Prof. Atsuko Kikuchi, one of a kind!

Andrew Barke

It is my great privilege to have this opportunity to write a few words about Professor Atsuko Kikuchi on the occasion of her retirement. I have known Atsuko (or 'Atchan' as her students affectionately refer to her) for the past 36 years and during that time we have become like family.

I first met Atsuko in 1989 when I took one of her Japanese classes in the third year of my undergraduate studies at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. I recall enjoying her classes very much at that time, so much so that when I decided to do my Masters, she was the first person I asked to be my supervisor.

I think part of the appeal of Atsuko to her students is the fact that she always treats people equally, expects the best from them academically, but at the same time respects them as individuals, listens to their opinions, and is happy to offer them advice. One piece of advice I distinctly remember her giving me when I was considering possible career pathways, was that a career in academia is worth thinking about as it can be very rewarding. She informed me the work is not only varied (as it includes research, teaching, and administration), you get to interact with a wide range of interesting people, and you are able to continue improving and extending yourself, so you never get bored.

By the end of my Masters, though, I was ready for a change and a rest from academia, so together with my new wife, I travelled to Japan and worked for several years in a manufacturing company and then a bank. However, I remained in contact with Atsuko and her advice must have stuck in my mind, because I eventually returned to the University of Auckland and began tutoring Japanese there. Sometime during my three years of tutoring, Atsuko introduced me to Professor Shigeru Sato, a professor from Tohoku University, and that introduction eventually led to me applying for a Monkasho (back then it was Monbusho) scholarship to do my PhD under his supervision.

As it happened, Atsuko was on sabbatical leave at Tohoku University when I arrived there, so our connection continued in Sendai for a while as well. However, our paths went in different directions for a number of years after Atsuko returned to Auckland and then later took up a position in the Institute of Foreign Language Education and Research at Kansai University in 2000. I, on the other hand, worked at Okayama University for a year after completing my PhD, and then moved back to New Zealand to take up my first tenured position at Victoria University of Wellington. Over the years, though, Atsuko and I continued to keep in touch, which eventually led to me applying for my present position in the Faculty of Foreign Language Studies and arriving in Osaka in 2011 after my application was successful.

In all the time I have known her, including the 14 years I have had her as a colleague at Kansai University, Atsuko's commitment and dedication to her work has never ceased to impress me. Not only did she lead the management and development of our widely recognized Study Abroad Program for more than seven years, she has served the Faculty in the capacity of Associate Dean (graduate school) and in many other capacities as well. Her efforts to offer her students the best educational experience possible have continued right up to the present. Before the beginning of each academic year, Atsuko has always insisted on reviewing and revising the content of each course that she teaches. If she found a textbook she thought could better serve her students, she would not hesitate to change textbooks, even if that meant extra preparing work. If she was asked to teach a make-up course, she would happily agree.

Professor Atsuko Kikuchi, as you are about to start a new chapter in your life, we thank you for all your hard work and commitment to the Faculty of Foreign Language Studies, for the leadership that you have shown during that time, and for being an outstanding colleague and role model for so many people over the years. We wish you all the very best for your retirement!