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BEING A BROAD

Japanese Culture in the Nude

Bare-breasted for breast cancer. By Julia Maeda



Studying Japanese culture takes on an entirely new perspective when you are naked.

Rather than wondering if your feet are positioned at just the right angle, with your toes pointed in just so, other details suddenly begin to matter more. Questions such as; "How big would an *ikebana* arrangement need to be to hide one's modesty" or "What height would you need to hold your teapot, and at what angle should you pour to keep your breasts hidden?" take on a greater importance.

But what kind of women would be asking such questions?

Well all of us are "respectable" — formerly, at least. All of us are married, and our husbands supported us (although as Shawn O'Hara, our Golf lady, said, "You should have seen the look on my husband's face when I told him a three and four iron was all that covered me up!") Many of us are mothers and a few of us grandmothers. What madness overtook us? And how will our husbands ever be able to explain this at the office?

We are the kind of women who are guilty of wanting to make a difference, and, like many others, unsure of exactly how to do it. We also wanted to do something to show our appreciation to Japan for the all the weird and wonderful experiences we've had living here.

We are the kind of women who, given enough support from friends and encouragement of the bubbly, alcoholic kind, were prepared to strip off for a 2006 wall calendar that will hit the streets of Japan on Oct. 1.

Is this starting to ring bells? If it is, you would be right in thinking along the lines of Helen Mirren and the movie 'Calendar Girls' — based on a true story of 12 very proper English ladies who wanted to raise money for cancer after one of their husbands died from leukemia.

So how did this happen and what is our cause?

It all started at a wine tasting with a promotional postcard for a vineyard featuring neither grapes nor rolling hills, but rather the winemaker herself, Lane Tanner, naked and giggling in a bubble bath, with a glass of wine in her hand. Jean Williams, a former nurse from Wales with one too many good ideas, got talking to Shawn O'Hara, an amazing lady who used to run a huge non-profit organization before coming to Japan, and who is famous for 'encouraging' people to volunteer for all manner of activities to help others. One of them had obviously seen the movie...

Sadly, it didn't take long to find a cause. Breast cancer is the number one cancer killer of Japanese women today, and yet only three percent of women in this country receive mammography screening, compared to 60-80 percent in Europe and the U.S., 26 Japanese women die from breast cancer EVERY day.

Or to make it even more real, in the words of two of our ladies; Nancy Nussbaum, Tea Ceremony lady, "One of the many reasons I chose to do it is that my husband's mother died of breast cancer when he was only three years old. I couldn't imagine anything worse than having a baby and knowing that you wouldn't be around to raise it." And Laurel Dove, Piano lady, "Sadly, a dear work colleague died two years ago at a very young age after a heroic battle with the disease. With her in my mind, I'd do anything to save another family from the grief her three young boys are enduring."



Calendar cover girl, Julia Maeda.

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How many lives can be saved with the right education and the right tools? To save their breasts, we bared ours.

Enter 'Run for the Cure Foundation', a non-profit organization that funds education and awareness programs throughout Japan and was founded by an American breast cancer survivor living in Tokyo (see profile on the page opposite).

Once Run for the Cure Foundation was involved it all moved fast, too fast for some. "At the first meeting, I found that the shooting will take place in two weeks... I really needed to lose about 15 pounds fast... As desperate as I was, I tried Atkins... didn't last too long (three days), and after eating all the carbs that exist in Tokyo, I gained 3kg from my starting weight. I hope it didn't show..." (Yoon Takeda, Umbrella Girl). Using a variety of Japanese props, we were transformed by the artistic direction of Fraser Biscomb, creative director for Paradigm and the magical talent of the world famous fashion photographer, Noriko Yamaguchi. Incidentally, both believed in the project so much, they worked for free. We were soon "jumping into the tub... with Shawn O'Hara by my side, whisking up more bubbles during the film change, and Jean Williams refilling the champagne glass in my hand." (Genie Drossos, Bath lady)

Do you suddenly have an urge to get naked? Well, you don't have to go quite that far to make a difference...

The goal is to sell 3,000 calendars by November. They are ¥2,000 each (not including packaging and delivery) and will be available for purchase at the upcoming Run for the Cure, a 5K walk/run around the Imperial Palace on Oct. 22, and the Pink Ball at the Grand Hyatt Tokyo on Oct. 28. Calendars can also be purchased online (see resources below).

"To sum it all up — if this calendar brings breast cancer awareness to, or helps even one woman, it was well worth the effort." Sean Massad, Majong lady. So go on, get yourself a copy. Help us help Japanese women improve their odds in the fight against breast cancer.

For more info on the Run For the Cure and the Pink Ball see: www.runfortheCure.org/

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