

Rachel writes . . .

As I write this we are in the final week before Christmas, so it feels a little odd to be writing something people will read in January. There is still all the rush and celebration of Christmas to come, then the lull between Christmas and New Year; finally the first days of 2026 will have come around. Some of us will have made resolutions; others will not.

The best resolution I ever made was to read a book a week. It required quite a commitment to read every day - even when I felt like watching television or scrolling through my phone, but I really enjoyed it once I got over the hump of pushing myself to get back into the habit of reading. It also meant carrying books around - on the train in Tokyo, sitting waiting to meet friends, at work at lunchtime - but becoming aware of all the available space in my days and consciously filling at least some of that space with reading was well worth the effort. It also helped me to have plenty of suggestions for the members of my Japanese Ladies' reading group when it was time to choose a new book for us to read.

Thinking about my Year of Determined and Intentional Reading, I was reminded of a Japanese term, *tsundoku* (積ん読), which describes the habit of buying lots of books and letting them pile up without reading them. I realised when I moved house last summer just how many books I have! So I have decided in 2026 to have another Year of Determined and Intentional Reading, by reading some of the giant pile of books I have accumulated and not read yet. When I googled *tsundoku*, the AI summary at the top of the search results mentioned that *while once negative, tsundoku is often seen positively as a sign of intellectual curiosity or a reminder of what you still have to learn*. Contemplating the number of books I have accumulated, I am either an extremely intellectually curious person, or my subconscious is telling me that I still have a great amount to learn!

If you are the type of person who likes to make a New Year's resolution, I hope it will be something that you enjoy, or feel better for doing - something that opens up a new space in your life, or gives you a new view or experience. And if you are not that type of person, but someone who prefers to step into the new year without that pressure or added expectation on yourself, I hope that too will bring you joy.

I know that I have quoted this poem by Minnie Louise Haskins, but it always comes to mind at this time of year:

*And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:*

*"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown".*

*And he replied:*

*"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.*

*That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way".*

As we step into 2026, I wish you all a year full of love, joy, hope and peace.

Blessings,

Rachel CJN