outreach logo from her blazer and crawl under the seat.

Touchdown in Tokyo didn't come nearly soon enough. The moment she got off the plane, Nori shrugged out of her blazer, stuffed it into her backpack, and lost herself in the crowd at the passport checkpoint. Her freedom was short-lived, however; their escort herded the group back together, and she was stuck with them once more.

At the baggage claim area, Nori perched on one of the padded chairs and watched the other students gather around the carousel. The guys were all showing off for the other girl, Amberly Bryson, and she was eating it up—giggling and fingering her blond curls. Nori shuddered and

looked down at the single entry in her travel journal. “The Tokyo-Narita airport is very clean.” She didn’t have the stomach to write anything more.

“Nori! Come get in the picture!” Amberly waved like she was bringing in a plane. She’d arranged the dork squad in front of a sign written in kanji characters that probably said something like FOOLISH AMERICANS MAY STAND HERE FOR PHOTOGRAPHS.

Nori shook her head. No way.

“Come on, Nori,” Amberly persisted. “It will be a memory!”

“That’s what I’m afraid of.”

The carousel lurched into motion before Amberly could say anything further. The guys drifted from their appointed positions, eyes fixed on the suitcases dropping from the chute.

Amberly’s smile faltered, but that didn’t stop her from joining them. “Grab mine if you see it,” she said. “Blue floral with a big pink bow on the handle.”

Nori rolled her eyes. Why am I not surprised?

After clearing customs, the group rolled their suitcases through the sliding doors into the crowded arrival lobby, where a tall Japanese man carrying a hand-lettered Global Outreach sign rushed forward to greet them. He bowed deeply.

“*Yokoso!*” he said. “Welcome. My name is Koske Wada,



but you can call me Wada-*sensei*.” His dark eyes crinkled at the edges as he gave them a broad smile.

Nori eyed him with approval. The information packet she’d received with her registration materials had explained the use of honorific titles like *san* or *chan* or *kun*. You tacked them onto people’s names to show respect. *Sensei* was a title that meant master or teacher. As teachers went, Wada-*sensei* looked pretty cool. He had a casual air about him from his Daniel Radcliffe hair to his rumpled khakis and Teva sandals. Not that it had anything to do with cool, but his English was perfect. Not even a trace of an accent. She was impressed.

He consulted his clipboard and called out their names one by one, pausing for an affirmative “here.” Satisfied, he nodded. “Right. Now let’s get a move on. The other groups are already loading on the bus. Yours was the last flight in.”

They quickly exchanged their dollars for yen and stopped by a kiosk to get snacks for the long ride to Tokyo.

“Oh, look at this!” Amberly held up a packet of stiff alien-looking things. “Dried squid!”

Nori grimaced and put down the rice crackers she’d been holding. That did it. Killed the appetite. If there was one thing in the world she absolutely couldn’t stomach, it was fish. She grabbed a bottle of water and headed to the counter.

A postcard display caught her eye. She’d promised her mom and dad that she would write as soon as she got to Tokyo. Separate cards, of course. A wave of sadness threat-

ened, and she pushed it away. No. No thinking about them. This trip was about getting away from their troubles, not bringing them with her. She grabbed a couple of random postcards and hurried to the checkout counter.

By the time Nori's small group got to the bus, everyone else had already boarded. Nori slid into the first free row she could find and dropped her backpack onto the empty seat beside her. She started up her iPod and stared out the window, trying not to notice Amberly standing expectantly in the aisle.

Amberly reached for the backpack. "Would you like me to put this in the overhead?"

Nori sighed. "No, that's okay." She pulled it onto her lap, and Amberly slid into the empty seat.

As the bus rolled slowly through the evening traffic, Nori tried without much success to write to her parents. After about an hour of intense concentration, all she had come up with was "Dear Dad, I'm here." The letters looked like a first-grader had scribbled them because each time the bus bumped or swayed, her hand bumped or swayed with it. She rubbed her eyes and tried to focus on the card, but in the shadows, the words became a blur. Yawning, she looked around the bus. Most everyone else appeared to be asleep—and no wonder. It was like five in the morning back home.

She tucked the cards into her backpack and leaned her head against the back of the seat, letting her heavy eyelids drift shut.



Amberly suddenly bounced up and down in her seat, shaking Nori's shoulder. "Look!" she squealed. "Isn't that cool?"

"Wha—?" Nori opened one eye just a crack.

"The Rainbow Bridge!" She leaned over Nori to look out the window. Up ahead was the suspension bridge that spanned part of Tokyo Bay. Nori had read about it in the information packet. It had been designed so that the white towers would harmonize with the Tokyo Harbor. Nori had liked that word, *harmonize*, imagining Japan as a utopia of cherry blossoms, swoopy rooftops, and serenity.

She craned her neck to see the bridge ahead. Green, white, and red solar-powered lights illuminated the two towers of the bridge, just like the information packet had described. Nori might have been impressed if she hadn't been so tired.

"Oh, and look at the Ferris wheel!" Amberly twisted in her seat and pointed out the windows on the other side of the bus to where a huge Ferris wheel striped in neon lights slowly circled. "I hope we can ride that while we're here. It's like the biggest in the world. You're supposed to be able to see for miles at the top. Or should I say, for kilometers?" She giggled.

"Mmm-hmmm." Nori tried to close her eyes once more, but Amberly continued to shake her arm.

"Oh. My. Gosh. Have you seen anything so cool in your life?" They were on the Rainbow Bridge now, crawling along in traffic, and to the right lay Tokyo, which, Nori had to admit,

was pretty impressive. Black silhouettes of buildings stood stark against a twilight purple sky, the lights in their windows like a galaxy of stars, all reflected in the water of the bay.

"It must be like coming home for you, huh?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You know, being Japanese. This must be such an awesome experience for you."

Nori clenched her jaw. Give me a break. "I'm not Japanese. I'm American."

"Oh. I meant..." Amberly's voice raised an octave. "Well, you have such Japanese features, and—"

"Slanted eyes don't make a person Japanese, Amberly."

"But... isn't Tanaka a Japanese name?"

Nori shot her a look. "Yeah. Just like Bryson is a British name. Does that make you English?"

Amberly twisted a strand of golden honey hair around her French-manicured finger. "Actually, I'm Welsh and Scottish and Danish, and if you go back far enough—"

Nori held up a hand. "The answer to your question is no. It isn't like coming home for me because I've never been to Japan before." What she didn't say was that she was here now only to get away from her parents' fighting. She would just as happily have gone to Timbuktu.

She folded her arms, hunched down in her seat, and squinched her eyes shut, even though now she was much too irritated to sleep.

Amberly must have caught her mood because she



backed off. "There's Tokyo Tower," she murmured, but she left Nori's arm alone.

Nori looked out the window of the bus as they pulled in front of the dorm building, surprised to see that it wasn't located near a campus at all, but in the middle of a long block of businesses and shops. She gathered her things and followed the others through the sliding-glass doors into the lobby, which, with its low couches and tables, looked more like an oversize dentist's office waiting room than a place for students to gather. Not that Nori really cared. She was so tired all she could think about was a shower and a bed.

That is, until Wada-*sensei* handed out the room assignments.

Amberly squealed and hugged Nori. "Roommates! We're going to have so much fun! I just know it." She grabbed the key. "Come on!"

Grinding her teeth, Nori bent to pick up her backpack. The front doors slid open, and she glanced up. Her breath caught. Striding into the lobby was a tall, blond, broad-shouldered hottie who looked just like Orlando Bloom, only cuter. She smiled. This summer just might be more interesting than she'd thought.

Nori rose with the sun, which was not such a good thing since in Japan in June the sun makes its appearance at about

four A.M. Actually, she'd been awake for a long time, and her head ached from trying to force herself to go back to sleep.

Amberly, of course, had no such problem and was snoring daintily in her frou-frou pink pajamas and matching satin eye mask.

Nori suppressed a shudder and set about folding up her blankets and futon. She stacked them neatly in the closet and slid the screen shut. Now what? Breakfast was not for another three hours.

She turned slowly, taking in the shadowy confines of their small dorm room. Wasn't much to see, really. Just the futons and two low tables that would serve as desks for the next seven weeks. A series of sliding screens along one wall concealed closets and shelves, and a sliding-glass door on another led out to a narrow balcony. The other walls were completely blank. Drab. Blah.

Suddenly feeling very claustrophobic, Nori stepped over Amberly and let herself outside onto the balcony. The streets below were quiet and dreary in the early morning light. A red paper lantern hung in the doorway of the business across the street, but that was the only breath of color among the boxy gray buildings as far as she could see.

A movement below caught her attention, and she looked down to see a lone black cat limp across the street. Nori leaned over the railing and watched until the cat disappeared into a dark alleyway. For some reason she couldn't