I have always held a fascination for big cities. Metropolis. International maelstroms of culture and violence and affluence and perversity. Not the downfall of man, but the return to his evolutionary roots, complex jungles of steel and concrete and gum wads and hot dog vendors. Those who choose to live in cities are a special species; they spend their days behind a desk in a sexless environment, then scurry home to the arms of a loved one in a hidden apartment or else in isolation, absorbing stress and sadness, until one day they pop, adding their own to the Soup. The Soup is what has always fascinated me; that underneath the culture and skyscrapers lie the alleys, the small parks and shrines and cafes and cramped apartments and houses and people.

I first tasted the Soup in Tokyo. At the age of seven I was transplanted from the township of Big Flats, New York into a culture so complex you must be Japanese to understand it. Instead of moving to the American community, we landed in the section known as Meguro, a network of cramped houses and thin alleys between the Meguro River and the Loop. But Meguro was not unique, its mass of houses with roads added only as an afterthought wound into other neighborhoods, creating eventually a continuous noose all around the city. It was in this environment that I would venture into, finding the decrepit Indonesian School and the lopsided park and later the Nakameguro Community Center and the art
museum on the hill with the garden full of naked statues, the bright city providing the perfect backdrop. Soon I joined up with Lars Behring, half Danish--half Japanese, who spoke both languages plus English, except when exited, like the time he stood out my second-story window, awoke me with a handful of rocks, and shouted "Cray, I (something in Danish) down the uh, how you say (something in Japanese) beeg hell (Danish) on my bike without no brakes". We hit it off well, and soon we were of on increasingly longer journeys, discovering, like the Renaissance explorers I so admired in our Encyclopedia (just about the limit of our English library), newfound territory. But instead of Victoria Falls of the Fountain of Youth, we came upon parks, shrines, museums, and one lucky day, a 7-11 with a Donkey Kong game, which we could never quite beat.

One fine day Lars and I were riding our bikes (I on my brand new Huffy ProThunder) to the park when we suddenly noticed that the route we were taking was actually a bike path, carved through yards and alleys, marked with bright yellow lines. Seizing the opportunity to quench our explorer instincts (and under the alibi of harmless play at the park) we set off to find its source. For a while it was beautiful--trees lined its sides, and the houses managed not to crowd the sunlight too much. But soon, the buildings closed in, and the bright yellow lines faded, then stopped. But since we were still curious, Lars and I pressed on, assuming we could find our way back. How fascinating it was, too--a food district, with small red restaurants spilling smoke, with a legal capacity of ten but overflowing with patrons--they
served only one dish, and the owner would stand outside the door and entice you in Greek or Turkish or Iranian, and the smell of fresh goat prepared a thousand ways was enough to coerce anyone on, not to mention two young boys who became more hungry as they became more lost. Yes, I realized, we were truly and utterly lost. I, being the experienced city boy, began to cry. Bawl is more like it. Lars, however, was truly hardened, and he prodded me on, and soon all was forgotten—home, family—my worries had drowned in a sea of sweet smelling incense and the press of bodies— the Soup. Eventually one street led to another, to a road, to an avenue, and finally we were back in Meguro, safe again but forever wondering where we had been, burning to taste the Soup that exists in every city, if you can find it.