

Reprinted with kind permission from The Japan Times (October 14, 2021)

8 | The Japan Times | Monday, July 10, 2017

community

Send your comments and Community story ideas to community@japantimes.co.jp

For the latest community updates follow us on [Twitter @j_community](#)

Thank you, Jean, for helping us get things done

Lifelines

LOUISE GEORGE KITAKA
SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

In the United States had Ann Landers and Dear Abby, and Britain had Jean Pearce, then Japan had Jean Pearce—someone who transcended the title of “columnist” and became a media icon for several generations of readers.

From 1964 to 2000, Pearce's columns, Readers' Exchange (1964-75) and Getting Things Done (1975-2000), were a staple of The Japan Times. For foreign nationals living in Japan in the pre-internet years, the columns were a must-read. Its warm and witty style, she served up information on myriad topics, from the mundane to the life-changing. You never knew quite what to expect when you turned to Pearce's page, but it was always guaranteed to be a good read.

Her column sparked interest or contained information that you thought might come in handy, you cut it out for future reference. Although it may seem hard to believe to those raised in the internet age, there were surely many foreign nationals out there with a notebook stuffed with clippings from Pearce's columns. The death of information in English back in those days can be seen from the fact that The Japan Times published two volumes of Pearce's columns in book form in the late 1970s, under the title “Jean Pearce's How to Get Things Done in Japan.” Beverly Findlay-Kaneko fondly remembers Jean Pearce from her time working in the newspaper's editorial department as an editor and copywriter.

“When I worked at The Japan Times in the 1990s, my department handled her column. She called and dropped by every so often with a smile on her face. Her columns always arrived in eco-friendly packaging—recycled envelopes. We all went to The Japan Times 30th Anniversary Gala for Getting Things Done, and I knew she had been in Tokyo for a long time. But, I am still surprised she was 90.”

Reflecting on how she came to write the column, in June 2000 Pearce wrote: “There had been a Q&A column running in The Japan Times for several years. A few days after I arrived in Japan, it was announced that the writer was leaving. Someone else had already been hired, but when she left, I had a phone call from the paper—by then I knew several of the people who worked there—and my first column appeared three days later. I only missed one deadline in the next 36 years. I was overseas and the mail was delayed.”

For every reader whose query made it into a column, there were many more to whom Pearce replied privately. I recall personally replying to a reader who asked if a stamped addressed envelope had been used with their letter—postage costs would have been astronomical if Pearce had covered them herself. Many years before I took over the present-day incarnation of Pearce's column, I was one of those readers, anxiously scanning the pages of The Japan Times for my letter box for an answer.

In early 1990 I was a naive 20-year-old, not experts, both in and out of government. Bill Sherman, who had served as Ambassador Mike Mansfield's deputy chief of mission and held many other high positions, was near the top of this list. Bill gave me invaluable advice, not only about Japan and U.S. Japan relations, but about the intricacies of the State Department and the embassy in Tokyo. Even with this brief exposure, I recognized that Bill Sherman was a consummate public servant and remarkable human being. If Jean Pearce had to leave Japan, I believe marrying Bill Sherman was an excellent reason to do so.

WALTER F. MONDALE
U.S. Ambassador to Japan, 1993-96

Missed by friends and fans
Jean Pearce was a dear friend and a journalist whose knowledge of Japan was widely respected by those who were privileged to know her and/or to read her column.

Having had the chance to do both, I can say from personal experience how much she will be missed by her friends and her fans. She was a great lady.

MICHAEL ARMACOST
U.S. Ambassador to Japan, 1989-95

Finding love again at 80
Jean Pearce, whom I came to know when she lived in Japan for three years, was a really good friend. She had a great sense of humor and perspective on the world, and was a



COURTESY OF CHRIS PEARCE

long out of university and living in a provincial area of Japan on training for my first real job. I was also newly engaged to a Japanese man whose family refused to meet me. Aside from the obvious reason for their dissention—I was a foreigner—they also disapproved of the 10-year age gap between us and the fact that we had got engaged 10 days after first meeting at a Christmas party the previous month.

I vaguely remembered that Pearce had mentioned a support group for foreign women with Japanese partners, so I wrote to her for more details. Within a couple of weeks she replied, helping to link me up with a foreign wife in my area who was a wonderful source of inspiration and encouragement. Things eventually worked themselves out, his family came round and we celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary earlier this year.

The support group was AFWJ (the Association of Foreign Wives of Japanese). In respect of the original name, AFWJ welcomes foreign women of any national or cultural origin who are (or have been) in a relationship with a man or woman of Japanese nationality.

AFWJ is set to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2019 and owes much to Pearce and Getting Things Done. Twenty years before I wrote to Pearce, another young foreign woman with a Japanese partner reached out for help.

Feeling isolated in Niigata, American Joan took wonder if there were other women in the same situation and tentatively wrote to Pearce. After Pearce put out the call in her column, there was enough of a response to merit a get-together at the Tokyo American Club in the autumn of 1969. Once again, Pearce helpfully publicized the meet-up in her column, and the organizers were overwhelmed when the numbers of foreign women who showed up far exceeded their expectations. AFWJ was on its way.

Now known as Joan Iroh Burk and based in Canada, AFWJ's founder recalls her friendship with Pearce. “Over the years, Jean and I became close friends,” Burk says. “When I moved to Tokyo, I found an apartment just one block from where she lived. We shared many laughs and a few tears over the years. “It was Jean who encouraged me to write

Jean Pearce, 1921-2017: an obituary

LAER PEARCE
LAGUNA HILLS, CALIFORNIA
SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

Jean Pearce, my mother, who for decades helped Japan's foreign community feel more at home in their adopted country through her columns in The Japan Times, passed away peacefully on June 14 at the age of 96 in Washington, D.C.

Born Jean Elizabeth Fassnacht in South Bend, Indiana, in 1921, Jean was drawn to foreign lands as a young girl, and took her first steps toward satisfying her wanderlust after graduating from Purdue University, when she moved to Washington to work at the wartime State Department.

While her husband served as a submariner in the Pacific during World War II, Jean finally realized her dream of living someplace exotic, moving to Honolulu, where she worked at a radio station. Subsequent assignments led the family to Turkey in the mid-1950s, then Japan in 1958, which ultimately became her home for more than 40 years.

For decades, she was perhaps the second best-known American in Japan, topped only by a stream of U.S. ambassadors, including Edward O. Reischauer, Sen. Mike Mansfield, former House Speaker Tom Foley, and Vice President Walter Mondale, who once toasted her as “the best diplomat of us all.” Her series of “Footloose in Tokyo” books were favorites of tourists and among Tokyo residents alike, as they unveiled secrets and surprises within walking distance of Tokyo's many commuter train stations.

She was an active member of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, which she qualified for by writing articles for The Wall Street Journal, South Bend Tribune and for many other publications, and recently

was honored by the Tokyo American Club, which named a meeting room after her.

In 2000, just before saying goodbye to Japan, she married retired foreign service officer William Sherman, whom she met when he served as deputy chief of mission (DCM) of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo from 1977 to 1981. Fittingly, their marriage involved two ceremonies, a Japanese one at the local municipal office and an American one at the embassy, where all work stopped as Japan's most famous journalist married the embassy's former DCM. They then settled in the Washington area.

Jean's final Japan Times column, written on July 12, 2000, begins with a passage that serves as a very fitting eulogy.

When I first arrived in Japan more than 40 years ago, one of the first words I learned was sayonara and that I meant “goodbye.” As I stayed on, I began to learn that sayonara did not mean goodbye in the sense of “I will meet again” or “I will watch over you,” as such phrases are used in the West. The literal meaning of sayonara is “if that's the way it is,” with a little implication of sorrow and the unspoken hope that if things must be different, perhaps there will be other pleasures somewhere, some time, in another life.

That, I think, is how I want to say goodbye.

Sayonara, Jean.
Jean's husband, Bill, passed away just weeks after his wife. Jean is survived by sons Chris and Laer, four grandchildren, one great-grandchild and many nieces and nephews from California to Maryland, all of whom know they were blessed to have the opportunity to know and love this remarkable woman.



Jean Pearce with her husband, Bill Sherman, whom she wed in 2000. COURTESY OF CHRIS PEARCE

“Please don't feel unhappy about my departure. I am going to a new life with a new friend whom I love deeply, one who shares my experience and my appreciation of this country.”

JEAN PEARCE
WITTINGTON BISHOP FENEL
COLLEGE IN 2000

Two writers, Angela Jeffs and Ken Joseph Jr., co-wrote the column for some years. Ashley Thompson then took over in the final month of March 2011 before handing the baton to me in 2013.

Lifelines currently runs once or twice a month, with lawyers from the Tokyo Public Office also contributing answers on matters of a legal nature.

That last couple of years of Jean Pearce's columns are archived on the JT website: www.japantimes.co.jp/author/it/jean_pearce/. If you have a story about how Jean helped you get things done in Japan, please let us know: is there a particular column you remember that you'd like us to track down and reprint? As always, please send all your comments and questions on any issue related to life in Japan to Lifelines at lifelines@japantimes.co.jp.



Jean Pearce (right) with fellow writer Joan Iroh in 1984. COURTESY OF JOAN IROH BURK

“She was my inspiration and mentor. She was a foreign woman who managed to carve out a career in Japan and kept it going for many years. She will live on in my most treasured memories.”

CHRISTINA BURK, FOUNDER, ASSOCIATION OF FOREIGN WIVES OF JAPANESE

Tributes to a woman who shaped the community's experience of Japan

Source of help and friendship

I was deeply saddened to learn of the death of Jean Pearce last month in Washington. Jean was a good friend to both my wife, Joan, and me, and she played an important role in making our three years in Tokyo so interesting and enjoyable.

When Joan and I arrived in Tokyo in 1995, we of course had no first-hand experience of living in Japan and very few contacts and friends. Jean Pearce was one of the first resident Americans to reach out to us, offer her friendship, her near infinite knowledge of the city, and suggestions on interesting things to see and do, and interesting people to know.

More important than the help and friendship she extended to us is the tremendous contribution she made over many years to the lives of thousands of expats living in Tokyo. Jean's column in The Japan Times eased the daily lives of newcomers and opened many windows into Japanese society. Jean's numerous books on the local scene made an immense contribution to the foreign community's knowledge and enjoyment of Japan.

When Jean left Japan in the summer of 2000 after 40 years in Japan, she gave up her column of 36 years. I am sure Tokyo has not been the same since. We will miss her.

I would like to add a word in remembrance of Bill Sherman, Jean's husband of 17 years who died this month, only a few weeks after Jean's death. When I was nominated by President Bill Clinton in 1995 to go to Japan, I sought out the best and brightest of Japan

experts, both in and out of government. Bill Sherman, who had served as Ambassador Mike Mansfield's deputy chief of mission and held many other high positions, was near the top of this list. Bill gave me invaluable advice, not only about Japan and U.S. Japan relations, but about the intricacies of the State Department and the embassy in Tokyo.

Even with this brief exposure, I recognized that Bill Sherman was a consummate public servant and remarkable human being. If Jean Pearce had to leave Japan, I believe marrying Bill Sherman was an excellent reason to do so.

WALTER F. MONDALE
U.S. Ambassador to Japan, 1993-96

Missed by friends and fans
Jean Pearce was a dear friend and a journalist whose knowledge of Japan was widely respected by those who were privileged to know her and/or to read her column.

Having had the chance to do both, I can say from personal experience how much she will be missed by her friends and her fans. She was a great lady.

MICHAEL ARMACOST
U.S. Ambassador to Japan, 1989-95

Finding love again at 80
Jean Pearce, whom I came to know when she lived in Japan for three years, was a really good friend. She had a great sense of humor and perspective on the world, and was a



Advertiser Jean Pearce visits an archeological dig in Croatia in an undated photo. COURTESY OF CHRIS PEARCE

really kind and thoughtful person.

What I most remember about Jean was her getting married. She came to lunch one Saturday after staying a month at Leisure World in California near her son. I learned that she felt that at 80 years of age she should retire. She had also spent a month in Hawaii renting an apartment near her other son. She was in despair. She did not feel comfortable living near either son. I sympathized but didn't know what to suggest.

A week later she came to reception at the embassy and told me she had resolved her dilemma and was going to live in Reston, Virginia, with Bill Sherman. She was very pleased with the idea and said Bill was com-

ing to Japan to help her pack and move. She told me that she had had an email correspondence for several years with Bill and that when she was out of touch with him during the month she was at Leisure World he became very upset and suggested she move to Reston and live with him instead.

Sure enough, Bill came to Tokyo to help Jean move. I got a call from Jean one day when I was at work and she said Bill had insisted that they get married, and they wanted to do so in my husband Tom's office at the chancellery. Tom was out of town so someone got a high-ranking U.S. official for the ceremony and Bill and Jean came for lunch afterwards at the residence. As I recall, the cook produced a small wedding cake.

Jean and Bill went back to Reston, sold the house there and bought a beautiful apartment overlooking the Potomac. Unfortunately, it had stairs and they moved again a few years later to a one-story apartment building and later to assisted living.

They were such a perfect couple. It's so sad to think they are no longer living. They looked after each other so well.

HEATHERS FOLEY
wife of Thomas F. Foley, U.S. Ambassador to Japan, 1997-2001

Truly Japan's national treasure
I send deepest condolences to Jean's column served as my guide and counselor on all matters related to living in and enjoying Japan.

She had an uncanny knack of anticipating and answering my questions before I had even articulated them.

If Jean had been a citizen of Japan, she would have been a contender for the honor of being designated a National Living Treasure.

GEORGE R. PACKARD
President, U.S. Japan Foundation

A best friend, a great legacy
Jean was my best friend in Tokyo. I'm sure that I wasn't the only one that felt that way.

She was also a star, recognized wherever she went for her books, lectures and columns that helped readers better understand and enjoy life in Japan.

We could always count on each other to be ready to explore some aspect of Japanese culture, whether ringing a temple bell on New Year's Eve or visiting post Matsuo Basho's hut beside the Sumida River.

I remember one summer evening when we visited the cricket sellers at a distant park. As we walked, we could hear the crickets singing long before we reached the vendors' stalls. Of course, we couldn't resist buying a cricket and a little bamboo cage.

Such were the small and large delights of friendship. Jean leaves an important legacy behind.

KRISTEN DEMING
wife of Rust Deming, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy, Tokyo, 1993-1997

Jean made Tokyo come alive

Jean Pearce made Tokyo come alive for generations of foreign residents. She was an adventurer, an explorer who loved to find the most unusual nooks and crannies and make them accessible to foreigners who spoke every language except Japanese.

In her Japan Times columns and her books, she gave detailed descriptions of *shitamachi* (downtown) neighborhoods, obscure shrines, unique craft shops, nearby restaurants—including one in Sanyo she took us to that specialized in *sakura-niku*. All of these were easily accessible by the Yamanote Line or the subway.

Jean loved Tokyo and wanted foreigners to feel at home in Japan and freely answered questions about living in Tokyo—where to shop, where to eat, what some strange custom meant. She especially liked *o-shogatsu*, the New Year's season, which is special in Japan, and held intimate New Year's Eve soirees in her small apartment followed by a pilgrimage to the nearest temple or shrine.

Jean opened windows to the pleasures of participating in everyday life in Japan and made living in Tokyo an adventure for all.

WILLIAM BREER
Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy, Tokyo, 1989-95

Send your personal tributes to and memories of Jean Pearce to lifelines@japantimes.co.jp.