



Name: Jon Ryan Dujmovich

Age: 42

Nationality: Canadian

Heritage: Croatian, Swedish, Italian, French,
Native (First Nations People)

Program Designer and Instructor

Growing up in a multicultural society, and in a multicultural family, I know first hand the advantages and disadvantages of multicultural life. I can recall my school days playing with children of all races, with backgrounds from all over the world. I never once questioned whether they were Canadian or not, they were merely my friends, classmates, neighbors, or people whom I did not know. We all lived and played together, life was seemingly carefree.

Now, much older and a resident of Hamamatsu with a wonderful Japanese wife and two beautiful multiracial children of my own, I find myself wondering what kind of childhood they will have. Will they be happy? Will others treat them fairly? Are they going to have the same opportunities as I did? Of course, like all parents I dream that my children can grow up in an accepting, loving, caring, environment and feel proud and confident about their heritage. Not only their Japanese heritage, but also from my background as well. This is the challenge all families like mine face, to raise children with strong ties to both parents cultures.

I often feel depressed when I hear people in the community refer to my children as “half”. I know most people who use the term are naïve of the negative inference and do not intend to be hurtful, but they are hurtful nonetheless. I find the term “half” offensive as it assumes that people are not whole, or missing something in some way. Better is the term “double” referring to the two nationalities of their parents (Canadian and Japanese), but this is even misleading given the rich heritage that many children, including mine have. I wish there was a better term, or even that they would be accepted simply as “Japanese” which they most certainly are.

Realistically, with my children having a family name that is not a common name in Japan, and facial features that suggest a mixed-race background, I fear that they will more than likely face some discrimination or bullying in their future. As a father I must prepare them for such a time, and hope it never comes.

I once took my son to play with other children and overheard a mother tell her son to “go play with your foreign friend” while pushing her son towards mine, and it made me a little angry. Why did this woman have to say such a thing? My son is Japanese, every bit as her son! He was born in Hamamatsu, his mother was born in Hamamatsu, and he has never lived anywhere else. Why did she assume he wasn’t Japanese? Was it just because his name is different, or he looks different, or his father is not Japanese? The more I thought, the more I became sad and felt that we have a long way to go before Hamamatsu is truly a place that embraces multiculturalism and people do not automatically consider others that may look different as “outsiders”.

When I was asked to contribute to the Multicultural Facilitator Program I did not hesitate to say “yes”. To create a community that is truly accepting, loving, and caring of all people, requires initiative and programs such as this to raise awareness. I hope that by reading these experiences, and using the lessons contained in this book, we can become a little closer to building a multicultural city that all of it’s citizens can be proud to call home.



Name : Lissa Kikuyama

Age: 34

Nationality: Japanese

Heritage: Japanese

Program Coordinator

When we live in another country, we have to adapt. Adaptability and flexibility are therefore essential to live abroad successfully. In my case, I lived in Brazil, a multicultural country, amongst many Japanese descendants, I was considered Japanese too.

My parents wanted me to learn more about my Japanese origins as well to improve my Japanese. Therefore, when I was in 6th grade, I came to Japan to study. Unfortunately, because I was not fluent in Japanese I felt isolated. I remember many Japanese students would ask me only about the very famous Amazon forest. Yet, what I knew about the Amazon came only from books and the Amazon was actually a three-hour flight from where I had lived in Brazil. Ironically, after I returned to Brazil, anytime anyone mentioned the Amazon I was reminded of Japan.

People often stereotype different nationalities. Brazilians stereotype the Japanese as being naturally intelligent people. Thus, due to my Japanese heritage, many Brazilians thought I was intelligent and could speak Japanese fluently.

When Japan became the second most influential world power in the 1980's, a Brazilian teacher once joked that everyone would have to learn Japanese rather than English if Japan became the primary world power. Because of this influence, many around me began to take interest in Japanese language. Friends used to ask me to write in Japanese, even though I barely knew how to write the characters. As the phrase was always the same (I love you), I became able to write it.

At that time, I began taking computer classes because I wasn't good at computers. During my first day of class, my Brazilian teacher said the Japanese are technologically advanced and, pointing to me, said I should be good with computers. I was sitting in the back of the room, and I will always remember everyone turning to look at me after my teacher's comment. I'll never forget the intense pressure I felt.

Stereotyping is a delicate subject. People in any country may over generalize specific matters, nationalities, or cultures based on only a single source of information or through the popular media. One must be strong enough not to be influenced by how others stereotype lest one risks losing his or her own identity.

I thank my parents for giving me the opportunity to see a different culture and to understand the importance of learning other languages. If I ever have children, I would like them to live in an environment with many opportunities to meet people from different backgrounds.

I know many people from different countries. The more contact I have with people from different backgrounds, the more I realize the importance of multiculturalism to our vision of life.

Given today's more integrated world, I believe a culturally rich person has the basis necessary to harmoniously coexist with others worldwide.

(Original text: Portuguese)