

## Autumn Adventure to Saitama



With another man also hitchhiking! His partner with him took the photo



Mother with 2 year old daughter who took me from Echigo Kawaguchi in Niigata to to AkagiKogen in Gunma

It was fine weather when I started out from Niigata City at 10 a.m. My destination was Sayama City in Saitama Prefecture which is just to the north of Tokyo. The distance from home is about 280 kilometers, only half of the 560 kilometers to Osaka which I hitchhiked the previous week. I thought it would be piece of cake not only because the distance to travel was much less, but because it was a Saturday. Weekends are always easier to hitchhike. People are often traveling either to or from their home towns which means they are going further than they would be on a workday. Normally it gets easier and easier to catch rides the closer I get to my destination. Today was different!

The first driver was an architect who designs homes and buildings. I asked him if he thought that the collapse at near free fall of the World Trade Center buildings was caused by burning jet fuel melting the steel girders. "No way!" he replied. "It was done by an explosive called Termite." I said, "Do you mean Super Termite or Nano-Termite?" The man was surprised I knew of those words. He said that termite is unknowingly being used in building construction. He said Termite's chemical reaction with a combination of steel and aluminum is powerful.

The second driver was a lady, a young mother with her two young daughters, Chika (6) and Mei (3). It's so uncommon for me to be picked up with little kids in the car without the father or an adult man present. Out of 2550 vehicles since keeping records from August of 2003, the total number so far is 45 cars which is 1.67% of the total, a number higher than I thought it would be. I wanted to take their photos but she said no when I said I wanted to post it on the Internet!

The third driver, a man by the name of Hidetoshi, said he just came from Fukushima only 25 kilometers away from the damaged nuclear powerplant. His job is to restore a fossil fuel power plant not far from the damaged nuclear plant. Hedetoshi said he likes America and its freedoms. I told him my experience of getting thrown in jail for 3 hours for passing out Gospel literature on the street at a western suburb of Chicago.

The 4th car was another mother with her child! It is possibly a first ever experience to be picked up by two mothers with little children in a single day! Ladies who pick me up are 15% of the drivers. Drivers with little children in the car are about 6% of the total number of vehicles but the father is usually present. Mothers with little children without their husbands present are possibly less than 0.01% of the total number of cars. The mother in the photo on this post has an older daughter who is 20 years old, just married and is herself about to have a baby! This is a gap of 18 years between bearing children. I asked the mother if she purposely wanted to have a 2nd child after raising one to adulthood, and she said yes! God bless her.

Her home in Fukushima near the border of Ibaragi was destroyed by the March 11, 2011 earthquake which forced her to move. She took me to Akagikogen in Gunman.

After waiting some 30 minutes at the Akagikogen service area, a highway patrol car pulled up and 4 men got out and questioned me. These guys are no police but have the power to ask me to leave. They are often followed up by police.

This time I was able to talk my way out of getting kicked out of the expressway service area! The last time I was stopped like this, they called the cops and I was escorted to a town from where I was told to catch a bus. But today I asked them if I could stand near the restroom area and ask drivers directly for a ride. After about 10 minutes of waiting and further negotiation, they got the OK from their boss. They made me promise not to step out into the street, a promise I kept.

After another 30 minutes a man offered to take me to the Takasaka service area in Saitama Prefecture. This is just short of where I wanted to get off the Kan'estsu expressway in Kawagoe! His highschool son was in the car and I spoke to him in English, something the father appreciated.

It was after 5 p.m. and dark when I arrived in Takasaka. The service area was crowded with people and cars, but everybody seemed to be in a busy mood. From experience I knew I was in a bad situation. When the service area is too crowded, nobody seems to care about the lone hitchhiker. And because it was dark, it made the situation even worse. I knew there had to be a train line within walking distance from the service area. After 20 minutes of vain efforts asking drivers for rides, I opted to leave the service area out the back way and walked the regular road toward the distant lights of a town toward the east. I knew the train line was in that direction. This paid off and in 30 minutes I arrived at the Kita Sakado train station! From there it was only 570 yen to get to Sayama city.

God is good.