

CANADIAN ACADEMY

Samuel O. Nicholson

The Canadian Academy was one of two officially accredited western high schools in Japan. The other was the American School in Japan in Tokyo. They both served the business and missionary communities.

In a letter, Father told me that he had decided to stay in Japan for another year, because the headmaster had told him the school was so short staffed that it would fold, and that he and his wife might help to keep it open another year. That would mean that Virginia and I would have to return to Japan for a year, as the children of staff are considered part of the school. Our education in America would no longer be covered.

He also told me that he and Mother would be house parents at the new boys' dorm, Gloucester House. Father would also teach a math course and one on religion. The school needed to find some way to fill as many vacant positions as they could, in order to continue to provide an outstanding education.

The Canadian Academy had started to make a move into the suburbs, which in this case meant moving up into the closest shoulder of the surrounding mountains. They had leveled off an area wide enough for the boys' dorm, with room to the east for the other dorm when they got the funding for it. Quite a bit lower was a large flat open space, which would become the athletic field.

My parents had an apartment on the west end of the first floor of Gloucester House. A Canadian teacher by the name of Fielding also had an apartment there. His much younger brother was a senior and lived in the dorm, on the third floor across from me. As a younger brother, he also got free tuition and care. The dorm was organized in the British Prefect system. This meant that one of the most capable of the senior boys would be a prefect, with a small private room, in each dorm, and he would be responsible for the other six boys in the third-floor junior dorm. The larger part in front was our living area and the prefect's room, while the rear was our bedroom.

I was fortunate that my desk faced the bay. From my window I had a clear view across the bay. There was a small German passenger liner and three or four freighters in the anchorage area this side of the harbor, which was hidden from my sight by the mountains coming down to the sea. The ships were stranded at Kobe because of the bad relations between Great Britain and Germany. If they had tried to get back to their country, they would have been captured by the British near Singapore. The crews were stuck on board with little to do. They must have been bored, and I didn't know how their needs were being met. I could also see the whole expanse of the upper end of the Inland Sea, and any shipping passing through.

The youngest dorm residents, the high school freshmen, had the dorm on the east end of the first floor. That included my younger brother, Donald. This pleased Mother, as it made it easier for

her to keep an eye on him, since he was so near their apartment. The main entrance to the dorm was at the upper end of this hallway.

Our dining room was a one-story addition on the east end of the dorm. Behind this room was an extension for the kitchen and utility areas. The large open area of our flat shelf to the east, was where the future girls' dorm was to go. When this other dorm was completed, and the large flat area below was developed into the school's athletic field, the campus expansion into the hills would be completed.

As the house parent in charge of the dorm, Mother kept an eye out for what was going on at mealtime. Of course the boys knew this, and usually made an effort to be neat and proper. She must have often made little comments or suggestions, but I only remember two, because they were unusual. The first involved a game the boys at one table were playing. On weekend dinners, the boys at this table would compete for their desserts. Rather than each boy taking his desert, they would compete for each of them. When one of the youngest boys at that table ended up with all but two of the desserts for that table, Mother called a halt to this game. The other was that Fielding's younger brother refused to take milk on his breakfast cereal. She felt he should, but she could only push it so far, so she left it with his statement that he did not like milk.

Getting To School

Since it was less than two miles down to the school it was up to each of us to hike down there without being late for any of our classes. One of my roommates and I decided we could save some time in getting to school if we took a half mile shortcut on the narrow dirt paths through the rice fields. Although they were narrow, there was no problem most of the way. However, at one corner we had to be careful, as there was a large deep-walled tank right up against the path, where the farmer deposited his night soil to let it mellow before spreading it on his fields, and the smell was terrible.

A couple of days later, some of the first graders saw what we were doing and followed us. On the way they were horsing around, and when we reached the pit, one of them slipped all the way in. It was a terrible mess, and the only way we could get any of the muck off, was for him to dip into the edge of a wet rice field. Some of us helped him back to the dorm, where Mother had to clean up the mess. That was the last time we were allowed to use the shortcut.

The building I remember the most at the main campus was the classroom building. Since it was built on sloping ground, there was a long set of stone steps to the main entrance on the first floor. Fielding's math class was held in the first room to the right of this entrance. At the bottom of each page, there was a series of three problems that were there as a test of the abilities of the best students. He was proud of his math ability and wanted to challenge us. So rather than assigning the practice problems at the end of each class, he would assign one of these really hard problems. We were all stumped.

While waiting for class the next day, three or four of us were at the bottom of the steps, drawing diagrams and equations on the ground. Each had a different approach, and we all came to a dead

end. At the start of class, we asked Fielding to show us his solution. He had not worked on this one yet, so he went to the board and started out. After the first twenty minutes he hadn't gotten to the solution, so he said he would take it home for the weekend and work on it and would let us know at our Monday class. When the next class started, he told us that he had worked really hard on it for much of the weekend, and he was sure that the textbook had an error and put in a problem for which there was no solution.

I was aware of other classes in the building. Although I have no memory of seeing other teachers, there must have been some. I do remember hearing my father's voice coming down from above, so he must have been teaching one of his classes on the second floor. The classes must have had girls as well as boys in them. The only memory I have, is that there was a report that a teacher had caught a senior boy kissing one of the girls between classes, while hiding behind the staircase to the second floor. That caused a real fuss.

I don't remember other buildings on the campus, but I know there was a girls' dorm, as Virginia lived there. All the campus buildings were older and frame construction, while our dorm was reinforced concrete. There must have been a small gym and an auditorium, or perhaps the two were combined. They may have been separate or a part of the classroom building.

Field Day

In the spring it was announced that there would be a field day, and all the boys were expected to take part. It must have been their first one, as they had not had the field to use previously. Although the future field on the area below the dorm had not been developed yet, the quarter mile track was in usable, though not perfect, condition. We were given our choice of distances, and then were to train in the afternoons in the month before the meet. I did not have a clue as to what distance to choose, but as I was not a fast runner, I steered clear of the sprints. That meant I was in the mile.

It was a nice sunny day. The mile was the last event. I watched the other distances nervously while waiting my turn. We all lined up for the start, and when the signal was given, took off. I was soon left behind. By the time I rounded the far end, the runner in front of me had just reached the next curve. By the time I finished a half mile, I could not see the other runners, as I was facing in the wrong direction. Just before I finished the third lap I was being passed; everyone had to wait until I finished the race, though I heard someone say that my race should have been for three laps only.

Boy Scouts

A little later, the administration told my father that it might be a good idea if the school had a troop of Boy Scouts. It was not something that Father would have thought of, but he decided to go along with it. He never dreamed that he might ever become a Scoutmaster.

He looked around all the storage places at the school, to see what materials and information was available. All he could find was a very complete handbook, with instructions and diagrams, for a Canadian Sea Scout troop. It included instructions for merit badges in drilling, signaling and cooking. There were a number of pairs of signaling flags, a variety of badges and a good picture of the uniform, but no uniforms at that time. This was a real problem, as no sturdy cloth was available at all.

A few American liners were still making runs to Hong Kong, with a stop on the way at Kobe. Father contacted the purser on one of these ships, gave him a picture and specifications of this uniform, and a small variety of sizes. They had to be in blue. A large variety of materials were available in Hong Kong and tailors there were very fast. So, thanks to this purser we had our uniforms.

We were a very small outfit. We were organized into two patrols, with five or six boys in each. Father did not know anything about drilling, but that problem was easily solved by Helmut, a German day student who lived in Kobe. He loved drilling and was the leader of the "A" patrol. I was the second member of the "B" patrol, which was led by my friend, Jishin Martin, another day student, who was commuting daily by train from a college half way up the side line to the city of Takarazuka. My friend got his name because when his parents were living in Karuizawa, the Great Kanto Earthquake's local tremors brought on his birth.

Although there was only limited playing space at the main campus, it was plenty large enough for our drilling exercises. I was glad the hedges were high enough to hide what we were doing, so that passers-by could not see foreigners in uniform drilling in wartime Japan.

Signaling

Working on the signaling merit badge was a lot of fun. I took the code home with me and practiced it without the flags, just by moving my arms. We also practiced after school. We soon could signal easily. Before long, we decided to make a game of it. There was a nearby area on a hilltop, which we had discovered when exploring on a Saturday. It was a great place for a number of us to go and play Capture the Flag, as this area had waist-high reeds in which to hide, and you were able to sneak around and pop up at unexpected places.

So we varied this game. We decided to put one patrol against the other, and signal teammates where we would pop up next. I'm pretty sure that these signals would be visible from the bay, and we played this game even when the Japanese Grand Fleet was there for more than a week, filling the upper end of the Inland Sea.

There was a wide variety of warships of various sizes, but I did not spot any aircraft carriers.

Cooking

Next came the cooking merit badge. A couple of my friends and I decided we would go together and make a stew. I checked the instructions, which said to get a couple of carrots and potatoes and a piece of meat. Then you go out in the woods and clear a safe place to build a fire. To do that, it said that you collect pieces of wood and twigs and bark and make some shavings. Then, using a drawstring bow to spin a stick on a piece of wood to make a spark, you could start a fire. Since it was pouring rain, this was impossible. But the meat would not keep, so we needed to do something to save our project.

It was obvious that we couldn't find a dry place for our fire on this day, so we had a problem to solve. We needed to find another location for our project. Our entrance street had four houses on each side. They were all empty except for the headmaster's house at the top. Also, the one at the bottom on that side was a burned-out mansion, with just its basement remaining. It was of reinforced concrete, with the lower end, which was above ground, of sturdy stonework. That was where our bus stop was located.

Although it was against the rules to enter an abandoned property, and an attempt had been made to block any entrance, in my free time I had poked around and found that I could wedge my way in. It was filled with trash in the far corner. Also, on the side away from the street, I discovered that the hillside dropped away, so that there was a view across the valley. I figured that if we fixed it up a bit, it would make a good secret clubhouse.

We decided that using this place was the only solution we had. We took all the materials I had assembled down there, cleared a spot, and built up a hearth using a few loose bricks that were there. Getting a fire started was a real problem, as none of us had tried that process before and it was quite damp there. I have to admit that we cheated a bit, as one of the other boys discovered he had a cigarette lighter in his pocket. But I do remember getting down on my hands and knees, and blowing very carefully on a tiny twig to keep it alive until it burst into a flame. We finally got the pot boiling and made a passable stew, but quite a few wisps of smoke escaped, and I'm glad nobody noticed this.

Bus Travel

Although we did not travel by bus very often, I did take them a few times. I found that this could be a real adventure. Since scarce resources, such as gasoline, were reserved for the military, the local areas had to make do with what they had. In rural areas there was enough to power the standard small buses, but they had a very limited schedule. The solution was to power these buses with charcoal.

Charcoal came in eight-inch-round blocks, with a number of air holes through them. They were also readily available, as they were the main source of domestic heating. To modify a bus to use this source of fuel, a metal framework was welded on the rear of the driver's side of the bus, and a large vertical tank was attached. When enough steam was built up, it would be used to power the bus. It took real skill for the single driver to get these working.

One Saturday afternoon, I had gotten permission to go to the main business district, which was down near the railroad station. It was dark by the time I returned. Since it was so far, I had to take the bus. Like most of the Kobe buses, it was a charcoal burner. The bus was packed with several people standing. The driver did his best to get a running start as he approached a long steep section, but it slowly ground to a halt. The driver applied the brakes, stood up and announced, "Everyone out except women and children," so we all got out and pushed.

A friend told me that one time, when he was the last person to get off a bus at the upper end of the line, and he turned around and put his foot back on the bottom step to tie his shoe, the driver did not notice what he was doing and had started to return to his shed. His foot had stalled the bus and the driver was very angry with him. This was a great story, but it was probably not true.

The Goat

The next spring, Father got a surprise message. He had been getting milk goats from Nagano, the mountain prefecture, and getting them to farmers in Ibaraki. This man no longer wanted his goat and needed to return it. Since this business in Ibaraki had been discontinued, he asked this man to pass it on to another local farmer. The man refused, probably because the area was changing and the farmers there did not want to take on a new project. Father had to take care of it himself.

Not A Spy

Since it was during spring break and Father did not need to be at the school, he was free to take care of it himself. When he got on the local bus to go to the village, he was surprised that no one on the bus would even look at him. Since foreigners were never seen in this area, he expected that at least they would be making comments between themselves as to why he had come there, but no one said a word. He asked the driver what was going on, and the driver pointed to a poster behind his seat which said, "BEWARE OF FOREIGNERS, THEY MAY BE SPIES." Father asked the driver who had put up the sign and was told that it was the official at the village office they were coming to. Since it was the closest stop to his destination, he got off and went in to see him. The man had been one of his students years before, when Father had been teaching English at the prefectural higher school. Father asked this official if he thought he was a spy. The man answered, "No teacher, it's the other foreigners." Father pointed out that he was the only one around.

Father let us know that he had shipped the goat, but then we didn't hear from him for a few days. I became worried that the crated goat had been in a freight car for days, and wondered if the railroad was feeding and watering her. I got Mother to take me down to the freight office near the railyards, and they reassured us that they were taking care of the animal. I really wanted to see for myself and persuaded her to hang around there until late evening. Finally, a night clerk agreed to take us and slipped us under a fence. When he had taken us behind a warehouse, we heard troops being loaded onto a ship on the other side of that building. The other side must have been a pier, and we were in a highly restricted military area. We were grabbed by some military police and taken to a police box, or little office for the neighborhood policeman. We were

searched for weapons, including in our shoes, and for some reason after a couple of hours they let us go. Mother got us home as quickly as possible. This was an incident I really wanted to forget.

The next day both Father and the goat were back, and before the end of the vacation the goat gave birth. Fielding's younger brother was fascinated to watch how Father handled the procedure. As soon as the kid was born, it stood up on its wobbly legs and reached up for its mother's milk. Father explained that for the first two or three months, milk was all the young goat would eat. The boy said, "But what if it doesn't like milk?" This became a family joke.

During a long weekend that spring, Jishin invited me to visit him at his home. This was at a Christian university run by a mission, where his parents were professors. It also had a high school, but this one was only for faculty kids. One afternoon a group of us discovered an abandoned salt mine and played some games there. I really enjoyed playing with a different set of kids.

The Return To America

Fielding had been in the Canadian reserves and had spent three months in uniform, and we and the rest of the staff didn't feel like hanging around either, as war clouds were darkening. So when we learned that the NHK liner, *The Brazil Maru* was sailing, many of us decided it would be a good idea to be on board.

On the way to Honolulu, Jishin bragged about how he was a man of the world, and he planned to spend his day there at Waikiki beach, because that was where all the action was. I said that because of my family connections, I was stuck with just visiting family.

After we sailed, he told me that the day had been a dud. He had been on a crowded beach with lots of tourists hanging around, and he had seen a line of four native hula dancers who had gone through the motions but they were not very attractive and their heart didn't seem to be in it.

I told him that Mother had taken us to see her aunt, an older woman who had gained a lot of respect in town, and after listening to their conversation for a time, Donald and I discovered there was a very large Palawan tree in the middle of her extensive front lawn. We discovered there was a huge area underneath its overarching branches, and she told us that the whole community was proud that such a tree was there.

After lunch, an attractive spinster took us on a long ride in an open-air trolley, and she pointed out the various sights we were passing. All three of us had a great time. She enjoyed having youngsters to share the time with her.

In the late afternoon, Mother took us to the home of some friends of hers. The husband told us that he was glad he happened to be there to see us, as he was away most of the time. His construction business was involved in a hush hush rush job on a distant island, and he was there a lot. After an enjoyable luau type of dinner, their mother told us that their very attractive blonde

nineteen-year-old daughter had been studying the hula. She would be glad to show us what she could do. I was particularly impressed with how much she communicated with every movement of her hands.