

Musings from an *Ohanami* Volunteer

From across the pond the sound of *shakuhachi* sifts through the *sakura* petals. Earlier the jangled twang of *koto* strings serenaded passers-by.

My task is to stand watch and answer questions in front of the tea house in the Nitobe Memorial Garden. Inside the tea house participants engage in a shortened tea ceremony with *matcha* and sweets. Not the gorgeous *wagashi* that Junko Friesen used to supply faithfully. Recently she moved to another city: our loss. But *ohanami*—cherry blossom viewing—is a reminder of transience. We try not to mind (too much).

Individuals, couples and families stroll through the gardens, some taking pictures of each other wearing indigo *yukata*. Other volunteers inside the Asian Centre who know their way around obi and the intricacies of wearing *yukata* have helped them dress. Beside them at tables, many fingers deftly fold origami creations. In another corner storytellers entertain with their art.

At booths between the Asian Centre and the garden Vancouver Mokuyokai volunteers sell tea, chocolates, *obento*, and mushrooms for Japan Earthquake relief.

Before the lanterns in the garden are lit, a Buddhist priest chants sutras in front of the Pacific Bell Tower. After the prayers, individuals who wish, step up to ring the Pacific Bell crafted by Master Craftsman Masahiko Katori (1899-1988). Again and again the bell tolls for the dead and survivors of the earthquake disaster. Each reverberation gives voice to thoughts that fail to find words.

Overhead, the wings of nesting cranes slice the air. Traffic on Marine Drive hums softly while three elegant Japanese matrons chatter and giggle like naughty third-graders through the service.

Though we stop a moment for *sutras* and *sakura*, life does not. Life sings on.