Japanese Foreign Minister's Award Ceremony
Mutsuko Endo Hudson
June 17, 2004

There are many, many people to whom I'd like to express my sincere appreciation for this wonderful recognition, in addition to, of course, Foreign Minister Kawaguchi.

First, to the Consul General Isashiki – Thank you VERY much for this award and for your support for Japanese language education.
And, to Yamazaki-san, Joan-san, Anita-san, Steven-san, and ALL the staff in the Consulate General of Japan in Detroit for helping make this occasion possible.

Second, to my parents, and my brothers and sister. I'm sure my father is bragging about this to everyone in Heaven!

Third, to my students -- former and current, -- of Japanese language, linguistics, and teaching methods.
I owe it to their unflagging enthusiasm and interest that I have stayed in this profession as long as I have. (I'm happy to say that some of them are here now!)

Fourth, to all my friends, for their love and faith in me.

And last, but not least, to my husband Grover – my life companion, my co-traveler, my tennis doubles partner, and my biggest cheerleader!
No words can express how grateful I am to you for literally EVERYTHING!

Indeed, I am deeply honored for this tribute, given in conjunction with the 150th Anniversary of the U.S.-Japan relationship.
For, I AM a product of U.S.-Japan friendship!

This year marks my 31st year of teaching Japanese in the U.S., and my 30th in Michigan.
It all started when I went to junior high school in Hiroshima. The school was one of those established by American missionaries all around Japan in the late-1800s to provide quality education to Japanese girls. American teachers taught English in class, and led extracurricular activities. It seemed like such a fun job that I knew then I was going to do the same when I grew up, only the language would be Japanese and the country, America.

I went to high school of the same type in Nagoya. In 1967-68 I spent my senior year as an exchange student living in Phoenix, Arizona, with a wonderful family, the Bloxoms. I did not have to pay a yen for this unforgettable experience, thanks to the good will of the American people and the Japanese government.
After returning to Japan, I went to a small liberal arts college in Tokyo. I was attracted to this school by its large international student body, beautiful campus, and the fact that it offered a major in "Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language", the only school in Japan back then! I didn't know then that the school had been established largely with funds from an American foundation.

I graduated in March 1973, and by September I was back in the States, teaching at a college in rural Indiana. In those days, when I told Japanese people what I did for a living, they marveled, saying (in Japanese), "I didn't know such a job existed!"

That was then. Nowadays, Japanese-speaking non-Japanese are everywhere in Japan, the U.S. and elsewhere.

There are many reasons people learn a language – out of desire and/or necessity to communicate with the speakers and to travel to the country, linguistic curiosity, national security, and here’s another good reason -- according to the news I heard recently, being bilingual helps people stay sharp when they get old!

As corny as it may sound, however, the best reason may be to get to know people from other backgrounds, and to try to understand the differences.

Language is the window to the culture of the country, and to the hearts and minds of the people. By learning another language, one becomes aware of different ways of interpreting "universal" facts and phenomena.

In our classes, students make friends with their classmates from diverse backgrounds, and with Japanese students on campus and in Japan.

I believe that, if one has a friend in another country, one will be less likely to wage a war against that country. I know it's simplistic, but there may be some truth in it.

I hope that, by teaching Japanese language and culture and trying to help broaden the minds of American youngsters, albeit in a small way, I can repay some of the tremendous debt I owe to the United States and to my country Japan.

Thank you very much.