

# "Dear Pen Pal, Some day we shall meet..."

An American teen-ager wrote this years ago—  
and made it come true in a way that says a lot about youth the world over

By CAROL JSIRANDANIS as told to John M. Ross

WHEN ALLEN COUTU handed me a letter that day in the seventh grade, I had no idea it would eventually become a passport for a magic-carpet-like flight into another world.

The letter was from a teen-age Japanese girl in Tokyo, who had been Allen's pen pal for several months. She wrote about the strange and fascinating life in the Orient and told of her desire to know more about other people of the world. Her English was simple, sometimes faltering, but it held me spellbound.

"Gee, Allen, how'd you ever get to know a girl in a place so far away?" I asked my classmate.

Allen explained he had been given her name and address by one of our teachers who had been helping the students of our school in Hallsville, N.H., to establish pen-pal relationships with the boys and girls of other lands.

"Do you think I could get a pen pal, Allen?" I asked with curiosity.

"Well, Kiyoko has a younger sister. Maybe you could start writing to her," he suggested.

I pounced on the idea, and before long my first letter to Kiyoko Tanaka was on its way to Japan. Kiyoko was 11 years old—my own age at the time. I was sure this would give us much to write about.

I counted the days, awaiting Kiyoko's reply. When it came I was almost overcome with excitement. Imagine, a letter for me—all the way from the other side of the world!

In Japan, children are not taught English until they reach what would be comparable to our sixth grade. Kiyoko, therefore, had studied our language for only a year. She had difficulty expressing herself in English, and her letter was not easy to read. But it didn't matter. I read it a dozen times, and its simplicity became more beautiful each time. Almost immediately I wrote again to Kiyoko.

This was the beginning of one of the most unusual friendships any two young girls have ever experienced anywhere.

Our letters were exchanged about once a month—sometimes more often. They were typical teen-age letters, I guess. We wrote about our schools, homework, parents, hobbies, customs, boy friends, recreation, relatives, and the like. We swapped pictures of each other, our families, and local surroundings. And often we'd exchange small gifts. This presented a problem. In shopping for a present for Kiyoko, I'd hunt for something inexpensive but typically American. But just when I'd find the



Carol's pen pal Kiyoko gets a taste of American hospitality from civic leaders in Manchester, N.H.

perfect item, I'd turn it upside down and find it stamped, "Made in Japan."

I thought it would be fun to send Kiyoko some samples of the kind of clothes teen-agers in America wear, and in one of my letters I asked her to forward her clothing sizes. She complied—but utter confusion resulted. The method of measuring sizes in Japan differs from ours. To solve this, I sent along some string in my next letter and asked Kiyoko to measure off the width of her waist, length of her arms, etc. It worked out perfectly, and I was able to send her a skirt and blouse that were her size.

Before long, Kiyoko's wonderful letters brightened my whole routine. I was never at a loss for conversation among my friends or at home, never stumped for a topic for a school composition. And it amazed me that two teen-age girls, living more than 7,000 miles apart in surroundings so vastly different, could think alike on so many matters.

IN 1955, AFTER almost two years of corresponding, Kiyoko and I cooked up the most fantastic plan. We decided to exchange visits to each other's country. It was like a pipe dream in the beginning, but when we mentioned it to our parents the response amazed us.

My mother thought it was a wonderful idea—especially since I indicated that I planned to earn all the money necessary to get me to Tokyo and back to our home in Londonderry, N.H.

"It will teach you the value of money," Mom

said. "Also, it will give you the chance to choose between spending your money on the pleasures that pass quickly or saving it for the experience of a lifetime."

Encouraged by this, I began to make meticulous plans. I figured the cost of such a trip—cutting corners wherever possible—would be around \$2,000. Jeepers, I thought at the time, that sounds almost as much as \$2 million! But at least I had time—almost five years, since I promised my parents I would not begin my journey until I had been graduated from high school.

In the days that followed, my saving habits would have put the squirrel to shame. I became the busiest baby sitter in Londonderry. I was seldom without a new scheme for earning additional money for chores around the house. I seldom spent a cent on clothing and was content to make do with the clothes I'd receive from my parents as gifts. I cut out the movies and swore off candy and sodas. As I grew older, I was permitted to work after school in my father's restaurant. Eventually, I increased this schedule to some evenings during the week, weekends, and holidays. My bank account began to swell rapidly. I gave up vacation time in the summers of 1958 and '59 to work as a full-time waitress at a resort at Hampton Beach—where the tips were extremely good. My net profit from this project amounted to \$900 and pushed me very close to my goal.

I kept Kiyoko advised on the progress of my program, and she seemed to be envious of my determined, if exhausting, effort. In Japan, young ladies simply cannot earn money this easily. Jobs are difficult to find, and they pay very little. However, Kiyoko's father, a well-to-do executive of a Tokyo jewelry manufacturing company, had promised to underwrite her trip to America when the time arrived.

Last summer, after I was graduated from Central High School in Manchester, N.H., I was ready to pack. My nest egg had reached \$2,000 the week before, and my itinerary and plane reservations had been completed. But now a big problem developed. The political riots in Tokyo brought warnings to my parents from friends and neighbors.

"It's foolish to let a young girl go there by herself with all that trouble going on," they advised.

I held my breath waiting for a reaction from Mom and Dad.

"Well, if the situation really was dangerous, I'm