

BRUCE M. BRENN

SCJS '63

By the time Bruce M. Brenn played in the Rose Bowl in 1958, he had already been horseback riding with then Crown Prince Akihito -- now Emperor of Japan. That was five years earlier, in Wyoming. Another five years earlier, he had seen the aftermath of the devastating impact of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima. To say that Brenn has had unique life experiences might be an understatement, but it is this unusual combination of opportunities in sports, culture, and history that are the underpinnings to his success in the fields of business and education, in both the United States and Asia.



Brenn was only eleven when he and his brother arrived in Yokohama in 1947 to join their father, who was working in SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers), the American occupation authority. Until 1950 when the two boys left because of uncertainties created by the Korean War, Brenn was offered rare glimpses into a Japan that few Westerners, even few Japanese, had access to -- among them an invitation to meet the Crown Prince for English language conversation and two school trips to war crimes trials where Brenn easily identified General Hideki Tojo. He also witnessed the scene at Tokyo station as Japanese soldiers returned from Manchuria. Although he had been steeped in U.S. wartime propaganda prior to arriving in Japan, what he saw brought Brenn to a new understanding: "The emotions expressed by men, women, and children searching for, finding, greeting or not finding returning family members immediately dispelled for me the myth that Japanese were unfeeling and unemotional."

After graduating from the University of Oregon, Brenn headed for the University of Michigan, where he earned M.A. degrees in Japanese studies and economics. In 1962, on a break from his graduate coursework, he enrolled in the IUC program, which was an "opportunity to expose myself to a Japan twelve years later than when I left it

as a kid." At IUC, Brenn immersed himself in the complexities of the language, but also trained in the fine art of "learning about the people around you by observation and listening." The only negative aspect of his IUC experience was that the one year program was "too short."

Brenn established himself as a widely-respected international businessman, working in senior positions at Citibank Hong Kong, India, Tokyo, and Taipei, then becoming the Vice-Chairman and CEO of Nike Japan in 1982. During his tenure at Nike, he brought world-class athletes, including American track stars Carl Lewis, Al Joyner, and Jackie Joyner,

to Osaka to inaugurate a new indoor track stadium, and arranged clinics for coaches and athletes to raise the level of Japan's track and field in world competition. His stewardship of Nike Japan was followed by senior executive posts at Continental Bank and Smith New Court Plc. Out of twenty-six years in business and finance in Asia, Brenn spent seventeen in Japan.

While still overseas, Brenn helped launch an intensive Japanese language program at Richmond School in Portland, Oregon. He was also invited to lecture at Portland State University on international banking and finance, and upon relocating permanently to Oregon, he established the Center for Japanese Studies at that institution. Cited for his outstanding contributions to the promotion of education for the study of Japan, the deepening of understanding between Japan and the U.S., and the development of sports in Japan, Brenn was decorated with the Order of the Rising Sun medal in 2009. Today, he maintains his deep connections to Japanese culture and language, and believes that particularly since the Fukushima disaster of 2011 "an increasingly positive bond between Japan and the U.S. has firmed up."