

# Meet Sawako Jager - November 2011

By Danny Bernstein



Sawako Jager grew up in Shimonoseki, Japan located on the western point of Honshu, the main island of Japan. Now she is a regular CMC hiker and hike leader.

"In the late 1950s, we played mostly outside on my grandparents' property. I lived where the beach met the mountains," Sawako recalls. "We were close to Mt. Kasayama and the property included three cannons and stone statues of the Goddess of Mercy. I spent a lot of time, up in the mountains, exploring caves and enjoying the views." The area had foxes and wild pigs.

In the 1960s, Japan was heavily influenced by US politically, economically and culturally. When Sawako was in elementary school, the US Army supplied a lot of food for Japanese schoolchildren. This was in exchange for letting the military use their land. Sawako had to try lots of new and sometimes strange American foods in school such as wieners, macaroni and cheese, hamburgers and powdered milk.

Wieners were particularly puzzling. "Our teacher asked a "rich" boy, one whose parents owned a kimono shop, how to eat American wieners," Sawako explains. "You don't peel them," the kid said. So the teacher got on the loudspeaker and told the whole school, "You don't peel wieners."

Sawako was an education and literature major in college and became a language and social studies teacher in Japan.

"When I was in college, in the early 1970s, our church pastor suggested that we should have a joint hike with American soldiers on weekends. We, the students, didn't even like the idea of spending any time with US soldiers as they were notorious for their misbehaviors." Sawako would not elaborate on the type of misbehavior. But she finally agreed to join these multi-cultural hikes.

"I met my husband at a church bazaar. Calvin was a missionary associate for the Reformed Church of America. He saw me sweeping the church and he must have thought I was a hard worker," she laughs. They married in Japan and moved to Michigan in 1986 and to Asheville eight years later. Calvin and Sawako have two children, Jennifer who works for a local retailer, and Derek, a college student.

### **How did you get into hiking?**

A few years ago, I went on my first backpacking trip in Pisgah Forest sponsored by Diamond Brand Outdoors. John Murius led a loop in Pink Beds. Then John started his own hiking group. We walked about two to three miles and took a mid-day nap. We went to Rattlesnake Lodge, Craggy Pinnacle, and Dupont Forest. These short trips convinced me that I had moved to a wonderful place. When John moved on to start working with dogs, he told me about CMC.

Sawako documents all her hikes so it's not surprising that she remembers her first CMC hike, Devils Courthouse to Pilot Mountain, led by Ashok Kudva. She didn't know what the ratings meant. "We descended steeply on the roller coaster Art Loeb Trail to Farlow Gap. It was rated A-AA and I thought I might die. For a while, I believed the CMC's rating system and I only went on C or B hikes. It helped to build my self-confidence."

"I am a two-mile per hour walker and a multi-tasker. I like to look at flowers, shoot pictures, and take copious notes. I have a place on CMC hikes." [A charming way of saying that she feels comfortable on hikes now.]

### **How did you finish all the CMC challenges?**

Now I hike three to four times a week and suddenly I realized I had done many of the hikes for several CMC Challenges. I finished the *Waterfall 100*, *South Beyond 6000*, and now the *Lookout Towers*. If you go on a lot of Sunday and Wednesday hikes, you will have done many hikes needed for CMC challenges.

When she's not hiking, Sawako does Nordic walking, with hiking poles. But she doesn't use poles in the woods, because she needs both hands to take pictures and notes.

### **If you could take a friend on one hike (independent of how difficult it was) where would you go?**

The five waterfalls outside of Gorges State Park in Nantahala - Turtle Back, Rainbow, Stairway, Drift Falls and Windy. They're beautiful.

### **So what's next, Sawako?**

I have to check my records and see how many Pisgah 400 trails I've done.