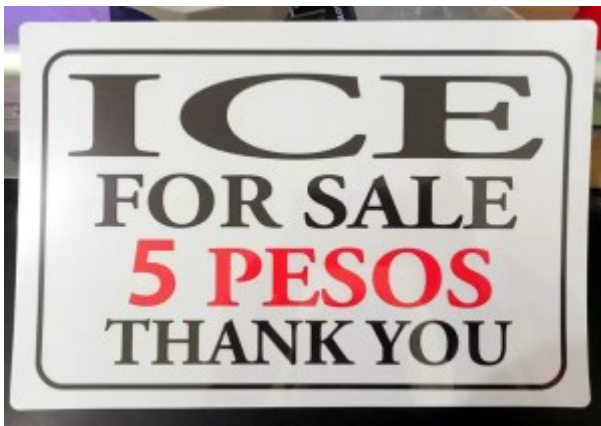


Scenes of the Philippines



There are [photos below the text.](#)

On Friday, June 21st, I turned 74 years old. I'm thankful to my Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ, for reasonably good health at my age, normal blood pressure, no arthritis, and no diabetes as my father had, and for being completely off medication of any kind. And I'm *especially* blessed to have a ministry of sharing God's truth, His Word, and the true views that Protestant Christians used to hold before the Counter-Reformation of the Jesuits sidetracked evangelical Christians. And I'm super-blessed to have friends who value my work and the articles on this website. And I'm blessed to have a wonderful wife who supports my ministry. And I'm blessed to live in a land of peace and liberty with no crime in my area that I know of, a land where little kids walk the streets without danger of being abducted. It never gets cold but doesn't get too hot either because of the proximity of the sea. I hardly see police anywhere. I see only armed guards at entrances to banks and any establishment where there is a lot of cash or goods at hand.

The Philippines is still a poor country as are many Roman Catholic nations. Signs advertising ice for sale are ubiquitous and are indicative of its poverty. We sell our neighbors ice for about 10 US cents a bag and use the money to buy filtered drinking water which costs roughly only USD 0.50 per 5 gallons. Our next-door neighbors do not have either a refrigerator or a stove. They cook outside over a wood fire. They do have a phone, however. A phone is the one appliance nobody seems to lack. They connect to the Internet through what's called Piso WiFi. Put a 5 peso coin (about USD 0.10) in the slot and you get one hour of Internet. Haircuts are only about \$1.00 or 60 Philippine pesos. I always give them more than they ask or about 100 pesos. This is still 7 times less than I would pay in Guam.

Households owning appliances:

Television 75%

Refrigerator/Freezer 50%

Washing machine 49.2%

Radio 35.4%

Aircon 16.1%

Stove with oven/gas range 14.2%

Microwave/oven toaster 10.5%

Source: [Percentage distribution of households in the Philippines owning home appliances in 2022, by type](#)

Photos of my area in the Philippines



Caba Beach near sunset



Caba Beach near sunset



Imaga White Sand Beach sign



Imaga White Sand Beach sign.



Image White Sand Beach



Children walking on the main road to town.



Elementary school graduation ceremony.



A typical village road.



A poor family's house



A rich family's house



Near Caba Beach



Near Caba Beach



Wedding at Imaga White Sand Beach



Imaga White Sand Beach rocks in the background.

[Life in the Philippines](#)



Today, June 4th marks the first full year since my wife Tess and I moved from Guam to the Philippines, now the third country I lived in outside the USA for more than one year. There are so many unusual sights here I've never seen

anywhere else in the world that I thought the regular visitors of this website might like to see them too.

One of the most inconvenient things about life in the Philippines is frequent power outages. I don't know about Manila or other large cities, but where I live in the province of Northern Samar, power outages are frequent. They can occur anytime, and when they do, we also have no WIFI to connect to the Internet. I keep my laptop charged so I can still do some work on articles even without an Internet connection.



The main shopping street in downtown Allen.



Human powered tricycle taxi in downtown Allen.



Beautiful scenery like this is abundant. This one is Mt. Bulusan across the San Bernadino Strait, a view from Caba Beach, Cabacungan, the city of Allen in Northern Samar.



Imaga beach in Northern Samar.



Our first vehicle was a 125 CC Honda TX. Since I had the accident and broke a bone in my elbow in September, 2023, we added a sidecar to it so that I would never fall again. At first it was very difficult for me to steer. I nearly ran into a ditch! But I got used to steering it and now I have no problem. My arms got stronger. We now call it a tricycle or a "trike." It can take up to 3 passengers or more if they are children, and we can haul stuff with it.



This rooster is right outside our house next door. They are raised for cock fighting. You see one of its legs is tied to a rope which limits how far he can walk.



Another view of the trike. Our gasoline costs monthly are now only 1/5 of what it was in Guam.



This is an example of how Filipinos use a sidecar to haul things. Our neighbor Jason is using it to carry tables to another location.



This is a popular public mode of transportation called a Habal-habal. This one is maxed out with passengers. We rode on them many times.



Trikes are also used for public transportation, but as a rule the trike driver won't take you as far as a habal-habal driver will. a 20-minute ride to town on a habal-habal is a little less than one US dollar.



This is another type of tricycle with the front wheel in the center. I hear it's much easier to steer than one with a sidecar like ours.



This is a public transportation vehicle called a Jeepney. This one is privately used. I never rode on one because they're not used here. I saw them in Manila.



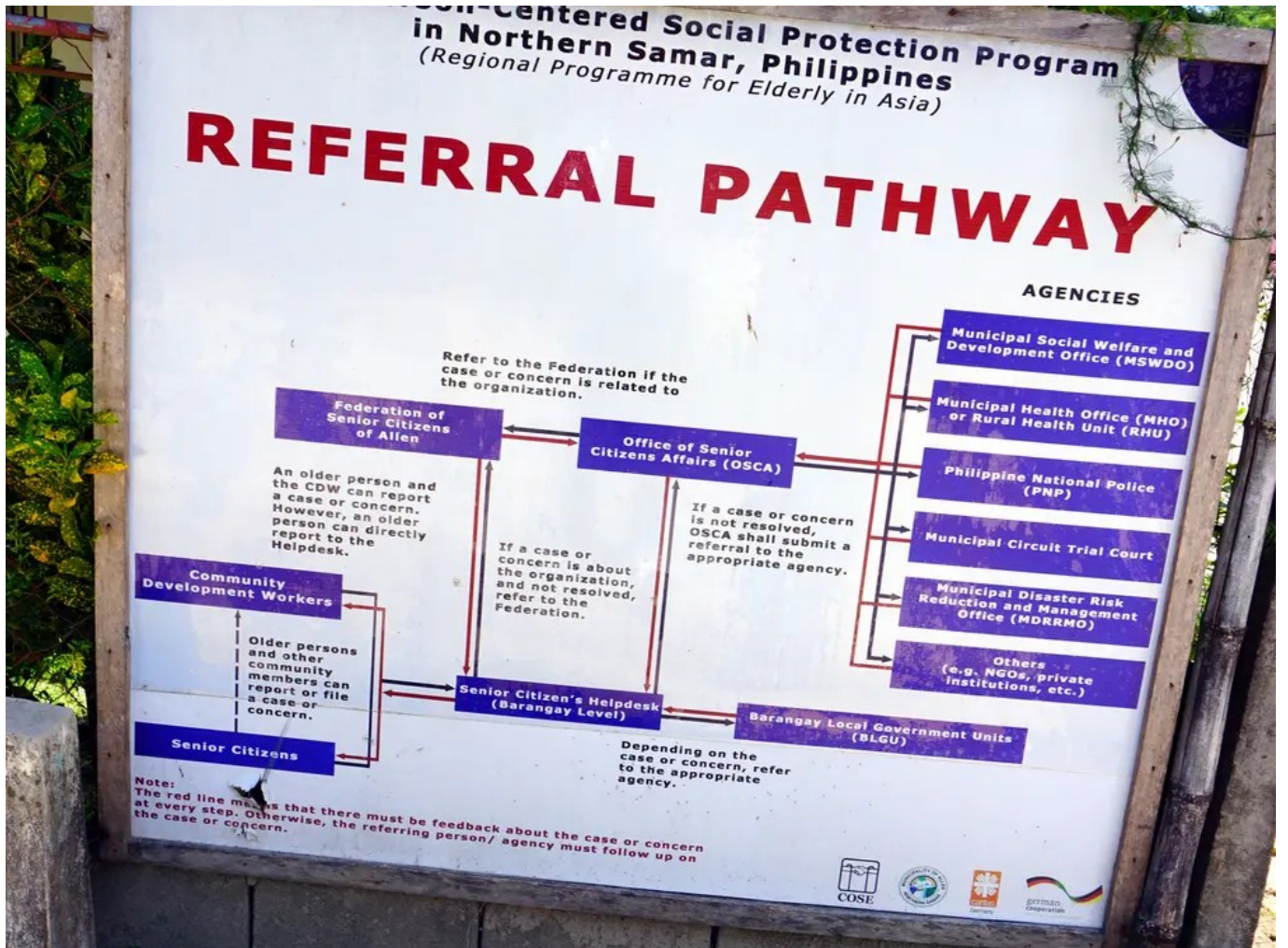
A man powered trike-taxi! It's a regular bicycle with a sidecar attached. I think it must take a lot of effort to drive.



These soft drink bottles are filled with gasoline! I hear other southeast Asian countries also have them. They are used to gas up motorcycles. I don't normally buy gasoline here. I'd rather fill up the motobike's tank from a regular gas station in town, a 20 minute drive from home. I need to go to town at least once a week.



Drying newly harvested rice on the road. This one is on a sheet. Sometimes a sheet is not used. There are many stray dogs and they defecate on the roads.



English signs are common! I would never see a sign in English like this in Japan or Russia. All educated people in the Philippines can speak and read English pretty well, much better than most Japanese living in Japan. Even little kids know some English. I heard one little girl say, "What's that?" But the language they learn at home from their parents is either Tagalog or some other dialect.



Tess giving a Bible study to the children.



Another children's Bible study.



Teen Bible study. I am sharing my testimony how I started to share the Gospel a few weeks after I got saved in 1971 to my fellow Airmen while stationed at McClellan AFB in Sacramento California.

PISO WIFI

Acc piso Wi-Fi
Acc Piso Wi-Fi

RATES

P1 - 10 MINUTES

P5 - 1 HOUR

P10 - 2 HOURS 30 MIN

P20 - 6 HOURS

P30 - 12 HOURS

P60 - 1 DAY

P150 - 7 DAYS



RATES

P1 - 10 MINUTES

P5 - 1 HOUR

P10 - 2 HOURS 30 MIN

P20 - 6 HOURS

P30 - 12 HOURS

P60 - 1 DAY

P150 - 7 DAYS

Public WIFI. Just bring your laptop or phone within range of this, log into the WiFi network of the PISO WIFI, put a 5 peso (about 9 cents US) coin in the slot and you get one hour of Internet connectivity.



Our Barangay hall. Villages in the Philippines are called barangays. The person who is elected to watch over the barangay is called the barangay captain.



Drying clothes on fence.



Me on a horse. Besides the two houses I see in the area, there are goats, water buffalo, chickens, ducks, and lots of stay dogs and cats.

See more photos of my area in the Philippines on [Scenes of the Philippines](#)

[Unintended Conversation with an AI Chatbot?](#)



Through Facebook Messenger, I had a strange conversation with someone calling herself Shirley who I believe is either a scammer or an AI chatbot or a combination of both. Why do I think so? Please read the conversation and tell me what you think.

I saw you mentioned an interesting topic on facebook and I would like to hear your views and opinions.

Sure. What topic are you referring to?

The one you just shared is about 10 hours or so.

You mean my lastest post about the Antichrist?

End time is an important concept in the Bible as it relates to God's plan and the end of human history. The Bible mentions that God has determined the end of the world and the final judgment.

Would you mind sharing with me, I don't know much about this, I'm learning a lot on a large scale.

Yes indeed. My views are all on that article and many similar articles.

The views and positions of Christianity that I have heard recently are diverse and can involve criticism, doubt or opposition to Christian beliefs, teachings or the Church. it's nice to meet you, maybe we can make friends? In later life we discuss and understand each other.

I sent you a friend request. I've been to Shanghai, your home town, right?

Thank you very much for your friend invitation, I don't like to use this chat because I feel there are a lot of bad thinking people on it, they are bor, I am glad to hear that you have visited Shanghai, it is a beautiful and prosperous city. Shanghai is known for its modern skyline, unique cultural landscape and rich historical heritage. If you have any questions related to Shanghai or other topics, I will be happy to answer.

I'm glad to be your friend because you are seeking for truth. It all starts with knowing our loving Creator and His Son Jesus Christ!

Thank you for your kind response, but I understand that religion is an important source of guidance and strength for many people, my name is Shirley, my hometown is Shanghai, I am from Hong Kong, but now I live in Portland, USA, you Woolen cloth? Do you have WhatsApp? If possible, we can have a friendly chat on WhatsApp before we meet.

Two things are strange in what she wrote. She can't be from two places. And she wrote, "Woolen cloth". Could that be a translation of Samar, the island in the Philippines where I live?

Before we meet? I live in the Philippines, the island of Samar. Your hometown is Shanghai but you are also from Hong Kong? You can't be from both places! You lived for a while in Hong Kong? I've been there too. I lived a long time in Japan and speak Japanese.
Yes, I have Whatsapp but it's tied to a telephone number no longer in use.

Nice to know that you are from Samar in the Philippines, I was born in Shanghai and lived in Hong Kong for a while, as for you living in Japan and speaking Japanese, that's great! Japan is a beautiful country with rich culture and history, are you in the Philippines now? Not in America?

I am not from Samar, I only live here now. The place you are from is your hometown. You can see my hometown on my profile.

I see you are from Chicago but you are not in Chicago now when will you come back to Chicago?

Never, Chicago is a terrible place to live!

but i browsed your page and saw you were from Chicago.

Yes! I am from Chicago. I don't live there anymore. My home WAS in Chicago. Not now.

You mean you don't plan to go back to Chicago?

Exactly. I don't plan to go back to Chicago. I sold my house in Chicago. I have nothing to go back to.

I understand your reluctance to return to Chicago. Everyone's situation and decisions are different, and sometimes we need to make changes to find better opportunities and ways of life. Selling your home is a big decision and hopefully it brings you new opportunities and freedom. No matter where you choose to go, the key is to find a place that suits you, build a new life and experience, I plan to travel there in September.

Why are you going to Chicago? Do you have some business there?
(This question was not answered.)

Thank you so much for appreciating my sharing and perspective. I welcome you as friends and getting to know each other about what the Gospel means, and I understand that it represents the good news of Jesus Christ and the message of salvation. Everyone has different views and positions on religion and belief, I respect and appreciate your belief in Christianity, I just browsed your Facebook profile and saw that your job is programming?

Not programming but more like IT. I make websites and maintain about 20 of them.

Sorry if my previous answer may have been misunderstood. When you mention that you make and maintain websites, this is really information technology (IT) related. Creating and maintaining a website requires technical and programming knowledge, including skills in front-end development (HTML, CSS, JavaScript), back-end development (eg, PHP, Python, Ruby), and database administration. Which of these skills are critical to building a fully functional, secure and reliable website?

You are a technical person? It's not necessary to know all those programming languages to build a website. I do know HTML, CSS, and use a little JavaScript and PHP code I copied to run certain things on my websites. And most of my websites are WordPress which uses PHP without having to know how to code PHP. I don't know Python or Ruby. I use MySQL for my database and have some knowledge how to edit it when necessary.

I'm not a technical person, knowing HTML and CSS can help you design and layout web content, and familiarity with MySQL databases can help you store and retrieve data. Although you may not be familiar with programming languages like Python or Ruby, using existing code snippets or plugins can add more functionality and interactivity to your website.

To sum up, you already have a certain understanding of the tools and technologies required for website development and maintenance, which can help you build feature-rich websites without having to go deep into the details of each programming language.

Am I talking to an AI Chatbot? You sure sound like one. How can you say you are not a technical person and yet tell me those things? I think you are an AI Chatbot.

It sounds like a great career, I have been running a clothing design import and export clothing trading company myself for 7 years, and also investing in real estate and investing in cryptocurrency with my uncle, how many years have you been working?

24 years in IT. (Self-employed)

This sounds great, Maybe we can share a selfie photo of ourselves with each other, so that we can get to know each other better.

At this point, my wife told me to quit the conversation! I blocked her. Could

she be a scammer trying to blackmail me? Could it be scammers are using AI instead of the script they usually use?

I'm sharing this to warn others. Scammers are getting more and more sophisticated.

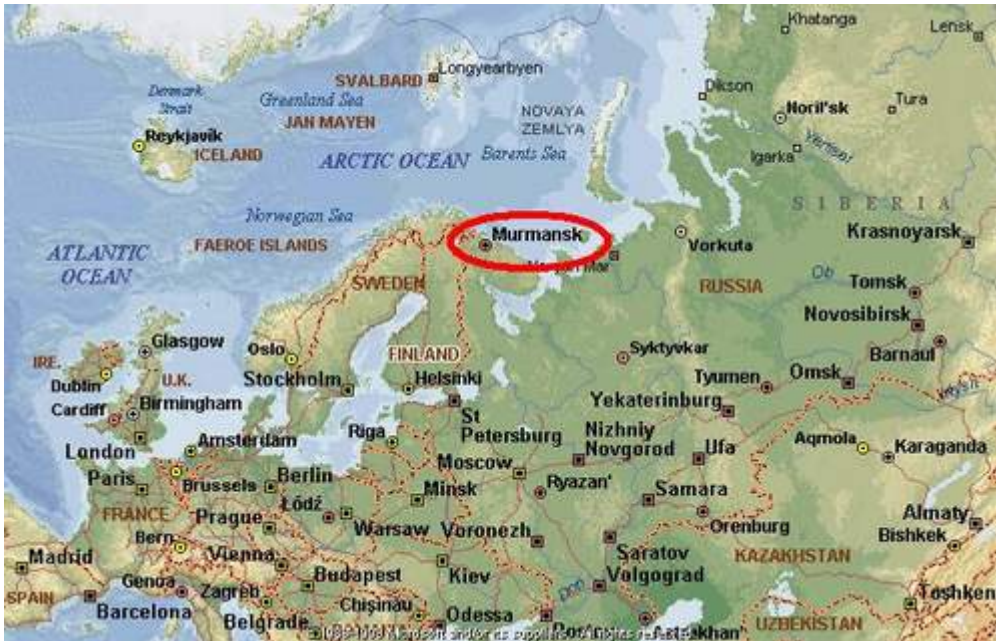
[Adventures in the Russian Arctic City of Murmansk](#)



I posted this article on my old website on kt70.com/~jamesjpn 20 years ago. It was hosted by my friend Kengo Tahaha for free. A few years ago he told me he would stop paying for the server. Only today, Dec. 9, 2020, I realized I hadn't copied it to this website.

"Murmansk (Russian: Мурманск, is a port city and the administrative center of Murmansk Oblast in the far northwest part of Russia. It sits on both slopes and banks of a modest ria or fjord, Kola Bay, an estuarine inlet of the Barents Sea. Its bulk is on the east bank of the inlet. It is in the north of the rounded Kola Peninsula which covers most of the oblast. The city is 108 kilometers (67 mi) from the border with Norway and 182 kilometers (113 mi) from the Finnish border. The city is named for the Murman Coast, which is in turn derived from an archaic term in Russian for "Norwegian". " – Quoted from Wikipedia

I visited the Russian city of Murmansk by train from St. Petersburg a total of ten times from 1995 to 1997. Murmansk is the largest city in the world that is north of the Arctic Circle. Though north of the Arctic Circle, the winters are relatively mild due to a warm ocean current that crosses the Atlantic from the Gulf of Mexico. There are nearly 24 hours of darkness from Dec. 2 to January 20 and 24 hours of daylight in June and July.



Murmansk (red circle drawn around it) is located on the Kolsky peninsula near the Arctic Ocean. You can see St. Petersburg is located about 1000 Kilometers to the south. Winters are long and summers very short with only about 14 really nice warm days. Anybody with any money at all goes down south for their summer vacations, often to the Black Sea.



Here you can see the relationship of the Kolsky peninsula with the rest of the world.



Murmansk in the summertime! The body of water in front is the Kolsky bay.
Lenin Street, Murmansk.



This is the main street of the town that runs past the train station. There's a large statue of Lenin still standing in a small park on this street.



What Murmansk usually looks like! Cold, drab, and dreary.



The poor lady in the photo has to stand outdoors all day to sell a bit of fish and beans to make a living! Let's think about her the next time we are tempted to complain how "bad off" we are!



March of 1996, Murmansk. I'm standing next to a park buried in snow.



Yana and Ruth. Ruth is a native of Murmansk who decided to become a follower of Jesus after receiving the Gospel from my fellow missionaries in Russia.



See, it's not cold all the time! A nice warm June day in Murmansk. July turns cold again with rainy weather with highs only 13 C or in the lower 50s F.



A man collecting beer bottles to resell to make a living. Unless the bottle is broken, it won't be lying on the ground for long in Russia. Some people even intentionally leave their bottles on the street for the poor to pick them up.



With Ukrainian Faithy just before boarding a train to go to Murmansk. It's a 36-hour train trip one way from St. Petersburg. I've been back and forth exactly 10 times which means I lived 25 days on that train!



The lady in the middle and her friend on the right was so glad to meet Faithy and me! She lost her business due to pressure from the Mafia.



With Inna Hairdresser and her friend Anna.



Ukrainian Lydia with children at an orphanage we visited.



Natasha from Monchigorsk with a Sami girl. The "Sami" people are the same as the Lapp people of northern Norway, Finland, and Sweden. They are reindeer herders. Once I saw a race with reindeers pulling sleighs around a track during a winter festival in Murmansk. It was fun but also very cold that day so I couldn't stay outside for more than 30 minutes without freezing.



Snezhana with Sergei. Sergei served as an Army Officer in the Soviet Army for 20 years. He says he doesn't believe in God. He does seem to believe in alcohol to help him overcome his problems. Poor guy! I really tried to help him. But no, he "knows too much" to believe in God, ha! However, he did laugh at my jokes.



Another proof that Russia and even the Russian Arctic is NOT cold all year round! Over 400,000 people live in Murmansk and the surrounding area.



During a festival in the central town square where we often distributed Gospel tracts. Once when a policeman asked what I was passing out, I told him it is religious literature and how glad I am I have the freedom now to preach the Gospel in his country! He agreed and said, "Ten years ago, I would have thrown you into prison!"



Again with Inna Hairdresser and her friend Anna.



Anna in the center with her friend the librarian on the right. This is at the entrance of a college dormitory. All the dorms in Russia seem to be co-ed. We visited this particular dorm frequently to share with the students the Message of God's Love and the Gospel and made many friends. Anna is Jewish. There wasn't a single time during the 3 and a half years I spent in Russia that a Russian Jew objected to me sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them! They were all sweet people.



The Murmansk team of the summer of 1996! Left to right: Yanek, me, Swedish Teen, Andrew, and Angela.



At a top high school in Murmansk. This school is right on Lenin St. in the heart of town. The head of the English department invited me to speak in English to the students on a regular basis. She gave me the freedom to speak on any subject I chose, so of course, I chose Biblical subjects! There was no pay for this but they did give us lunch. There was never a time in the schools in Murmansk that I was forbidden to read from the Bible! – Something I can't even do in my own country (the US of A)!!! Actually, it is technically a no-no in Russia too, but Murmansk is so far away from Moscow

and nobody really cares what the central government says anymore. At least they didn't care when I was there from 1994 to 1997.



With Snezhana (her name means *snow flake* in Russian) and Natasha from Monchegorsk. The name of her city means "beautiful city". The name *Monchegorsk* is a combination of two words, the first from the Sami language and the second from Russian. I've never been there, but I can bet that the only thing beautiful there is the beautiful people who inhabit it, not the ugly drab Soviet-style architecture!



Three people trying to pull a refrigerator up a slope!



With a school principal of one of the schools in Murmansk. She wanted to take me on summer vacation to her home country of Belarus.



Belarussian Yanek with Natasha and friends.

Poison in Paradise – Attacked by a Drunken Man with a Baseball Bat!





Rear window of my Toyota Yaris after the baseball bat attack.

On June 20th, 2019, just after I took my father-in-law to his home in Piga Subdivision from the Dededo Senior Citizen's Center on the island of Guam, after turning right onto the main road of Chalan Koda, I saw a car ahead that was stopped about 50 meters from the intersection. I drove around the car on its left and then saw a man standing in the middle of the road holding a baseball bat. As I drove slowly past the man, he violently swung his baseball bat and smashed the rear window of my Toyota Yaris! Imagine my shock! This is the stuff of nightmares! I found out later that the driver of the car I went around had stopped and even backed up because the man with the baseball bat was throwing rocks at him!

The road is called Chalan Koda in the north part of the Village of Dededo. It's a rather narrow country road with potholes on both sides of the road. There is always traffic on it and I always slow down when approached by oncoming traffic in the opposite lane because I veer to the right as far as I can where the road is bumpy with holes so as not to rattle the car too much. It's a road I *must* drive on 3 to 4 times a week to take my father-in-law home. I had no idea it is also a dangerous area with disgruntled people from the island of Chuuk who live in the jungle next to it. More about them later.

I was all shook up and pulled the car over to the side of the road. Almost immediately 3 men came to see if I was alright. One was the driver of the car

I went around. He said he witnessed the whole thing and tried to get a video of it but failed. I called 911 and had a man talk to the police to explain where I was. About 10 minutes later the police came and sped past us as if they knew where the culprit was. About 30 minutes later a police officer came and talked to me and the witness. They believe the suspect is from one of the four islands of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) from the island of Chuuk. The four islands are Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae. Besides these 4 there is one other island, Palau, that is also in Micronesia but independent of FSM. Among these 5 island people who moved to Guam, mainly the Chuukese people are the troublemakers. The ones who are unemployed drink in the daytime and attack innocent people with rocks, slingshots, and even machetes! Why? In my opinion, it's probably out of jealousy. Most of the Chuukese people are not like them but are hardworking people with jobs. They are ashamed of their fellow countrymen. Except for the Chuukese people, which is only one of the four islands of FSM, there is no other racial profiling on Guam! There are minority Black people, White people like me, Japanese, Koreans, Japanese, Russians, Filipinos, and other island people including the northern Marianas Islands which includes Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. And of course, there are the Chamorro people who are native to Guam. Only the Chuukese have the reputation of being troublemakers.

This is sad because so far besides the man with the baseball bat, every person I have met from the island of Chuuk has been nice to me. My next-door neighbor is a pastor from Chuuk. The local market sales lady is from Chuuk. Some of my co-workers at DFS T-Galleria are from Chuuk. I was even picked up by people from Chuuk when I used to hitchhike the first six months after coming to Guam before we bought the car! I never felt intimidated by them. One of my co-workers, a Japanese lady told me that when the Chuukese drink, they become different people. Alcoholism is a problem on Guam. Liquor is sold at every food shop. Alcohol is the "poison" in the paradise of Guam. Booze is toxic. That's why it inTOXicates.

It will cost me and my wife \$400 dollars to have the back window fixed in spite of the fact we have car insurance. The insurance company says our policy is a \$400 "deductible" whatever that means. Rather than get a rent-a-car from the car dealer, we will use the car as is till we get it fixed. The day after the attack we went to the Home Center to buy thick transparent plastic and attached it with duct tape to keep the rain out. Then we went as instructed by the insurance agency to the car dealer to get an estimate of the cost and see if parts are available. The car dealer ordered the part and they will come sometime in the middle of next month, July, 3 weeks from the attack. \$400 out of a paycheck is a big sum for us as it is more than what I make in two weeks and about half of what my wife makes. If any of my readers who appreciates my work on this website would like to donate to help me and my wife Tess pay this money to the car dealer, I would sure appreciate it! We must give the dealer cash. We asked if we could pay in installments but that is not in the car dealer's policy.



Closeup of rear window.



Plastic sheet attached with duct tape over the rear window to keep the rain out.



Tess with her father.

Pioneered Hitchhiking in Guam!



Fun hitchhiking and meeting new people on the Pacific island of Guam.

Adventure Moving to Guam



James and Tess Arendt

On May 5th I flew to Guam from Osaka, Japan, to meet my bride Tess for the first time! She met me at the airport together with her father, her neice and nephew, and her brother Joey and his wife. I put an engagement ring on her finger at the airport in public, and strangers applauded us!

The first two nights we had to stay at a hotel at \$75 night. The place we intended to stay for free turned out to be a closed door!

On May 6th. Sunday, I attended the local church with Tess. It was a blessing to see so many Christians together in one place, hundreds of them! The pastor was so sweet and gave a message of love and hope.

I didn't bring all that much money from Japan. It was \$360 USD and 80,000

Japanese yen which I exchanged for \$696 USD. At \$75 a night plus money for food, that money would not last long! We were told apartments are expensive.

On May 7th, Monday, we moved to an AirBnB place at only \$35 a day on the tourist hotel street right by the beach on Tumon Bay! Walks along the beach in the evening were great! I talked to Japanese tourists in Japanese and had them take photos of Tess and me!

On May 8, Tuesday, Tess and I saw an offer in Chriaglist for a house at only \$570 a month, fully furnished and with WIFI! We downloaded the contract and would have sent that money through Money Gram the next day had not a good brother in Christ, Gregory, pointed out to us that it could be a scam! We listened to Gregory and didn't send the money. The owners are off island and living in Texas! Gregory pointed out the deal sounded too good and it looked flaky to him. We believe now he was right and are so thankful to have been saved from deceit and robbery!

On May 9th, Wednesday, Gregory took us to the Veterans Administration building where I applied for medical benefits from the VA. He also took us to see Ms. Amor, who offered us a studio apartment at \$670 a month. The location was very good but at that amount of money we were hoping to find something better. I also established a bank account and my own PayPal account.

On May 10, Thursday I received a gift from a brother in UK via the PayPay account. And later I received payment for a domain name I previously renewed for a friend in Australia. It totaled \$89, our first income since coming to Guam!

May 11, Friday, we received notice from Gregory of a house we can live in with an elderly lady at only \$300 a month! We were overjoyed! We will move today. Also we will meet a person who can possibly give me employment as a wedding pastor, a job I had much experience in Japan.

On May 13, Mother's Day, we met Ms. Paca's two sons, wives and children. We had a mother's day lunch with them. About 10 days later one of Ms. Paca's sons, Tiger, invited Tess and I to temporarily live in his million dollar house in the captial, Agana, to care for his 3 dogs and 2 cats while he and his family take a vacation in the Republic of Palau! They said we can eat up any food we find!

On May 20 Tess and I had our marriage ceremony in Yigo in Bethel Baptist Church. The minister was William Maunsell.

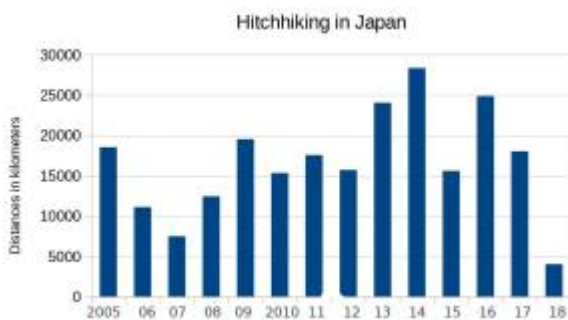


James and Tess
Arendt





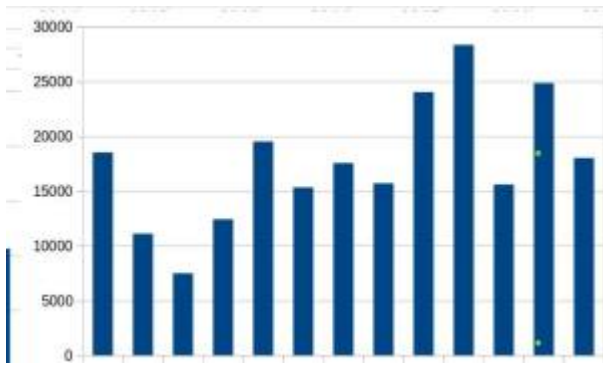
[The End of My Adventures Hitchhiking in Japan](#)



My days of hitchhiking in Japan are over. On May 5th, 2018 I will start a brand new life in Guam with my bride! The chart shows the distances I traveled by hitchhiking since I kept records, a total of 258,500 kilometers. I estimate the total distance hitchhiked over 20 years from March 1998 to be 350,000 kilometers.

You can see a [detailed breakdown](#) of the people who picked me up.

End of Year 2017 Hitchhike Statistics



Distances I hitchhiked in Japan in 2017.

Hitchhike Adventure During Golden Week 2005



This is another adventure I had on my old kt70.com/~jamesjpn site which I am reposting. It occurred from April 27 to May 7, 2005.

I had two consecutive hitchhiking adventures, the first to Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo, and the second to Nagano. The total distance traveled in the 19 vehicles that picked me up was about 1750 kilometers or 1095 miles. This was during the period called "Golden Week" in Japan. Golden Week is a string of 4 national holidays which begin on April 29 and ends on May 5. Many people travel during this period to visit their parents and relatives. That makes it a relatively good time to hitchhike long distances.

The first day, Wednesday April 27, I hitchhiked to Osaka, a distance of 565 kilometers from my home in Niigata City to my friend's home, and in only 9 hours and 40 minutes! This is exceptionally quick considering that it was on a weekday. The 4th and last vehicle, a mini van, took me 498 kilometers of the 565 kilometers or 88% of the distance. This is the furthest traveled in a

single ride since I have been keeping statistics from August 2003. The driver went a bit out of his way to take me right to my friend's house! The driver and his partner are members of the "Sokagakai" sect of Buddhism. They are not known to be friendly to other religions, and *especially* not to Christians! But they were polite. I first ask them questions about what they believe and listen to them. This obliges them to listen to me when I tell them about Jesus!



Kengo with his girlfriend.

In Osaka I saw my friend Kengo – the sponsor of my very first web site at kt70.com/~jamesjpn – and his girlfriend Aya. I first met Kengo while hitchhiking through Shizuoka in 1998. He was the person who helped me get started with web site construction back in 2001 by offering me free web hosting on his server! After sowing seeds of the Word of God in his heart over the years, I finally had the opportunity to pray the prayer of salvation with him to receive the Lord Jesus Christ into his heart!

Osaka is next to the city of Amagasaki where [a tragic train accident](#) occurred on April 25 when 107 people died when the lead car derailed and smashed into a building.

Two days later I took the train to Kyoto and visited two friend's homes. This was the most expensive part of the trip – about \$10 to travel only 1.5 hours. People often ask me if I visited the many temples in Kyoto. I do not visit temples!! I tell them if I wanted to see a Buddhist temple – which I don't – I would take a little walk down the road from my house to see one.



The Okubo family

The photo the Okubo family who took me from Kyoto to a parking area near Gifu City. A Japanese muck raking tabloid called "Friday" published an article in that week's edition about my Christian Fellowship, [The Family International](#), and had a line about yours truly in it! It says, (my translation from Japanese) "*Hitchhike evangelism – A male believer of the group who supports the [Ainokakehashi Project](#) (a web site I made for my friends in Hiroshima) is engaged in evangelism while hitchhiking across the country. On his web site are many photos of regular people who picked him up.*" Ha! While at a parking area I pointed out to Mrs. Okubo the magazine at the newsstand and told her there was a line in it about me. She said, "What?! There's something bad in it about you?" "Not at all" I replied, and I showed her the article. She understood very well that the particular magazine is a muck raking tabloid trying to make money by throwing dirt at others. The article didn't even have all the facts correct. But I felt honored that the reporters noted my web sites. The Devil may be trying to hurt my hitchhike ministry by this article,

but because Friday magazine, though nationwide, is read by a relatively small percentage of the population, so far nobody who has picked me up since the article has mentioned it. None of my close Japanese friends read such a gossip rag.

After spending the night in Gifu City, I hitchhiked to Tokyo. Shigeru, an officer in the Japanese Self Defense force took me a good distance and even bought me lunch. He works as a MP. Shigeru says that unlike the US Military, there is no military court system in Japan. Serious crimes in the military are brought before civilian courts. I had a great time talking to Shigeru and shared the Gospel with him.

An Indonesian couple with two small daughters in the car took me back to Niigata from Tokyo. The husband spoke English well and was quite talkative. They are Muslims. I have no problem at all with most Muslim people I meet. Only a small percentage of Islamic people I have met have tried to argue against the Divinity of Jesus Christ. The Indonesians were very friendly. They understand very well the *real* reasons for the [war in Iraq](#). Many Japanese tell me that the war is about religion. Nothing could be further from the truth. I try to help them see how they have been conditioned by the mass media to think so.

Trip to Nagano May 6-7

I hitchhiked to Nagano on Friday. An elderly man took me most of the way and even bought me lunch. Nearly every week I go to Chino City to perform marriage ceremonies. I get a ride to the wedding chapel, but to return home, I often walk from Chino station to the Suwa interchange, a distance of about 3 kilometers or almost 2 miles carrying all my luggage with me. But I really don't mind it. It keeps me healthy. Part of hitchhiking is not only the "hitch" but the "hike" . When I get weary of walking, I think of wealthy people who spend thousands of dollars just to scale a mountain peak while enduring all sorts of discomfort but getting nowhere. I walk not *just* for exercise, but to get somewhere!



Mrs. Yamashita and
children

On the right is a photo of Mrs. Yamashita and her children who were riding in the car that picked me up on May 7. Her husband, Masa, speaks English. He took me from Suwa IC to the Suwa parking area a few kilometers down the road. Masa has since been writing me emails asking deep questions about the reasons for war and why believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and personal savior is so important.



From Suwa a college student, Mr. Mochizuki, picked me up and took me as far as Matsushiro parking next to Nagano City.

There were not many cars at this parking area and so I opted to walk directly to the drivers and show them the sign I was holding an A4 paper sign with the name "Niigata" which was my destination. One lady in a S.U.V. saw the sign and waved her hand back and forth meaning "no!" I saw that the license plate of her car said "Nara", a city near Osaka which meant that they would be going at least part of the way to my destination. After about 20 minutes the lady walked up to me with a map saying that she and her husband would take me as far as Nadachitanihama, a parking area not far from the junction that goes to Niigata. They would be entering the junction going the opposite way from Niigata, but because the parking area is not far from the junction, and because this particular parking area has a bridge crossing to the other side with traffic going to Niigata, I happily accepted her proposal!



Satomi

Later well into the trip the couple decided they would do me a favor and take me toward the direction of Niigata from the junction. This unfortunately was not nearly as good for me as the original plan for they took me instead to the Joestsu IC. It's not as easy to catch a ride at an interchange as it is from a Parking Area, and besides that, it was already dark. So after waiting unsuccessfully for 20 minutes I decided to leave the interchange and make my way to the nearest train station and take a train the rest of the way home. It was \$40 just to travel 60 miles! I had to climb a low fence to get to the regular road. There was a gas station nearby where I asked directions. The attendees said it was too far to walk to the station and one of them, the sweet girl in the photo, Miss Satomi, gave me a lift!

Did you like this page? Please write and tell me about it! Or if you see any typos, misspellings or bad grammar I would appreciate hearing about it so I can correct it.

[Hitchhike Adventure During Golden Week](#)



Another oldie goldie adventure from my old website I am reposting.

On April 30, 2004, I hitchhiked 500 kilometers from Niigata city to Nagoya, the 3rd largest metropolis in Japan. It was the second day of "Golden Week." Below is a brief description of what Golden week is all about:

The Golden Week is a collection of several national holidays within seven days in the end of April and beginning of May. It consists of four national holidays: Green Day (Midori no hi) on April 29, Constitution Day (Kenpo kinenbi) on May 3, "Between Day" (Kokumin no kyujitsu) on May 4 and the Boy's Festival (Kodomo no hi) on May 5. (Taken from <http://www.japan-guide.com/topic/0005.html>)



Tetsunori

The most interesting person who picked me up on the way was a 24 year old Buddhist monk by the name of Tetsunori. He said he sat down in mediation for two weeks straight in a cross legged position without sleeping on 3 different occasions! He was not allowed to sleep nor move during this time! I asked him how it went. "My legs hurt" he replied. I told Tetsunori all about Jesus and my life as a missionary and he told me all about his life as a monk. I was surprised to learn that he is allowed to listen to any kind of music he likes or watch any type of trashy Hollywood film. I would think they would have more separation from the world. But Japanese Buddhists have much more freedom than other Asian countries. They are allowed to marry and have children which is not allowed in Thailand or Tibet. Tetsunori says that he is the 17th generation of Buddhist monks that have been responsible for the care of a temple he lives in. I pray that the Lord used me to plant some seed of the Word of God into his heart. Buddhism is another "works religion". Only the Blood of Jesus Christ can save us! I told Tetsunori that Jesus' Message is simple enough that a young child can understand. We both agreed that if only highly intellectual people can attain to knowledge of salvation, not many would be saved. I know I wouldn't be. I couldn't even spell the word "intellectual" correctly and had to look it up! ☐

In the Nagoya area I stayed with my Brazilian friend Paulo and his family. He took me to a typical Japanese Golden Week festival.



Paulo with his youngest son,
Enoki



Brazilian children dancing



The flags in the shape of
Japanese carp are called
Koinobori in Japanese. They are
flown every year from April till
the end of Golden Week.



Booth of the Brazilian school in
Okazaki, Aichi Prefecture.

“Koinobori. Carp streamers, called *koinobori* in Japanese, decorate the landscape from April through early May in honor of Children’s Day on May 5. In Japanese culture, the carp symbolizes courage and strength because of its ability to swim up a waterfall. Since these are traits desired in boys, families traditionally flew koinobori from their homes to honor their sons. Ranging in size from about a foot to several meters in length, the koinobori resemble jewel-toned sea beasts swimming through the watery, azure skies. May, 1998.” (Taken from <http://www.hardfocus.net/stevie/koinobori.htm>)

On May 3rd. I left downtown Nagoya at 1:30 PM to start back home. This is rather late to hitchhike another 500 kilometers, but I couldn’t leave any earlier. It was absolutely imperative for me to be back home sometime this evening in order to perform a Christian style marriage ceremony the very next day! I opt to hitchhike at least part way to save some money.

Though I like to be cheap on myself, in order to save some time to get out of the busy city center, I took a 20 minute train ride to Tajimi, a small town

that is close to the Chuo Expressway. This expressway passes through Nagano Prefecture which is on the way to Niigata. It is also a tried and proven route I have traveled many times and the same route I used to travel to Nagoya.

The entrance to the Chuo Expressway is about 3 kilometers distance from the train station, a bit too far to walk because I am pressed for time, so I caught a ride from a kind man going that way. I arrived at the expressway entrance about 2:30 PM. So far so good!

I was not surprised to find most of the traffic heading back the opposite direction to Nagoya. I know that at least SOME drivers would be headed to Nagano, but after waiting more than 30 minutes I was getting a bit discouraged. The drivers that were heading the direction I wanted to go ignored me, but others offered me a ride going back to Nagoya. I knew there is a fairly large parking area called Utsutsutoge only 5 minutes down the road toward Nagoya, so I decided to take up the next offer going that direction (the opposite way I intended to go) thinking that I could find my way on foot to the other side of the parking area which heads back in the right direction. I have done this from time to time when I thought it was necessary. To date there hasn't been a single parking area I haven't figured out how to get to the opposite side. Some have a foot bridge to cross over but most have access roads which run parallel to the expressway with a tunnel going under the expressway. But the Utsutsutoge parking area is the *very first* expressway parking area to have neither! It is situated in mountains with no access road running parallel to the expressway. There was no way I could get to the opposite side going in the right direction unless I would attempt to cross the expressway on foot – something extremely dangerous if not illegal! Cars were whizzing past as fast as 140 KM per hour. That means to give myself at least 5 seconds to cross safely both the East bound and West bound lanes, I would had to wait for both directions to clear for a distance of at least 200 meters or about the length of two football fields. That was not going to happen. It was heavy traffic during "Golden Week" which is vacation holiday time in Japan when folks travel long distances to see their relatives or go sightseeing. Back in 1998 I did the cross the same expressway in this manner, but it was in a area far from the big city with few cars passing that time of day. Happily I wasn't spotted by the police.

All was not lost, however. I knew that though I had to keep heading the opposite direction from what I originally planned, I still had a few more options. One was to travel as far as Maibara from where I could catch a ride on the Hokuriku expressway which would take me to Niigata. But this route is much longer. It would add another 150 KM to my journey. Another possibility was to try a new expressway route that I had never traveled on before. It's called the "Tokkai-Hokuriku". This also heads toward the Hokuriku expressway which would take me to Niigata, but cuts the distance in half. The reason I never attempted to travel this route before is because the expressway is not completed in the middle (at that time). There is a stretch of 35 kilometers of normal road connecting both ends. My third option was to travel to a point I could get off the expressway I was on now and hitchhike back the opposite way.

The driver who picked me up at Utsutsutoge suggested that the Tokkai-Hokuriku route may be the best one for me. He said he traveled it only very recently toward Toyama. I knew if I could get as far as Toyama, it would be a piece of cake the rest of the way – or so I thought! More about that later.



On the map the blue line represents the route to Nagoya. The red line was my return trip. The green line was a possible alternate route which though much more out of my way, is a route I had traveled much before. The part of the red line that crosses Honshu toward the Sea of Japan and connects two points of the green line ending at Toyama (name not listed on the map) is the Tokkai-Hokuriku, a new route I had never used before.

After a 40 minute wait, a car with 2 men and a women took me half way to Toyama. Their names were Mitsuru (the driver), Yoshinori and Rie, all friends employed at the same company. We traveled though some of the most beautiful mountain areas of Japan with lots of lakes, rivers and even a waterfall.



(Left to Right) Mitsuru,
Yoshinori, Rie and me



One of the many lakes along the
way

They couldn't take me as far as I would have liked but dropped me off at a tourist area with other parked cars and a constant flow of traffic. It took me at least a half hour to get my next ride, a married couple by the names of Hiroshi and Masayo. I had something in common with them. They both spent a year living in Moscow and could speak Russian! We exchanged a few sentences in Russian. There are not many Japanese people interested in Russia. Only a very small percentage of the population is interested in visiting, and only a very tiny percentage who learn the Russian language.




With Hiroshi and Masayo

It was 7:30 in the evening by the time we arrived in Toyama on the Hokuriku Expressway. I still have some 250 kilometers left in my journey! The winds were blowing very strong along the Hokuriku which runs close to the Sea of Japan. So strong in fact that the cars and trucks were swayed sideways by heavy gusts! So though I originally told Hiroshi and Masayo that I would get off as soon as we arrived at Toyama to hitchhike further, because of the wind and the lateness of time, I lost confidence and turned to "the arm of the flesh" and decided to take the train the rest of the way. They themselves encouraged me to do the same. We thought there would still be trains going to Niigata at 8PM. We were wrong!

As it turned out, I missed the last train by about a half hour. There was no way I could get home by train that night! So Hiroshi and Masayo offered to take me back to the expressway entrance. I lost 45 minutes of precious time because I didn't have faith to continue hitchhiking, and now I was forced to hitchhike like it or not!

I was desperate! It is now completely dark, about 8:15 PM. Hitchhiking is much more difficult at night. A few cars with Niigata license plates seemed to slow down for me. I ran up to them in excitement thinking the driver would offer me a ride. This only caused the driver to become afraid of me and he fled away! One man stopped and I asked him a pleading tone of voice to take me at least part way home. He refused. So I realized that I needed to calm down and have more faith that God would come through for me. A pleading and desperate sounding tone of voice was working against me.

After about 45 minutes a man offered to take me as far as Arisomi – a large parking area a good distance down the road. I knew from experience that it was a very good place to get my next ride.

Most of the people ignored both me and the paper sign I was holding:  – Niigata.

At the parking area I tried to talk to the few who made eye contact. One man seemed to be willing to take me but his wife was not! She had a look of apprehension in her eyes. So I politely excused myself and left.

I don't like to make the Japanese people feel they must do anything for me. I try to leave it up to them. I know that God's sheep are always around somewhere. Sometimes they seem to be only 1 in a thousand. It was now 9:30PM and the cold attitude most people had was understandable. Why was I so dumb to get myself into such a situation anyhow?

After many rejections I decided to step away from the crowd and stand near the expressway entrance. This way more drivers would see me. But as I turned to go, one couple I had asked only a few minutes before approached me. The wife began chiding me for letting myself get in such a fix! I just smiled and calmly said that I had misjudged the time and had hoped to get a train, but there were no more trains. She softened her voice and said if it was all right with me, they would take me as far as Nagaoka – about 90% of the rest of the way! Of course I was very glad to accept their offer.

Throughout the journey they were both talkative and asked me many questions about my life. The wife asked me what I teach. I told them about Jesus and why He was killed on a cross. Most Japanese don't know or realize the meaning of the cross. They don't know that crucifixion was the preferred method of executing criminals during the reign of the Roman Empire. And so I make it a good history lesson for them. Japanese people tend to be very indifferent toward religion in general, but because they like to learn history, I try to approach them from this angle.

About half way into our trip the couple conferred with each other and decided to take me the rest of the way home – an extra distance way out of their way of at least 100 kilometers! And half of that is by low road. I refused their offer at first but the husband insisted several times. So I left it at that. It was my final answer to prayer to be home that night! Though it was after midnight when I finally arrived home, there was still plenty of time to get a good night sleep in preparation for the next day. I had to be on a train at 8:02 that morning to travel a 100 kilometers back in the direction I came!

[Hitchhike Adventure From Niigata City to Nagano and Tokyo](#)



This is an article I wrote at the end of August 2005. It was only my old website which is no longer on-line and I am therefore reposting it.

I hitchhiked from Niigata City to Matsumoto City in Nagano, and then to Tokyo and then back to Niigata in 3 days, a distance of 700 kilometers (440 miles) in 16 vehicles. Among these were 3 trucks and at least one luxury car. Among the people who picked me up was one stock broker, one high school teacher, 4 foreigners, and 2 relatively wealthy men one of whom is a nation wide famous entertainer! Three of the cars had small children, two had women without a male companion, and two had large dogs, one a Labrador and the other a German Shepherd.



Jerry Fujio,
Japanese
entertainer

The highlight of this trip was being picked up by a famous entertainer: Jerry Fujio. You may not have heard of him in your country, but everybody in Japan over 35 years old seems to know him quite well! All my Japanese friends have seen him on TV or in a film. His peak of fame seems to be around 1960s. I asked him if people hound him for his autograph. "A long time ago" was his reply. Jerry's mother is English and his father is Japanese. His age seemed to be in his early 70s.

Another highlight was a retired 60 some year old man from the Meguro area of Tokyo driving an expensive car who appeared to be of upper class Japanese society. The reason I say this is because he looked like a company president but didn't act like one. He didn't accept my business card nor even give me his name. He probably didn't want to accept my card because in doing so, he would be obliged to give me his in keeping with Japanese custom. Nevertheless he was very friendly, talkative and laughed a lot! I asked him if he is a member of a secret society. He replied he's a member of a golf club. He didn't tell me exactly what his profession was except that it was related to education and government but that he was not a politician. I asked him if he knows that the United States is a secret dictatorship run by the [CFR](#), and he replied in the affirmative. I told him that most Americans don't know that. He was surprised and dumbfounded that Americans are so **ignorant** of the fact. Though not a Christian nor a believer in God, he does acknowledge the possibility that the world could have been created by a Great Designer. He said he doesn't believe in Darwinism and claimed that it is not taught in schools in Japan. I thought it strange he would say that because nearly everyone in Japan believes in Darwinian evolution.

A Chinese couple with a baby took me as far as Kurohime (which means "Black Princess") in Nagano, a small mountain town close to the border of Niigata. I didn't know at first the man was Chinese because his Japanese was so good. He is from Harbin and his mother is Japanese. Harbin is part of Manchuria which the Japanese occupied till the end of WW2. He is very knowledgeable about the world and real motivations in politics. We talked about the [Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989](#). I told him I met a Chinese college student in Southern China back in 1998 who believes that nobody was killed in that tragedy. He replied that probably thousands of students died! How quickly the world is forgetting that it ever happened. He knows that there is no real democracy or freedom in China, and especially no freedom of religion.

To learn more about China, its history, and the murder of Chinese citizens by their own government on June 4th and 5th, 1989, please see: [The Tiananmen Square Massacre: From China's Authoritarian Roots to the Iconic "Tank Man"](#)

I never got off the expressway at Kurohime before and so it was an adventure pioneering how to get back on track. There were few cars and so it took me a while to get back on the main road. I did so 3 cars later.



A red Ferrari, \$300,000
of eventual junk

At Kamisato Service Area on the Kan'etsu expressway, a red Ferrari sports car parked right in front of where I stood hitchhiking with my sign. The driver got out and looked at the rear of the Ferrari. His friend from another car walked up and also looked. They looked and looked the longest time. I thought they were literally worshiping that car! They looked at it from all angles and took photographs. If I ever ended up with such a thing, I wouldn't really own it, it would own me! I probably would be thinking about the Ferrari half of the day. I'd get bummed out even if it got the tiniest scratch on its shiny red exterior. Thank God for deliverance from materialism!

I always carry with me Gospel literature and give a copy to every driver. I try to share some seeds of the Word of God in their hearts, as much as I feel they are ready to hear and receive. Most Japanese are very respectful of Jesus Christ. From my experience, the only ones who aren't belong to a radical sect of Buddhism called Sokkagakai from which sprang out of Nichiren Shoshu which is also intolerant of other faiths. Most Buddhists do respect Jesus and His teachings.

[Tips On How to Hitchhike in Japan](#)



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

Due to popular request I have compiled a list of tips and lessons I learned over the past several years hitchhiking in Japan. I think the basic tip is to use common sense and have the attitude of, "where there's a will, there's a way."

- Get to the a good intersection of the highway that has a **nice long red traffic light** which builds up a good row of vehicles in front of it when the light turns red. Sometimes I walk 3 or 4 kilometers to get to it,

sometimes and sometimes I take train or a bus to get to it.

- I usually stand before the traffic light. The longer the light stays red, the better. I stand near the light when it first turns red and wait for the first car to come. When I think the driver is close enough to see the whites of my eyes, I either hold out my thumb or hold out a sign that shows my destination. If the driver either makes no eye contact with me, shows no interest, or waves his or her hand back and forth indicating "NO!", I proceed to walk up to the next car, and then the next, and then the next until either I get a positive response from the driver or the traffic light turns green and the cars begin to move again. When the light turns green, I turn around and walk back to the light and wait till it turns red again.
- Sometimes I'll continue to hold out my sign after the light turns green in spite of the fact the traffic is flowing. Sometimes an interested driver who sees my sign though he passes me by and crosses the intersection will return back for me and offer me a ride. This has happened dozens of times.
- I try to present myself well groomed and dress reasonably well in dress pants and a dress shirt, never in jeans. Sometimes I've hitchhiked wearing a suit and tie but I found it really didn't help much.
- I try to make eye contact with the driver and smile. Once he or she makes eye contact, it usually means a ride.
- I made signs showing my destination with A4 size paper and a thick pointed magic marker. I use a clear plastic holder to keep the signs together with the sign of my destination on top. The sign is written in Japanese ideographs (Kanji).



An example sign written on A4 size paper in a plastic folder with other signs below the top sign.

Usually I'll carry the marker and several blank sheets of A4 paper in the plastic holder if I need to make a sign of a new destination. The driver is usually happy to write the Kanji down for me. I can copy Japanese characters if I look at them, but the Japanese will write them much nicer than I can. □ Since 2016 I started using larger binded sketchbooks to make signs. One advantage is the pages are bound and will not fly away in the wind as A4 pages can. I write one kanji on a page and hold the sketchbook open showing two pages. The names of most cities and prefectures in Japan consist of two kanjis. The sign is therefore larger and easier to see from a far distance.



A3 page in a binder can be used for signs.

- A sign should not show a destination that is too far away. On a regular road the destination should be not further than the next major city. The exception to this rule is if your destination is the largest city among all the cities you will be passing. Some examples: Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka,

and Niigata.

- At expressway entrances, try to stand at a safe place before the entrance where the cars can easily stop. There are good expressway entrances to hitchhike at, and poor ones. How do you know the difference? By experience!
 - If after you catch a ride from a driver entering the expressway who is going toward the direction of your destination but considerably short of it, have him drop you off at the largest service area that is before his exit point. Service areas are better than expressway entrances because the flow of traffic is always in the direction you want to go. I stand near the facilities on the side of the road where cars would pass when exiting. If you are too obvious or stand too close to the exit ramp, the traffic cops might tell you to leave when they see you.
-

Adventures in Estonia



In the summer of 1997 I needed to leave Russia and St. Petersburg for a visa renewal trip. Rather than make another visa trip to Helsinki in Finland, I opted for neighboring Estonia instead. As you can see on the map below, the distance from St. Petersburg to the Estonian capital city of Tallinn is not much different than from St. Petersburg to Helsinki, Finland.



And as you see from the maps (see below also), Estonia is the smallest of the three Baltic Republics that were former members of the Soviet Union – by force, not by choice! The other two are Lithuania which is the largest of the three, and Latvia. The only thing they have in common with Russia is a common border. Each Baltic country has its very own language which is not Slavic and therefore not related to the Russian language. The three languages are not related to each other either. Most of the ethnic peoples of these lands would rather have nothing more to do with Russia or the Russian language and tend to be offended if one tries to initiate a conversation with them speaking in Russian. Nevertheless, unless the individuals from neighboring Baltic countries know English or some other common European language between them, they are forced to communicate with each other in Russian, like it or not, because Russian is the only common language they know! Russian was the

language of education during Soviet times.



Here we have a closer look at Estonia. You can see that Finland is just across the Baltic Sea. The Estonians have much more in common with the Finns than with the Russians or even the Latvians on its southern border. This is because the Estonians were a Finnish tribe and their language is very similar to Finnish. Like the Finns, they are a hard working people and have rebuilt their country and economy relatively quickly after being set free from the Soviet Union.

After World War 2 Stalin forcibly exiled half the Estonian population to Siberia and replaced them with Russians. If I remember correctly, the ethnic population is roughly 40% Russian and 60% Estonian. On the Estonian side of the border with Russia there is a city called Narva that is 90% Russian. During the breakup of the Soviet Union, some Russians wanted the city to become part of Russia rather than Estonia. But in 1997 the Russians living in Narva were glad they didn't become part of Russia and are happy to live in Estonia! They know they have a much better life in Estonia than they would have had in Russia. The Estonian economy is much better.

In the Summer of 1997 I lived with my missionary friends in the city of Tallinn for one full month. I visited once before for a day on the way to St. Petersburg by land from Poland. My friend Yan drove a tiny Polski Fiat from Warsaw through Lithuania and Latvia. His intention was to re-enter Russia from Latvia but was advised against it as being too dangerous. There are many highway robbers in Russia but few if any in Estonia. So we drove through the Eastern side of Estonia and entered Russia at the border town of Narva. Talk about adventure! If you are bored with life, try driving a car through Eastern Europe some time and enter Russia. You will be greeted by a border guard on the Russian side carrying an AK47 automatic weapon. No joke! I saw it with my own eyes! But that was in 1997. I don't know if they still carry AK47s today.



Andres with ethnic Russian girl who was raised in Estonia. She could speak fluent Estonian and was our happy helper to distribute Gospel literature.



Russian Olga who was raised in Estonia. She couldn't speak Estonia but was a good English speaker and so could get a job selling picture postcards to tourists.



Two Estonian girls holding up a poster that says, "What Everybody Needs is

Love!”



Estonian young people. I asked the boy on the right if he likes the Russian population. He replied he doesn't actually hate them but has no Russian friends.

Most of the ethnic Estonians and Latvians in Latvia I met resented being greeted in Russian though they all knew it! In order to talk to the young people in the above photo, I had to greet them first in English! This is because they have great national pride and hate the fact they were taken over by the Russian speaking Soviet Union against their will.

When I was in Riga, Latvia, though people knew me and my friends were foreigners, they would still speak to us in Latvian! My Polish friend would smile at them and say in Russian, "I can communicate in only Russian, Polish and English!" They always complied and spoke in Russian.

The young people told me they don't speak English and so I asked them if they could speak Russian. "Sure we can," was the reply, "no problem!" So I pulled out my Estonia Bible and showed them Scriptures explaining in Russian what they meant. This impressed them for they knew I didn't read Estonian but I knew the Bible well enough to find the parts I was looking for. I could recognize the name of the books of the Bible in Estonian.

Before I went to Russia, in Japan around 1992 I met a young lady from Latvia. I was excited to meet her because I was studying Russian then and wanted to practice it with her. But she told me in English she didn't want to speak Russian with me. "That's not our language," she said. "We have our own language."

Interestingly, the Estonians were the worse speakers of Russian. This is because the Estonian language is not an Indo-European language as is Russian, Lithuanian and Latvian.



Russian girl distributing literature to an Estonian boy



Two Estonian girls who received posters.



Right: Lily from San Jose who was a regular monthly supporter

of our missionary work in Estonia.



A beach in Tallinn



Estonian ladies.

[The Story of Helen of St. Petersburg, Russia](#)



How life changed for the average Russian after the fall of the Soviet Union.

[Adventure to Teriberka – A Village in the Russian Arctic](#)



On July 31 1996, Yanek from Belarus, Angela from St. Petersburg and I traveled overland by bus from Murmansk to the remote village of Teriberka. We went to visit our friend Marina who was a student we met in Murmansk. These two areas are circled in red on the map below. The distance is a bit more than 100 KM or 60 miles, but it took **5 hours by bus on dirt roads!** Though it was summer, we could still see patches of snow on the ground! Most of the area in between these two places is tundra. There is nothing growing higher than an inch or so from the ground due to the permafrost just beneath the soil.



In the year 2000 a Russian submarine sank not far from where I lived. The city next to Murmansk called Severomorsk is a Russian Navy base. Only Russian military and the local town's people have permission to enter this city. And believe it or not, even the tiny village of Teriberka is part of a military restricted zone. I didn't know that before arrival. On the 3rd day border guards came to Marina's apartment and told me I had until the next morning to leave or be incarcerated!

A map showing the relationship of this area to the rest of the world. You're probably thinking, "What's so special about that village anyway?" It's special to me because it probably is the most remote area I've ever been in the world – a place only missionaries and National Geographic people would want to visit!



A view of Teriberka from Marina's apartment! It was the most miserable looking place I have ever been to in the world!



Belarussian Yanek in front of a typical Teriberka dwelling. The blue sign above the door says, "Welcome".



Yanek, Angela and Teriberka resident Marina near her apartment.



Marina's daughter (right) with a friend on a hill overlooking the Barents Sea (part of the Arctic Ocean). It's August 1st but only 13 degrees Celsius (55F) and windy.

There was nobody else on that beach except for the people with me! It was clean with no litter whatsoever which is unlike most Japanese beaches. Parts of it are rocky with very smooth large stones. Even in the summer the water is too cold to swim in without a wet suit.



Me with Yanek and Angela toward the left on that same hill, August 1, 1996.



Yanek, friend Marina and Angela.



Next day August 2! It warmed up to around 18C (70F)!



Yanek on the same day, same area.



Yanek with Marina. There is not a paved road in the entire village.



In Marina's apartment. Notice the rug hung on the wall? This is very typical of Russian homes. I think the photo was taken with a timer on the camera.

On the third day, two men who said they were government officials came to

Marina's apartment when I was there and asked me if I obtained permission to visit their area. I told them I didn't know I needed permission. Marina told them I am an invited guest. The men said I was in a military area restricted to foreigners (especially Americans!) and that I needed permission. I didn't see a single sign of any military activity at all! They told me to leave at the earliest opportunity and that I may be fined later. But there was no fine and nothing more came of it.

[More photos of Teriberka.](#)