there are pictures. I moved in closer and was bewildered to see English. *I See Everything* was the title. He opened it up. It was a large glossy book full of color pictures. The page he opened up to had "backpacking" written in big letters across the top. There was a drawing of a hiker with a backpack and a tent and all across that page were pictures of camping items with the names of everything in English next to them. Maku turned the page. "A department store" was written across the top, and the next two pages were full of pictures and words of that scene. He kept turning the pages and smiling. "I see everything," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "I also study English," he said in English.

A STITCH IN SPACE

HŌGOJI MAY 10, 1988

Norman does many things well. His head is good, his voice is good and his hands are good too. They're strong and intelligent, with long fingers. In his day Norman has used his hands skillfully for finished carpentry, lead guitar, elegant calligraphy, and finicky kesa and rakusu sewing. Even though Norman is always frustrated in one way or another because he feels he's treated as an outsider who can't *really* understand or master any Japanese way of doing anything, no one can deny that he sews a superb kesa. The kesa is covered with lines of stitches that look like closely spaced dots that hold together the small pieces of cloth it is made from. His dots are always perfectly spaced and straight as Bodhidharma's stare.

There are few places where monks or laypeople still sew these robes for themselves. Most of them are machine sewn and store

bought these days. Suienji is one of the only places in Japan that I know of where monks and laypeople alike sew their own. Some of the Zen groups in the United States require that ordainees make their own holy vestments, as Father Sam referred to them. Joshin-san (of the missing digit) patiently taught us this specialized sewing at Zen Center. We'd chant "Namu kie butsu" ("I take refuge in the buddha—I plunge into buddha," was her twist on it) with every stitch and would thus sew the vow of taking refuge into the very fabric of the garment. (Taking refuge, or plunging, in the buddha, dharma and sangha is as central to Buddhism as communion is to Catholicism.) Unlike a certain old monk at Suienji, Joshin never brought cultural competition into her teaching or doubted our ability to sew "Buddha's robe."

After lunch one day, while we were resting in our room, Norman told me a Buddhist sewing story. Once, he went to Suienji for a two-week sewing session. In the first ten days he whipped out a new kesa and matching *zagu*, the bowing cloth. He then joined a group of Japanese laypeople, mostly women, who had come to sew their own rakusu. Rakusu aren't just for monks; laypeople sometimes wear them too. An older monk was there to instruct in how to go about this exacting task. He demonstrated how to lay out the cloth, measure it, cut it, fold the pieces, do the stitches, how to make the straps to hang around the neck, every little detail. He didn't pay any attention to Norman, who was working away in the corner.

The next afternoon when he was checking people's work, the monk walked over to where Norman sat sewing. Norman kept on sewing in a concentrated fashion. The old monk looked at his work and did a double take. He asked Norman if that was a rakusu he'd been working on from before and Norman said no, he'd started with everyone else the day before. The old monk examined it carefully, glanced at Norman and looked at the rakusu again. You'd think the guy would be happy. "I mean what's the point

of the whole trip?" to quote Norman. But he wasn't happy—he was furious. His face tightened into a scowl and his breathing became audible. He turned around, glared fiercely at the unsuspecting lay sewers and commenced to scold them vigorously for allowing a . . . a . . . a gaijin to sew a better rakusu than they, than Japanese! He fumed and paced the room as he shamed them for this inexcusable insult to national pride. Norman, disgusted, went back to sewing as the outraged monk brought his fellow countryfolk to tears.

LECTURE PREP

MARUYAMA—KYOTO, MAY 11, 1989

When I returned Yasushi's call, he asked me to come to Gifu in mid-May and give a talk to his Junior Chamber of Commerce cronies. He'd mentioned the JCs to me before. He was the president of that chapter. All these guys were buddies of his and I knew I'd have to do a good job. Hmm. It would be great to see Yasushi and it would be challenging Japanese language study. So it was decided. After only one year in Japan, I would give a forty-five-minute talk in what the Jesuits used to call "the devil's language," it being next to impossible for them to learn well enough to convert anyone.

That night at home I sat at the *kotatsu*, a unique Japanese form of heating utilizing a low table. The blanket over my legs held in the warmth generated by the heat lamp under the tabletop. In front of me was an empty notebook. My Japanese wasn't that great, I thought, but if I prepared, I could do it. "Heh heh," I laughed to myself—Bop had said that, having an American

wife, I'd never learn Japanese. I'll show him. Now let's see. What will I talk about? Yasushi had suggested that I contrast my impressions of Japan with America. How typical—comparisons. Humph.

After I had spent all of my spare time for a few days writing down notes, I met with Kubo from the MMC to begin to put it into Japanese. She was excited that I was going to go through with this. "What are you going to speak on?" she said. "Your first year in Japan? Living in Japanese suburb? Comparing America and Japan?"

"None of that," I said, dismissing the predictable. "Why tell them what they already know? Anyway, I hate comparisons. Comparisons are the lowest, most superficial form of thought. I'll tell them something new, something they don't know about, something stimulating."

Kubo thought for a minute. "But you should tell them a little bit about your Japan impression and what you like about Japan and Japanese people," she said while smiling and nodding and making a motion with her hands like she was grinding something. This is *gomasuri*, grinding sesame, a Japanese symbol for buttering someone up.

"But look, Kubo-san, here's the story. I've got a great story to tell them." And I proceeded to lay out for her what I was sure would be a captivating talk about a socially important topic that would both hold their interest and expand their horizons. The movie *Mississippi Burning* had been in Japan for over a month so they'd be familiar with the background of what I was talking about. I had spent time with the civil rights movement in Mississippi during the same time covered by the movie and had worked with SDS (Students for a Democratic Society). I could mention the movie story and my own experiences together and bring it all up to date.

Kubo listened and nodded and said it sounded like a very difficult subject. She finally gave up trying to advise me and started working on the speech with me. But she was instinctively putting it into extremely difficult oratory Japanese that would

take me forever to get down. She seemed to be getting bored and suddenly said she had to go to pick up her son at school. So all I ended up with that I could use was a vocabulary list that I would tie together with my more basic Japanese later.

I worked it out in English at first, writing and remembering and developing a talk that criss-crossed back and forth between Mississippi and San Francisco, with a bit of Texas thrown in.

A few weeks later a letter arrived from Yasushi that briefly reiterated the basic facts of my coming trip. Included was the invitation that went out to the JCs, which had a picture of me with a brief bio. It said I had worked for a government youth program in the States (I had worked for the California Conservation Corps for a couple of years) and that the title of my talk was "The Japan That I Have Seen." I shrugged, thinking that the guy just can't get it straight. I didn't come to Japan to give them a talk on Japan.

On the way to Gifu to give the talk to the JCs I stayed at Bop's in Kyoto, a small old falling-down prewar one-story building nestled amidst newer two-story structures. Bop is a medium-height ex-surfer from Colorado who's blond where he's not bald. Elin says he's cute. He sleeps next door with his ladyfriend Keiks, so his place is available and he always lets me stay there when I am in town. It is Grand Central for a disparate crowd of Japanese and foreigners—monks, bluegrass musicians, an ex-Jesuit, art collectors and English teachers trying to save money and hold on to their sanity.

The night I stayed there on my way to Gifu, Bop and Keiks were entertaining some buyers who were there to look at Bop's kimono collection, other types of traditional garb and beautiful old material. The prospective clients were a sophisticated Japanese couple.

We got a lot of talking in and they said my Japanese was very good—in fact everyone was complimentary about how much

I'd learned. I hadn't prepared my talk as well as I'd planned to, in fact not at all, and so was a little nervous about it. I went over the whole story with them and they agreed that it was indeed quite interesting. There was a lot of smiling and nodding and the whole evening was just the boost of confidence I needed.

There was one weird point in that conversation, when I compared the plight of blacks in the United States with that of the eta in Japan. "Ooh, don't say that word," Keiks said, holding her arms and shivering. I noticed everyone was uncomfortable. I asked her why can't I say "eta"? There's a big eta section just down the street about a thirty-minute walk away.

"I *hate* that word," she said. "Don't use it." And it stopped there.

Bop quickly changed the subject back to my impending talk, but his advice made me wonder. "Just look at the audience and say, 'I'm from America, I like ice cream.' " He pointed to his nose the way Japanese do to indicate themselves, smiled and nodded as if in front of an audience of five-year-olds. "That's all you have to do. This'll be a piece o' cake for you. No problem," he said, slapping my thigh.

"Yes, do not worry, David," said Keiks, easily shifting gears. "Just be very simple. Don't try too much." The visiting Japanese couple were nodding and chiming in sounds of agreement.

"You'll knock 'em dead. Say, 'I like sushi, I like Japanese cars and Japanese women,' " said Bop, "and Japanese toilet paper and Japanese forks." They all laughed.

I tried to act amused, but I really didn't get the point. It all seemed sort of rude to me—to the audience. But the important thing was that they all had confidence in me and after a second I adjusted and gave a little chuckle because after all, we don't have to understand everything each other says.