

# MSU GAVE RISING STAR IN JAPANESE STUDIES TOOLS TO FULFILL HIS DREAMS

BY EVELYN BOSWELL

PAINTING BY YAMAGUCHI TSUTOMU

**A** Gardiner, Mont., native who used to clean up after elk and bison that wandered out of Yellowstone National Park is now a rising star in Japanese studies. Crediting Montana State University faculty with fostering his love of education, offering fascinating classes and encouraging him to pursue his passion, **Chad Diehl**, '03 Hist, said, "If you have the right combination of an educational setting and professors who really care about teaching, you give students the tools to fulfill their dreams. MSU really helped me do that."

Diehl recently published a book containing 65 poems written by a double survivor of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. As an MSU student, he won a Fulbright Fellowship to study in Japan for a year. He later received full funding to become a graduate student at

Columbia University in New York City. He is finishing his doctoral work now.

New York City and Japan are a long way from Gardiner where Diehl proudly grew up in a working class family and became a high school football player who preferred opponents who ran on two legs instead of four.

Diehl still remembers shooing elk away from the football field, and the coach calling a game warden to deal with the more dangerous bison. Even as nose tackle on the eight-man football team that won the 1997 Class C state championship, Diehl once spent two days cleaning up the football field after wildlife had used it as an outhouse.

"That was a lot of dung," he recalled.

PURSUING JAPANESE STUDIES IN MONTANA ISN'T AS UNUSUAL AS ONE MIGHT THINK...  
MIKE MANSFIELD,  
AFTER ALL, SERVED AS U.S. AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN AFTER SERVING AS U.S. SENATOR FROM MONTANA. LARGELY BECAUSE OF MANSFIELD, MONTANA DEVELOPED CLOSE TIES WITH THE KUMAMOTO PREFECTURE IN JAPAN.

His journey to Japan began at MSU, Diehl said.

Diehl enrolled in MSU's sociology and justice studies program, but said his plans changed dramatically after he decided to

take a course in foreign languages. Choosing Japanese because he had heard it was the hardest language, Diehl took his first class from Yuka Hara in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures. The following year he attended Kumamoto Gakuen University in Japan as an exchange student.

When Diehl returned to MSU, he continued to study Japanese. He also took courses from Brett Walker, current head of MSU's Department of History and Philosophy and an expert in the environmental history of Japan.



Chad Diehl

In the process, “I discovered that education is wonderful,” Diehl said. “It can really be fun if you pursue what you are interested in and have professors that make it interesting.”

Pursuing Japanese studies in Montana isn't as unusual as one might think, Diehl added. Mike Mansfield, after all, served as U.S. ambassador to Japan after serving as U.S. Senator from Montana. Largely because of Mansfield, Montana developed close ties with the Kumamoto Prefecture in Japan.

As a result of Hara's and Walker's encouragement, Diehl graduated with a major in history and a minor in Japanese studies. Because of his senior thesis, he won a Fulbright Fellowship that sent him to Nagasaki University to study atomic bomb history and literature. He is now finishing his doctoral work in modern Japanese history and continues to do translation work on the side. He plans to become a professor

in Japanese or East Asian history and also work in international relations.

“Because Chad is a first generation university student, the sky was the limit for him,” Walker said. “He is a splendid example of the long touch of the land-grant university. He is doing well in the field because he is smart, but also because he is modest and has no sense of entitlement. He has a strong Montana work ethic.”

Hara said, “Mr. Diehl is doing so well in the field because he is deeply interested in the Japanese language as well as Japan's cultures and peoples. Also, he is an open-minded person and always wants to challenge the new things. He thinks independently as well, but always has time to listen to what others have to say.”

Diehl said MSU was vital to his success. “It just opened so many doors for me,” he said.

One opportunity was meeting Tsutomu Yamaguchi, one of more than 100 survivors

who experienced both atomic bombings, Diehl said. Yamaguchi dealt with the trauma, in part, by writing poetry. Diehl got permission to translate and publish some of those poems after meeting Yamaguchi about four years ago. Yamaguchi died in January, just a few months before Diehl published *Raft of Corpses*.

It was an honor to publish the poems, Diehl said, adding that it was also a privilege to study with Hara and Walker.

“I was really lucky to have them as professors,” he said. 🍀