

**Close Friends in Columbus District**  
**By CRISPIN REEDY**  
**Dallas**

When I first became a member of Columbus District two years ago, I had just returned to America after spending almost four years abroad. First I was in Thailand with the Peace Corps, teaching English to junior high school students, and later I was in China, teaching college-level English. After spending so much time overseas, I found myself with a severe case of “reverse culture shock” when I returned.

America seemed strange and unfamiliar. I found myself marveling at such mundane things as a Coke machine. The “average” American lifestyle seemed unbelievably luxurious to me, almost hedonistic. I had been a different person before I left for Asia! And try as I might, I could never be that person again.

Although I had been warned about this reverse culture shock, I still was not prepared to experience it firsthand. I had expected to feel welcome, glad to get home. After the initial excitement of my return had worn off, I found that no one was particularly interested in my experience. I was living at home with my parents, was working for a temporary agency, had no friends in Dallas and was full of stories that no one wanted to hear.

So when I walked into Columbus District and found a welcoming community, I felt I had come home at last. Every meeting was interesting — sometimes thought-provoking, sometimes fun, sometimes touching. At the time I joined, the district had a group of especially active, creative young women’s division members, who helped make the meetings shine.

At the planning meetings, all the members would decide on the topic for the discussion meeting, and the young women would look for opportunities to contribute. We were very fond of skits. One time, to illustrate a Gosho, some of us made Japanese-style masks. One person played Shijo Kingo; another, the fearsome Lord Ema.

On another occasion, three young women each played one of the three presidents, reading his story as if she were the person. We wanted everyone to participate, so each young woman prepared interview questions that they distributed and then responded to in character.

One of the young women, Melissa Pavier, had a talent for computer graphics. For one meeting, she was determined to create souvenir packets for the members — bookmarks with pictures of the three presidents, determination cards and daimoku charts. The meeting’s theme was “Overcoming the Blahs,” the intention being to center on members’ suggestions to one another for revitalizing their practice when they felt down. Melissa pulled together a nurse costume and a hilarious presentation. She gave each member his or her own “medicine cabinet” of “prescriptions” for beating the blahs — the souvenirs that we made together.

Most important, as we worked together our group of young women became close friends for kosen-rufu. Each time we met to work on a presentation, we chanted together, exchanged views, talked, ate snacks, laughed and, especially, encouraged one another. Since then, several of these young women have moved away, following their dreams as far away as Utah, California and even England. Others have graduated to the women’s division, while still others are struggling with difficult work schedules that don’t allow them to come to meetings very often. However, the bonds we formed as we worked together in Columbus District still endure.

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