

My First Hitchhiking Adventure of 2016



Father Tsukasa and son Naoto who took me to Miyagi Prefecture from Akita Prefecture.

On January 31, 2016 I hitchhiked from the Hanawa service area in Akita Prefecture on the Tohoku Expressway back home to Niigata city. My friend Keiji who is from Akita Prefecture was amazed that I made the 505 kilometer (316 miles) trip in a single day. To be honest I myself am amazed! It's only because of the good Hand of my Creator Who provides all my needs. His Name is Jesus.

I shaved my one month growth of beard the day before the trip. I shaved it because I wasn't sure whether people would want to pick up a Westerner with a beard. Would you?

The hardest part of hitchhiking from A to B is often the very beginning. Somehow I had to make my way to the Tohoku Expressway if I wanted to return home the same day. Using Google Maps on my Android Tablet, I perceived the Hanawa Service Area is within walking distance from the Kazuno Hanawa train station. Kazuno Hanawa is only two stations away from Towada Minami from was. It was only a 210 yen (1.75 USD) fare for me to get to Kazuno Hanawa,

I have never been to this part of Japan before. But thanks to Google Maps and my Asus Tablet PC, and especially thanks to the Global Positioning System (GPS), I was able to find my way from Towada Minami to the Hanawa Service Area in spite of taking three wrong turns. I estimated the walk would take less than 30 minutes. It took me over an hour!

The weather was clear with a blue sky and the temperature was a few degrees below freezing. I walked over hard and slippery icy and hard packed snow much of the way carrying my or pulling suitcase (it has wheels) with me.

Twice I was puzzled in trying to find the expressway service area. The first

time I misunderstood the navigation directions on my tablet and took a wrong turn which ended in a dead end. For those who have never been to Japan, most areas are not divided into blocks like they are in America. The "go around the block" concept is not common in Japan unless you happen to live in Kyoto or Sapporo. Arriving at a dead end of a road in Japan basically means, "go back the way you came to get back to the turn you should have taken." The other alternatives are either trespassing on private property and / or trying to find a safe way to the road you want to get to which is just below a fairly high and steep hill. I contemplated both. But because the steep hill was covered with deep snow, and because I would rather not walk on property that is obviously not public, I deemed it a no go.

After that and more more wrong turn, I finally walked to the point of visual distance of the Tohoku Expressway. Due to recent poor eyesight, I can mainly tell I'm close only when I hear the traffic of vehicles on the expressway.

The problem I faced then was the navigation led me to follow a road that was filled with snow! I needed to get to the *opposite* side of the expressway. This meant I needed to find an underpass that led under the expressway, or a bridge that led over the expressway. It was clear that no vehicles were taking the road which the navigation showed me to take. There weren't any tire tracks in the snow on the road. I walked back a hundred meters (yards) back to the well travelled road that ran parallel to the expressway and walked a couple hundred meters to the direction I perceived the expressway service area to be. But initially I wasn't even sure I was indeed walking in the right direction! After walking 2 or 3 hundred meters (yards) further, I saw a passageway under the Tohoku Expressway which the snow covered road I previously saw led to. What to do? I turned around to get back point I was a few minutes before, back to the snow covered road. There was a mountain of snow that was created by a snow removal vehicle but I saw just around it were footprints in the snow which were going the direction I needed to go! Would those footprints take me to the underpass to get to the opposite side of the Tohoku Expressway? Can you guess? They didn't. The footprints ended a hut a hundred meters away. It was a small man-made structure of the size that probably no more than two people could be in at the same time! I walked around the hut only to find myself in knee-deep snow! There were no more tracks in the snow that headed in the direction I needed to go. I looked and saw only level (and deep) snow, and a fence that bordered the expressway, but no underpass in sight that led under the expressway to the other side.

What to do? In such a situation I learned from experience there is only one good and effective solution: Go back the way I came.

(To be continued!)

Chart of 10 years of Hitchhiking



The chart shows how many kilometers I hitchhiked every year for the last 10 years. Only the first year of 2005 doesn't show accurately how far I hitchhiked that year for I started keeping records from August 2, 2005. The total distance to date is 223,042 kilometers. over a period of exactly 925 days in 3587 vehicles. The latter two figures should be exact but the distance traveled may have a small percentage of error. I'm trying to be as accurate as possible. I used to use Google Maps to measure distances but now I use an on-line application on <http://www.mapfan.com/routemap/routeset.cgi> which should be more accurate. This is a great app if you live in Japan and can read Japanese well enough to use it.



Last year of 2015 was 12,749 kilometers (7968 miles) less than 2014 which was my record to date of 28,352 kilometers or 17,720 miles. The reason for this is I made far fewer trips to Aomori Prefecture. Will 2016 be a better year for me? I hope so. The number of trips has something to do with not only how much money I save, but how much income I can earn. You can see my income fell last year from the year before.

November 2015 Adventure Hitchhiking to Aomori Prefecture



On November 21, 2015, I hitchhiked in 9 cars from Gatsugi in Murakami City, Niigata Prefecture, to Hirosaki in Aomori, a distance of 330 kilometers of about 206 miles. This trip was so unusual that I feel compelled to document it in this post.

The first car was from Murakami city at the intersection of Route 345 and Route 7. Two ladies with two little boys 3 and 4 years old stopped for me! They were on their way to the Kamo Aquarium in Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture. It was such fun talking to the boys and the ladies. They are sisters, twins but not identical, and the one sitting on the passenger side is the mother of the two boys.



The ladies dropped me off at a point still far from the center of Tsuruoka. I walked a mile or so to get to a better traffic light where I could hitchhike. On the way I met the goat you see in the photo! He was friendly and let me pet it, but then he put my arm between his horns and twisted his head in such way it hurt my arm! I immediately left. □

Car #2 was a lady who took me to an ideal point in central Tsuruoka. From there many cars would be going to the next city of Sakata.

After only a short wait a man on his way to Sakata picked me up. He plays the viola in a orchestra!

Car #4 was a mother and daughter who took me close to the border of Akita, the town of Yuza.

Car # 5 was a lady from Niigata, Kazuoka Kobayashi, who is from the same remote area of Japan as my friends, the Matsuoka family, and she of course knows them! She was on her way to her home town. I would have gone with her to see my friends but their children were sick with the flu. Even more unusual is that she heard the Gospel when she was little, loves the Words of Jesus, and realized she is a child of God! And because her and I would be returning back the same day two days later, we arranged that I meet her at the closest train station that was convenient for both of us so that we could return to Niigata together. And so we did!

Kazuko took me to an expressway parking area that had only a few cars. Normally I would not choose such a place to hitchhike, and felt a bit worried. However only a few minutes after Kazuoka left a car with a married couple entered the parking area and offered to take me to the next large city of Noshiro. This was perfect for me!

From Noshiro after only a few minutes wait a lady, car #7 pulled up and offered to take me to Futatsui. This is only a relatively short distance but on my way to the next city of Odate.

Car #8 was yet another lady, Keiko Kanako, a piano teacher! And she was playing George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue which I just heard the previous evening! I introduced her to Emily Bear, a gifted American pianist that some consider to be a child Mozart. See

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=To7EG40KofU>

Did you count the number of cars with only ladies? Six in one day! This is by far my record! Things like this happen only in Japan.

Keiko took me to my favorite hitchhike spot in Odate, from there many cars would be going to Aomori. It was cold and I went to the toilet of the convenience store nearby to put on warmer clothes. It's now after 4 p.m. and getting dark. After 20 or so minutes of no success and getting cold I decided to walk up the road to try to stay warm. After another 10 minutes or so a man offered to take me to Hirosaki train station. This is only 45 kilometers or 30 miles short of my final destination. I took a train the rest of the way.

God is good and answered my prayers in Jesus's Name abundantly!

[James Japan on another Journey](#)



Dear friends and followers of this website,

On April 6th I left my home in Niigata City and traveled to Noda city in

Chiba prefecture which is just to the northeast of Tokyo. It was the first day of an extended trip which will last till the end of April. But only a few days later on May 2th, I'm off again on the road!

The red line starting at the top of the map and going southeast toward Tokyo was the first leg of my journey. The rest continues on to Osaka, and then back to Niigata via the expressway along the Sea of Japan. The blue arrow shows where I am at the time of this post, Shizuoka City.



Some folks have asked to have Skype sessions with me. While on the road it is difficult to arrange such direct sessions. I am not always in a quiet place with time and a good Internet connection. I need all 3 simultaneously! When at home I always have a quiet place with Internet, and I can usually arrange making the time, but while on the road, it is very seldom I have all three factors at the same time. And this morning when I did, the person seeking to Skype with me was off line!

For the time being I may not be able to continue much on my project of adding more chapters to "The Two Babylons" article on this site. Maybe I will complete it next month.

[The Hitchhiker's Woe: leaving Valuables in the Vehicle](#)



My hitchhiking adventure to Aomori on March 6, 2015 was both wonderful and traumatic! Wonderful in that it was on a day of good warm weather with relatively little waiting for the next car. Traumatic in that I left my suitcase in car number 7, and my tablet PC in car number 9!



This is Miki who lives in the city of Noshiro. She was driving from Tokyo and had not slept all night. I was thoroughly into a deep conversation with her about the false teaching of the evolution of life. Her job is helping to

bring new life into the world; She's a midwife! Miki took me to a parking lot of a convenience store at Higashi Noshiro. There I took photos of her. Here she is holding the sign I was carrying that says Noshiro, which was the next city toward my destination of Aomori. I thanked her and she drove off, but to my dismay I saw that my suitcase wasn't on the ground next to me! I left it in Miki's car!

What to do in such a situation? I had no way to contact Miki. I could only pray that Miki would return to the spot she left me as soon as she noticed the suitcase, or that she would contact me eventually via Facebook for she had my name written on a tract that I gave her. I waited and waited, and I prayed and prayed. I also called a friend in Aomori and told him of my trouble. I could not access my Facebook account from my location for I had no WIFI, so I asked my friend to access my Facebook account for me. He did but there was no friend request from Miki. At the time of this post though 4 days later, there is still no friend request from her.

After about two hours Miki returned with my suitcase! Was I overjoyed! She apologized for taking so long to notice it, and I apologized for causing her trouble to drive all the way back for me. I take the ultimate responsibility.

I had lost two hours and had only a bit more than an hour left of daylight. After only a few minutes, another lady stopped for me. She said she saw me hanging around the parking lot of the convenience store and wondered what had happened to me. The lady took me to Futatsui which is about 10 kilometers further up the road. I still had 100 kilometers left to my destination.

It was now getting dark and from experience it has been often difficult to catch a ride further past Futatsui. Rather than use a sign and wait at the traffic light, I decided to walk up the mountain road. When I'm in a lonely place often the driver will have compassion on me and stop. Sometimes they will pass me, make a U-turn up the road, and come back for me. Such was the case today. A man who runs 3 food stores returned for me. He was going all the way to Hirosaki which was better than I hoped for! Hirosaki is in Aomori ken and only 40 kilometers short of my final destination.

The man's name is Mr. Kimura. He runs three food shops with 21 employees. I often get rides from company presidents. Mr. Kimura wanted to take me to his shop in Hirosaki and treat me to a meal of one of his food products, but because we saw I might be able to catch the 7:21 p.m. train from Hirosaki station rather than the 8:13 p.m. later train, we opted for the earlier train. In my haste to catch that train I quickly disembarked without checking if I left anything behind. I made the train with only a minute to spare, but to my dismay, my tablet PC was not with me! I realized I left it in the car or perhaps might have dropped it when running to the train station. I had no way to contact Mr. Kimura. At the time I didn't even know his name or the name of his shop! I only knew he had three food shops and the cities they are located.

The next morning after waking up a new thought occurred: I had told the driver where I work! It was a place he knew of. Hopefully, he would bring my tablet PC to the place. Sure enough, Mr. Kimura contacted my work place. He

sent one of his employees to bring me the tablet. In the process, I learned his name, his phone number, and the name of his shop. The next time I come to Hirosaki I hope to visit him.

More photos



A lady who took me to Sakata from Tsuruoka. She is a former English teacher. She went out of her way to take me to Sakata, 20 kilometers away, for that was not her destination.



The lunch that driver #4 gave me.



Young man in car #6 holding a tract by John G. Hartnett that exposes evolution as a pseudo -science.



Car #6: A mother with her son and daughter who took me to Akita station.

First Hitchhike Adventure of 2015: Niigata to Osaka



The green line shows my route along the Hokuriku and Meishin expressway from Niigata in the north to Osaka in the south.

January 16, 2015: I had been intending for months to visit my good American friend from the State of Arkansas, Roger. I've especially been meaning to tell him about my new understanding of the [70th Week of Daniel](#)! He lives in the big city of Osaka, Japanese second largest city. Though Osaka is 550 kilometers (344 miles) from home which is 125 kilometers (75 miles) further than Hirosaki in Aomori (my usual destination), it is actually easier to hitchhike to Osaka than Aomori. This is because of an unbroken expressway most of the distance. When I hitchhike to Aomori, I'm mostly traveling on a regular road with stoplights.



The first driver to pick me up.

It was raining the previous evening but good weather the day of this trip. I took public transportation (680 yen or about \$6.00) to Sakai Parking area on the Hokuriku Expressway. Sakae is a convenient place to hitchhike because I can go from there 3 different directions, either to Tokyo, Nagano or towards Osaka which includes Toyama, Ishikawa and Fukui Prefectures. But the parking area is not so big, and sometimes I've had to wait long periods to catch a ride, often an hour, sometimes two hours, and once 3 hours and 40 minutes!

I used to stand near the entrance ramp just before cars re-enter the expressway, but now I stand close to the concession stands where people walk after parking their vehicles. I learned this gives me more opportunity to catch a ride. Anybody who notices me or the A4 paper sign which shows my destination, I try to make eye contact with them and ask them if they would take me. Most say no but some stop to talk and encourage me. And doing so proves to them I can speak and understand their language. One reason why a person may not pick me up is because he or she fears the foreigner (me) cannot communicate with them in Japanese.

Though I have waited for long periods at Sakae parking area, today the very first man I met offered me a ride! He was going to Kashiwazaki, about 40 kilometers away. This was good for me because it took me to a parking area past Niigata Prefecture's second largest city of Nagaoka where most of the drivers would be exiting the expressway.

The young man took me to Ozumi parking area just past Nagaoka. This parking area is smaller than Sakae, but more than half of the traffic will be traveling past the next large city of Kashiwazaki in the direction I want to go. After a relatively short time, a printer from Niigata City took me to Yoneyama service area just past Kashiwazaki.

Yoneyama is much larger than either Ozumi or Sakae, but much of the traffic will only go as far as Joetsu City, and some of the traffic will go toward Nagano Prefecture. It's possible to go to Oaaka through Nagano, but the distance is longer. I would only accept a ride from a man going through Nagano if he were going as far as the cities near the southern edge of Nagano near Nagoya. That would definitely make it work going to Osaka via Nagano because it would be more than half the distance in a single ride. But such a scenario is rare.

After close to an hour wait at Yoneyama I caught a ride from a man going to Toyama city. He took me to Arisoumi service area, a good distance of 125 kilometers, the furthest in a single ride so far today.

After considerable wait for over an hour, a sweet couple from Ueda City in Nagano took me to Oyabegawa service area which is past Toyama city. Oyabegawa SA is large with many cars, but most of them would be going only as far as Kanazawa City in Ishikawa. I needed a ride that would take me past Kanazawa, and preferably to somewhere in Fukui Prefecture.

A gas lady gas station attendant approached me and asked my destination. She said she would tell the customers about me and maybe one of them would offer me a ride. I have been helped before by gas station attendants. A few minutes later she walked me to me with a cup of hot coffee in her hands! I'm not supposed to drink coffee because I consider [caffeine an evil addicting drug which is harmful for health](#), but I accepted her gift and drank it. I don't want to offend the Japanese who show me much kindness.

After 30 some minutes a lady going to Fukui offered me a ride. She took me to Onagatani just before Fukui city. From that point I was more than halfway to Osaka and absolutely positive I would make it that day.

A man saw my Osaka sign and told me he would be going a different direction, to Nagoya. But I realized that he could still take me further down the Hokuriku Expressway before he gets to the junction of the Meishi Expressway from where drivers can go either south to Osaka or north to Nagoya. The man then offered to take me as far as Kanda parking area just before the Maibara junction.

Kanda is a small parking area and I regretted getting off there. I could have gotten off at Shizugatake, a much larger service area though a shorter distance from where the man picked me up. But after only a few minutes, a lady saw my Osaka sign and offered to take me to Taga Service area. Though Taga is not far from Kanda, it is right on the Meishin expressway with all the traffic going my direction.

At Taga after 30 minutes or so, I approached a truck driver who offered me a ride to Suita Service area in Osaka! This was my exact destination and the end of hitchhiking that day. I arrived just a little after 5 p.m., 10 hours after I left home. From Suita it was a short walk to a bus stop from where I caught a 220 yen (\$1.75) bus ride to Minami Senri station, and from there a 15 minute walk to Roger's apartment. Total transportation that day was 900 yen or about \$7.50. The Shinkansen (Bullet train) would have cost 22,000 yen

(\$175.00) and by plane 33,000 yen (\$275)).

Year 2014 – A record year for hitchhiking



The graph shows distances hitchhiked from 2005 to the present.

In 2014 I hitchhiked 28,352 kilometers (17,720 miles). That's 4304 kilometers or 2690 miles more than year 2013– a record to date! The older I get, the easier it is to catch a ride! ☐

December 12, 2014 Adventure to Hirosaki





70 year old man who took me to Akita City. He says he has been married for 50 years.

Today for the first time instead of hitchhiking on lonely Route 345 along the Sea of Japan, I took the train 25 kilometers further to Gatsugi station so I could hitchhike on Route 7 which has more traffic. It was cold but it wasn't raining or snowing as it was the previous week.

Five drivers took me to Hachiryu which is the beginning of a free expressway. I opted to get off there even though the driver said he was going further. Hachiryu (means 8 dragons) is an ideal place to hitchhike because the preponderance of traffic is going the direction I need to go – north. They want to take advantage of the free expressway that goes north from that point. Not many cars would be going south from Hachiryu because the road is a tollroad going south. Tolls are expensive on non-free expressways. Only those people who are in a hurry or those who can easily afford it will take them.

After over 30 minutes wait for a car to stop for me, I was getting desperate. In less than two hours it would be dark. Darkness ends further hitchhiking that day. Finally a lady stopped! I immediately jumped into her car without asking her destination. What a mistake that was! I assumed she would go at least as far as Higashi Noshiro, the second exit going north and another good place to hitchhike. But I was dismayed to learn she would get off at the first exit, Minami Noshiro. I knew both from experience and logic Minami Noshiro is a bad place to hitchhike! Most of the traffic would be going the opposite direction toward where I came from, to the south and not north toward my destination. The lady knew from the sign I was holding that I was going both north and east from that point. Why would she think she was helping me? She wasn't. She actually hindered my journey by picking me up! Nevertheless I was courteous and thanked her. She was on her way to a hospital to be treated for a cold. I gave her a few drops of my peppermint oil and told her to rub it on her nose. Since I have been using peppermint oil, I hardly get a cold anymore.

I knew God would have to do a miracle for me to get me out of my fix. And sometimes He uses my mistakes to get me to meet people I would not have met otherwise.

A man stopped for me. Sure enough, he was going south. I told him no thank you and he drove off. Later I wondered if I should have told him to take me back to Hachiryu. I decided to do so with the next driver who stopped if he or she was going that direction.

After a considerable wait, another lady stopped for me. She was also going south, but when I told her I was going north to Hirosaki and would be passing through Odate (the birthplace of the dog Hachi of the film of the same name starring Richard Gere) , she said she would take me to Odate! It is her home town and it would give her an opportunity to visit her mother. The miracle I

needed! God is good!

The lady is a nurse. Nurses often stop for me. She was glad to hear the Message I shared with her from the Bible. She called me a “happiness doctor.” I really wanted to take her photo but she said no. She is 40, a mother of two daughters, and her husband is 43 centimeters taller than she is! He is 190 cm tall. Not many Japanese are taller than me. I’m 183 cm.

December 5, 2014 Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori



Truck that took me to Aomori City
from Murakami in Niigata.

I wore my warmest coat, hat and gloves for another adventure to Aomori on a cold rainy day. I stood again for more than an hour showing passing drivers my A4 paper sign that says “Tsuruoka”. The place was on [Route 345](#) which runs along the now turbulent [Sea of Japan](#). For some reason there was a lot of trash on the road and sidewalk where I stood. Workers arrived to clean it up. They got closer and closer to me which caused me to walk further up the road to get out of their way.

Finally a driver stopped for me but he took me only 2 or 3 kilometers down the road. Now I was in a windy area. I used my umbrella to shield myself from the wind and intermittent rain.

About 15 minutes later I prayed, “Oh God, please send a car to take me at least to Route 7!” *Immediately* a car with a man and woman stopped for me. They were headed in the opposite direction, the direction I had just come from. “You’re not going to catch a ride to Tsuruoka standing on this road!”, the lady said. “Come with us and we will take you to Route 7 which has more

traffic!"

I knew she was right. Route 7 runs parallel to Route 345. It connects to Route 345 about 25 kilometers from where I was standing. However the man and woman wanted to take me to a point on Route 7 which was closer, and to get there they had to go the opposite direction from my destination. There was a mountain range separating Route 7 from Route 345, and to cross it, they had to go backwards from the direction I was heading. Nevertheless, I agreed to go with them.

About 30 minutes later we arrived at a convenience store on Route 7 in the area called Asahi. I have stood there before several times. "Look, that truck has Sapporo license plates!", said the lady. "Ask the driver to take you." And so I did. Sapporo is the largest city in the northern island of Hokkaido. I knew the driver would be going to Aomori Prefecture, and maybe even to Aomori City where I could stay even cheaper than I could if I only went as far as Hirosaki. Aomori City is a port town in the northern part of the main island of Honshu, some 400 kilometers from where I was in Asahi Town, Murakami City. Ferry boats run from Aomori City to Hakodate in Hokkaido.

The truck driver seemed surprised at my request but he graciously agreed to take me.

It is not common for a truck driver to stop for me or agree to give me a ride. Most truck companies have rules that forbid taking on passengers. They don't want to be liable to a passenger in case of an accident.

The driver's name is Hideki Watanabe. Mr. Watanabe had been driving all the way from Okayama Prefecture, an area the other side of Osaka, some 800 kilometers away. He says he makes the Okayama – Sapporo trip every week! This means if the timing is right, I can meet him in a parking area in Niigata, perhaps even as early as next week when I need to travel again.

Mr. Watanabe said there was an accident on the Expressway in Toyama which closed the road and delayed his trip. If it were not for that, I would not have met him!

Mr. Watanabe was impressed with the music I played him from my tablet PC. When I return back home to Niigata I hope to post it on this site.

I'm using the tablet now to write this post. If I don't write up an adventure as soon as it happens, I often lose interest to write it later when home. Who reads this stuff anyway? If you do, please write me some encouragement in the comments below and perhaps I'll be inspired to write more often and even the past adventures.

October 10, 2014 Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori



Mr. and Mrs. Suehiro who took me from Niigata Murakami City to Kisagata in Yamagata, a distance of 150 some kilometers

October 13, 2014: Today is the first day of a major change in my life. I returned home from my trip to Aomori prefecture to an empty house. My beloved spouse has gone to America to help her daughter's large family of 7 children. Our dog, Lady, was also not in the house but I retrieved her from the lady who is caring for her when I am not home, Yoneko san, whose business is to care for dogs when their master is out of town.

Now that I find myself with more time on my hands, I hope to be more regular in writing about my experiences hitchhiking in Japan. I need to travel nearly every weekend some 400 kilometers up north.

October 10, 2014: It's was a cool Autumn day with a cloudy sky when I arrived at Majima Station on the Ouetsu Line at 7:40 a.m. The station is just 100 meters from Route 345, the road that runs along the Sea of Japan in Niigata Prefecture. The traffic is sparse. The drivers see the paper A4 size sign I am holding and drive on by. The sign says, TSURUOKA, nearly 100 kilometers further up the road, the next major city in Yamagata prefecture which is the neighboring prefecture just to the north of Niigata. Fukushima prefecture happens to be Niigata prefecture's neighbor to the east! FYI most of Fukushima is NOT the nuclear wasteland some people portray it to be. I have passed **many times** pass through Fukushima prefecture since the March 11, 2011, tsumami and nuclear power plant disaster. It's interesting that suddenly a large area of Japan named Fukushima gets the stigma of being a nuclear catastrophe like Chernobyl. Some people, even from the alternative media have called it, "worse than Chernobyl." How can the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster be worse than Chernobyl when you consider only one person that

worked at the Fukushima power plant after the disaster has died? And whether or not that person died as a result of nuclear radiation has *not* been validated!

I know without doubt the drivers of the vehicles passing by me take notice of both me and the paper sign I am holding. They all veer toward the middle of the road as if avoiding to hit me. Even if they didn't veer they wouldn't hit me because I am standing far enough away out of their path. The Japanese are taught to veer away from pedestrians when attending course in driver's school. The Japanese law has zero tolerance for drivers hitting pedestrians. That means even if a pedestrian purposely jumps in front of a vehicle, the driver is still at fault! You can now understand why a driver would take no chances. I wish they would implement such a law in Russia. The most dangerous thing to do in Russia is to walk across a road. The drivers won't even slow down and actually expect you to jump out of their way! I lived in Russia from March 1994 to October 1997 and know what I'm talking about.

It's sometimes a long wait to catch the first ride on Route 345. I have a beautiful view of the ocean which is on my right when turned around facing traffic. Seagulls often fly over my head to keep me entertained. The waves are sometimes choppy and water splashes from time to time all the way to the road where I stand. There is no traffic light to stop the cars but because the road is a lonely one I know from experience that drivers from other areas of Japan will stop for me when they see they are going as far as the sign says I want to go.

Today was such a case. After only a short 10 minute wait, Mr. & Mrs. Suehiro from Kanagawa Prefecture (the prefecture just southwest of Tokyo) stopped for me. They were going all the way to Akita Prefecture! This meant that they would be going past Tsuruoka in Yamagata prefecture and I would be able to skip Yamagata Prefecture entirely! They took me to the Kisagata road station in Akita.

After waiting 20 some minutes at Kisagata, Mr. Saitoh stopped for me. He said he would go to Akita City, a good distance up the road of at least 60 kilometers. Unfortunately he let me off right in the middle of town, a place not well suited for hitchhiking. The traffic was heavy but most of the drivers are not going very far. I have experienced hitchhiking there before and knew I might not catch a ride at such a place, and so I walked backwards pulling my suitcase with wheels and held out the sign of my next destination, NOSHIRO, some 60 kilometer further up the road.

The time was now 12:30 p.m. There was a train leaving at 1:43 from from a train station, Tsuchizaki, which was few kilometers away. I thought I might have time to catch that train if I started walking to the station immediately, but after an hour walk I realized I wouldn't make it. I often walked backward with my thumb out hoping to catch a car, but it was fruitless. The traffic was going by too fast with not much room on the shoulder of the road for them to stop.

At 1:40 p.m. I arrived at the closest point to Tsuchizaki station though still standing next to Route 7. A teenage boy approached me asking if I have a

problem.

"No problem," I replied, "I'm hitchhiking on my way to Aomori City."

"You don't have any money?" he inquired.

"I do."

I reached into my bag and handed him a Gospel tract which he received, and I shook his hand. Handshaking was not part of Japanese custom until fairly recently, say within the last 20 or so years. When I first came to Japan in 1972, I didn't like to shake hands with a Japanese person because they just didn't know how to do a good firm handshake. They do better now.

Though I missed the 1:43 p.m. train, I knew there would be another one around 2:30. I had plenty of time to catch it because the train station was now only a 10 minute walk. Around 2:00 a lady stopped for me and saved me the trouble of walking any further.



Mrs. Hanga

Her name is Mrs. Hanga. She is now the president of a construction company since her husband passed away a few years ago. Mrs. Hanga saw my sign that said NOSHIRO and told me she was going only part way, but it turned out that because she was going all the way to Takanosu which is past Noshiro by a different route, I told her I would be delighted if she would take me to Takenosu! It's much further down the road than I had hoped for.

As we approach Takenosu Mrs. Hanga pointed out the buildings that her company made. That included large stores.

**Six hundred kilometer hitchhike trip
home in record time**



Route from Hirosaki to Niigata

I left Hirosaki in Aomori Prefecture just after 7:00 a.m. and got home in Niigata city by 2:04 p.m.! This is about as good as it gets to travel 600 km or 400 miles in only 7 hours in 5 cars with very little waiting. What's more, the folks that picked me up made the trip really fun!

It's 200 kilometers further to take the Tohoku Expressway rather than Route 7 along the Sea of Japan, but because it is all expressway with drivers going long distances, the potential to return home sooner is high.



Yoshi and Junya Kudoh. They took me from Hirosaki to Shiwa service area in Iwate Prefecture.

I arrived at the Hirosaki / Owani Interchange of the Tohoku Expressway early just before 7:00 a.m. Within minutes two men in a black car pulled up and offered me a ride. They were two brothers, Junya and Yoshi Kudo who was the driver. They past by me once, decided to picked me up, and circled back around to get me.

After getting in the car Yoshi told me they are Japanese Mafia. He said he was in prison for 4 years! I didn't ask him what he did but said I hoped he learned from the experience not to repeat the crime he committed. But Yoshi didn't seem too certain he wouldn't do what he did again.

Since keeping hitchhiking stats from August 2003, so far 6 men have claimed to be in Japanese organized crime. All were friendly and treated me with respect. And of course you can be sure I treat them with respect! They stopped twice at parking areas to rest during which time they bought me ice creme and something to drink. They were on their way to the coast of Miyagi Prefecture to go fishing. I saw their fishing poles. The coast of Miyagi was one of the areas devastated by the tsunami of March 11, 2011.

Shiwa service area was rather desolate with only a few cars. Rather than just hold out my sign, I approached people walking and asked them their destination. After only a few minutes I met Mr. Sasaki on his way to Chiba which is just past Tokyo. He would be passing the Adatara Service area in Fukushima. When I asked him to take me to Adatara, he willingly obliged my request.

Mr. Sasaki is from a town on the Pacific coast in Iwate but he works and lives in a city in Chiba Prefecture. His job is leveling out playgrounds, school grounds and sports areas so that when it rains water doesn't collect anywhere. The ground has to be flat but slightly higher in the center to cause water to flow away. The height to width ration is so slight it's imperceptible to sight.

At the Adatara Service area I met a lady walking her two toy poodles. I bent over the pet the dogs and asked her how far she was going. She replied Koriyama City which is just past the junction of the Banetsu Expressway, the road I needed to take. I knew she wouldn't be going my way. I then complimented her about how lovely her dogs are, and walked away.



Mrs. Harumi and her two toy poodles. She went 100 kilometers out of her way to help me get back home!

A few minutes later the same lady with the dogs came up to me in her car while I was hitchhiking near the exit of the parking area that leads to the expressway. She asked me my final destination. Though I told her Niigata she nevertheless offered to take me to the Bandaisan Service area in Aizu – 100 kilometers out of her way to Koriyama!



Tomoe Okubo who took me to Niigata City from Aizu in Fukushima.

After only a few minutes wait at Bandaisan Service Area, a lady with Ishikawa license plates offered to take me to Niigata. This is on her way home to Nanao in Ishikawa. When I got in the car I saw a book that looked like a Bible. It was a Bible! The lady, Tomoe Okubo, is a Christian and her brother is a pastor. She rejoiced knowing that I am a Christian and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ! Tomoe said that she was coming from Koriyama city where her son is attending high school. It was Sunday and she thought to go to a church in Koriyama that morning, but because her home in Ishikawa is so far, she decided to head out early. God blessed her and me both as a result of her decision not to go the church that morning!

Meeting other Christians for fellowship and worship is indeed a good thing, but organized religion today has become so corrupted that it's hard today to find a good Church to go to. I told her it mostly has to do with the pastor, what kind of man he is, that makes the church good or not. Many American churches are preaching a false prosperity Gospel! It's the *preachers* who are living in prosperity, not their poor members who give to them!

Adventure to Aomori via a new route



The red line shows the route to Hirosaki
I took this trip. The blue line is my
normal route.

In order to save a bit more money, rather than take a train from Niigata city to Murakami, I decided to take that train only as far as Shibata. This placed me directly on Route 7 rather than Route 345 on the Sea of Japan. The last two times hitchhiking on Route 345, I had to wait over an hour to catch the first ride. I thought perhaps my chances would be better on Route 7.

The first driver was a professional cook. He took me only as far as Tainai City, a few kilometers down the road.

The second driver was a lady who saw my sign (I often hold up A4 size signs in Japanese showing my destination) which shown my next destination as Murakami city. But she was going only as far as the entrance of Murakami and dropped me off at a place I had rather not have gotten off at.

The day was a traffic and pedestrian safety campaign day of the Niigata police department. There were many traffic cops visible. One policeman saw me hitchhiking and told me it was dangerous to stand where I stood on the road. It wasn't just any road, but a major national highway he said! But there was plenty of room on the side of the road for cars to stop. I didn't feel any

danger in the least. Nevertheless the policeman took down all my personal information and let me go after advising me to take a train!



Hiroaki Abe, the truck driver who took me to Tsuruoka City in Yamagata Prefecture.

Now I felt I was in a yet more difficult situation. I prayed I wouldn't see the same policeman again and get a ride quickly. After walking up the road a couple more traffic lights after only a few minutes I saw a man walking up to me. His name was Hiroaki Abe and he offered to take me as far as Tsuruoka City in his truck! It's not common that truck drivers pick me up these days. Mr. Abe is a very friendly guy. We had constant conversation and he even became my Facebook friend!



Pedro who took me from Tsuruoka to Shiwa SA in Iwate Prefecture

At Tsuruoka after a relatively short wait, an older man saw my Sakata sign and offered to take me there. His Christian name is Pedro and is one of the few Japanese I've met with some Christian background. When he said he was going all the way to Morioka city in Iwate Prefecture, I decided to go with him rather than go only 20 kilometers further with him to Sakata. The route to Iwate took me on roads crossing Yamagata Prefecture that I've never been on before. And it took me to roads and places such as Shinjo, Yokote and Yuzawa, cities I haven't been to in over 30 years. Pedro took me to Shiwa Service area on the Tohoku Expressway.

As you can see from the map above, going the way Pedro took me is actually a much longer route than the one I normally take via Route 7. Readers of my hitchhike adventures on this blog know that I usually take the Tohoku Expressway on my way back to Niigata, but not from Niigata to Aomori. Today was a notable exception. The reason why the Tohoku expressway is not necessarily better going north than it is going south is because the amount of traffic significantly decreases past Morioka City. But because Pedro was going so far, I applied another principle I learned in hitchhiking: *The closer I can get to my destination in a single ride, the better!*

I was now at the Shiwa Service area just before Morioka, but after an hour wait I still couldn't find a driver going past Morioka! I could have saved that hour wait by going all the way to Morioka with Pedro. As it turned out, I accepted a ride from a lady going to Morioka with the hope that my chances would be better from Morioka. But who knows? I believe nothing happens by accident. Maybe God wanted me to meet that particular lady.

The lady dropped me off just on the other side of the toll gate of the Morioka interchange. It was a good place to hitchhike because the cars are going slow at that point, but because I've often been kicked out by expressway workers from the area near the tollbooth (where normal pedestrians do not go), I usually hitchhike at the normal highway which leads to the toll booth. But the lady told me the cars would be going too fast to stop for me at that point and wanted to drop me off near the toll booth, and so I let her.



Midori and Miki who took me from Morioka to Hirosaki in Aomori Prefecture.

I prayed desperately to get a ride before being asked to leave the area. In only a few minutes, two ladies stopped and offered me a ride. Their names are Midori and Miki and they were on their way to Mutsu City in Aomori. Because Mutsu is on the east, they would not normally be going past Hirosaki but would take a junction that leads to Hachinohe, way out of my way. I therefore asked them to drop me off at the Iwatesan Service Area which is just before the junction that goes to Hachinohe. But the girls seemed to like to talk to me and decided to go out of their way and take me all the way to Hirosaki! This was not only more time for them, but it cost more money for the toll on the expressway. Most of the expressways in Japan are toll roads. Midori and Miki went 63 kilometers out of their way to take me to Hirosaki.

I got to Hirosaki by 6:30 p.m. about an hour later than I usually do. Perhaps I won't be taking the Tohoku Expressway route to Aomori in the future. □

February – March 2014 Adventure in Kansai



February 28, Day 1

It's the first day of a one week adventure traveling mainly by hitchhiking! I'm on my way to Kansai of which the principle cities are Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe. Today's destination was Osaka.



Mr. Washio, the Subaru Car Company worker who previously picked me up two weeks before.

I hitchhiked again from Niigata City to Osaka. This time I made it in record time arriving directly at my friend's house at 4:50 P.M.! And it was totally void of any cost for transportation.

The first driver was a young man, Mr. Washio. I met him three weeks before during my last trip to Osaka. He took me to the same place as before on Route 8.

In less than a minute waiting on Route 8 a driver stopped and took me close to the Sanjo-Tsubame Interchange of the Hokuriku Expressway. Normally from that point I would take a highway bus 6 kilometers further up to the Sakae parking area, but this time I felt led to hitchhike at the interchange, a practice I used to do. This was probably the main reason I arrived to Osaka so quickly, for at 9:15 a.m. a man going all the way to Kanazawa picked me up! Kanazawa is just over half the distance to Osaka, about 300 kilometers from home. Catching a ride at the interhchange saved time waiting for the bus and the time I probably would have waited at Sakae.

The driver's name was Mr. Shimada. He has a rather dangerous job of repairing the surface of the insides of underground gasoline tanks at gas stations. Sometimes they explode sending the worker flying in the air.

Mr. Shimada took me to Oyabegawa Service area in Toyama Prefecture. I choose to get off there rather than go all the way to Kanazawa before it's always best to hitchhike at major service areas of the expressway rather than get off the expressway and hitchhike at the interchange entrance.



Young man from Fukuoka who has been hitchhiking for the past 40 days in Hokkaido and Tohoku

At Oyabegawa, lo and behold, I saw another hitchhiker was standing waiting for cars! He was a young man from Fukuoka City in Kyushu. His signboard says, "Ishikawa" the next prefecture past Toyama. As I talked with him two other men approached us. One asked me how old I am, "I'm 63," I replied. He put his

hands on my shoulders and said, "You're really healthy and going strong!" The second man offered to take both me and the young man hitchhiker to Tokumitsu Service Area in Ishikawa which is just past Kanazawa.

At Tokumitsu I parted with the young man saying it was best we stand in different places. The place where he stood gave him the first opportunity to meet people while I stood near the exit of the service area just before cars reenter the expressway. An older couple on their way to Fukui stopped. They said they saw the young man which meant I caught the first ride.



Mr. Sakamoto who took me to my very destination in Osaka.

The final Car, driver #8, took me from Taga Service Area in Shiga Prefecture all the way to my very destination in Osaka! He name is Mr Sakamoto and he was very friendly and talkative.

March 1st. Day 2

Today my goal was to hitchhike to Kainan City in Wakayama Prefecture to meet up with a Facebook friend, Naomi, who I had never met face to face before. We have been in touch for at least a couple years. She's an English teacher. I first came in contact with her after she saw my web page about fixing Japanese paper shoji doors and wrote me an email about it.

I had never tried to hitchhike to Wakayama Prefecture before and didn't know the roads well. Mr. Sakamoto from the day before advised me to stand at the Chou Kanjo bypass entrance which is just a 10 minute walk from where I was. In only a few minutes a man in a light truck stopped. He said he would take me to entrance of the Kinki Expressway which connects to an expressway going to Wakayama.

The spot where I ended up was too dangerous to hitchhike. There was a great amount of traffic. Cars were whizzing by past me too fast. I left the Chou Kanjo bypass and searched for a safer place on the regular road that would run into the Kinki Expressway entrance.

After walking a considerable distance getting lost and walking even the wrong direction, two people gave me guidance and I found a good road to hitchhike on. I held out to the drivers a paper sign that says "To Kinki Expressway" but everybody ignored me. I realized then that most of those drivers would probably *not* be entering the Kinki Expressway.



Mr. Aoki, the Nichirensu truck driver who took me to the Kinki Expressway entrance.

It was still 9:00 a.m. and my appointment in Kainan was not until 2:p.m. I was pacing myself. If I could not get a ride in an hour, I would take the train so as not to be late for the appointment.

About 30 minutes later a truck driver offered to take me further up the road which would bring me to the very entrance of the Kinki. He name is Mr. Aoki and he was driving a large truck, the kind that normally does not stop for me. Mr. Aoki is a member of the Nichirensu Buddhist sect. He zealously explained the doctrines of Nichiren, but they made no sense to me at all. However Mr. Aoki is such a friendly guy, and we became Facebook friends.



Mr. Tatebayashi who took me to Kainan city in Wakayama Prefecture. Behind him is his friend who will accompany him to see the other friend in the hospital.

The final ride was a total miracle! After about 30 minutes, a man on his way home to another part of Osaka stopped for me. His name is Mr. Tatebayashi and he seemed surprised to learn I was on my way to Kainan city. Kainan is his home town and he was thinking of going there to see a friend in the hospital who just had a serious automobile accident. Though Mr. Tatebayashi was on his way back home without intending to go to Kainan that day, he decided to go there for my sake and because he needed to make the trip eventually anyway!

He told me a Japanese proverb I had often heard from drivers while traveling, "Tabi wa michizure, yo wa nasake" which means, "No road is long with good company". I arrived at Kainan City a little before 11 a.m. – 3 hours before my appointment to see Naomi.

March 2st. Day 3

Today I successfully hitchhiked from the Suita Service Area in Osaka to Otsu City in Shiga. This is going back the direction I came from Niigata. But it's not far and was a piece of cake to get to.

The first car were 3 ladies. The driver said they were on their way to Kyoto and could not take me to Otsu. I asked if she would take me only as far as the Katsuragawa Service area just before Kyoto. No problem she said.



The driver of the first car which took me close to Kyoto.

They were on their way to a concert. All were friendly and talkative. Most Japanese find it interesting that a man of my age travels by hitchhiking.

The second car was a young couple married only two years. When I told them I do Christian wedding ceremonies, they asked me if I could do the wedding vows for them. I replied the vows first to the husband and then his wife. The both replied, "Hai, chikaimasu!" "I affirm."



The married couple who took me to Otsu.

March 9, Day 10

I hitchhiked back to Niigata from Osaka in 5 cars. The last car was a nice couple who asked to photograph me. I subsequently photographed them!



A couple who took me from Nadachitanihama SA to Mitsuke station which is only a short train ride home.

February 26, 2014 Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori



Route 345 and the Sea of Japan near Majima Station, Murakami City, Niigata Prefecture.

Today was partially overcast with dark snow clouds. It snowed from time to time. Nevertheless I made it as far as Odate City in 8 vehicles.

Car #2 was Mr. Kawahara who works with Honda motor company selling car parts.

I may see him again at the local Home Center in March. He took me to Tsuruoka city. From there a lady took me a bit further to the Route 7 bypass in Tsuruoka.

Car #4 was Mr. Masayuki Morita who took me from Tsuruoka City to exactly where I wanted to go in Sakata City, about 20 kilometers up the road. His destination was actually only part way to Sakata. Mr. Morita understands hitchhikers well because he himself is an experienced hitchhiker who traveled 10 years ago all the way to the southern end of Kyushu island to the city of Kanoshima! It took him 5 days!

It was snowing rather heavily when I got to Ikura Sakura just past Akita City. A lady, driver #7, offered me a ride. She saw my sign that said "Noshiro" which is the next major town up the road. Before getting in the car, the lady confessed to me she suffers from panic attacks. After sitting next to her in the front seat, I immediately laid my hand on her shoulder and prayed for her healing in the Name of Jesus Christ! She smiled and seemed to appreciate it. She's on medicine. I told her panic attacks is a spiritual problem that can only be solved through spiritual – good counseling and reading wholesome books, especially the Bible.



Ishikawa in HIrosaki City, a scene on my way walking to the Tohoku expressway IC.



Truck that took me to Chojahara SA
in Miyagi Prefecture.

The next day on the way back I successfully hitchhiked all the way home on the Tohoku Expressway! The very first vehicle was a truck on the way to Sendai. It's very rare for long distance truck drivers to pick me up these days.

The second car was two ladies on their way to Murata city just past Sendai. I was thankful to go with them to get past Sendai. They took me to Sugo parking area.



Tourist Bus to
Adatara SA

The 3rd vehicle was a tourist bus with two ladies, the driver and the guide! I think this is only the 3rd or 4th time ever to get picked up by a bus! They took me to Adatara SA which is just before the Banetsu Junction in Fukushima

Prefecture. It was getting dark by the time we arrived which made a blurry photo.

Mid Winter Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori



Route 345 near Majima station, Murakami City, Niigata Prefecture

February 15, 2014 According to yesterday's weather forecast, I expected it to snow all day and was prepared to take a train from Niigata City to Hirosaki in Aomori Prefecture. But at 7:30 a.m. because the weather was fair, I decided to get off the train at Majima station and hitchhike.

The traffic was sparse. After 30 minutes waiting at the spot on the road which you see in the photo, I decided to walk. This way I would stay warmer. I hoped drivers would take pity on me seeing me in a more isolated spot away from the town. Today was the longest walk I had up Route 345 – a full hour. A man in a fine car offered to take me 10 kilometers further. Later he decided to take me as far as Route 7 which was much better for me. Route 7 is the main highway going to Hirosaki.



Couple who took me 190 kilometers
to Akita Station

After a relatively short wait near the intersection of Route 7 and Route 345, a couple on their way to Akita City pulled up and offered me a ride. Going all the way to Akita city in a single ride is outstanding! It has taken me as

many as 6 cars to get that distance! The ride was a good 3 hours. They were interested in why I hitchhike and all the various experiences I've had hitchhiking.

From Akita station I took a train to Ikawa Sakura station, 400 yen distance, and hitchhiked again. Three vehicles with two drivers who were ladies took me to Odate Station from where I got a train the rest of the way. It started to snow and was getting dark by the time I got to Odate.



Route 7 Nagamine, Akita Prefecture. Home is 400 kilometers ahead.

After my business the next day, I took a train to Nagamine Station and hitchhiked on the road you see in the photo above. The driver, a young man, took me to the desolate area you see in the photo which was about 15 kilometers further up the road.



Part way from Nagamine to Odate.

I didn't exactly relish getting off there because I knew traffic would be sparse, but the first driver who saw me stopped! It was a light truck. The driver was on his way to Odate City. He took me to the entrance of the bypass which would take me to the other side of Odate.



Miss Ako who took me to Akita Station from Odate, about 100 kilometers distance.

My last experience at that location was a long wait of over an hour. I decided to now show my sign showing the destination of Akita City and held out my thumb instead. I learned there is a time to use a sign, and not to use one. It bore fruit and I got a ride to the other side of Odate from an older gentleman only a few minutes later. He took me to a convenience store and advised me to wait for cars from customers who stop at the store. He also advised me to show drivers my Akita sign. I heeded his advice. Only a few minutes a young lady pulled up, smiled and offered me a ride!

Her name is Ako Yoshida, 36, single and works as a personnel director at a shopping center in Odate. It was very pleasant to talk to her the next hour. I hope to see her again.

2014 Winter Hitchhike Adventure to Osaka



On a snowy morning of January 17, after a 5 minute bike ride to the local train station where I park my bicycle and from where I walk to the highway, just a few meters away from the station my right foot slipped on the snow, hit a rock in the road, and my ankle twisted badly with excruciating pain! January 17th was to be the first long hitchhike trip this year. I was headed to Tokyo which is about 300 kilometers or 188 miles from home.

I hobbled back to the train station to inspect the damage. My ankle was visibly swollen as you see in the photo. I thought I might still be OK to travel. There was a train coming soon that would take me as far as the Hokuriku Expressway interchange. But upon further reflection and increasing pain, I decided to abort the trip. Thankfully I didn't have to limp in pain back home. I had the bicycle to ride back with.



Medical equipment consultants from Sendai. They took me from Yoneyama SA to Kureha parking area in Toyama Prefecture.

After praying for healing in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and applying a liberal amount of God's natural peppermint oil from the [Young Living Essential Oils](#) company thanks to the good advice of my friend Jonas who lives in Satama, by February 7th the ankle healed to the point I could walk without a limp again! There was no urgent need to travel to Tokyo at this time, and because my friends in Kyoto and Otsu city in the Kansai area wanted to see me, so I decided to travel to Kansai which includes Osaka and Kobe.

The first destination was Osaka, 606 kilometers or 379 miles from where I live in Niigata City. It's only 40 some minutes drive past Kyoto. This time I hitchhiked it in 9 vehicles in 13 hours. This includes time walking from home to the local highway, and taking a short bus ride in Osaka. The total cost of transportation was 210 yen or about \$2.00 US.

It took me two rides to get to the Hokuriku expressway in Sanjo city, about 27 kilometers from home. The second car was a man in his 70s. He stopped about 100 meters up Route 8. I wasn't sure he was stopping for me but sure enough, he was! The man was on his way to Nagaoka City. He graciously took me to Sakae parking area which saved me the usual 180 yen bus fare from Sanjo where most people drop me off.

The weather was mostly fair. It snowed a little bit at Yoneyama service area. In this part of Japan sprinklers are used to melt the snow. I had to be careful where I walked not to get my feet or legs wet.

I got stuck for about an hour at Fudojo parking area just before Kanazawa. A van with 4 ladies and 2 men took me just past Kanazawa to Tokumitsu SA, a much larger service area. This is the halfway mark and it was only 2 p.m.! I knew I would make it to Osaka that day.



Driver #8: Man from Noda City who took me from Onagatani parking just before Fukui City to Shizugataka Service Area in Shiga Prefecture.

The final car, #9, was the most fun. A lady with 4 young children on her way to Kobe saw my Osaka sign and pulled over. She spoke in English and asked me what I was doing. I told her I am a missionary who shares the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the Japanese. She asked me for an ID and I handed her my alien registration card. Normally people do not interrogate me before boarding their vehicle, but I could understand her concern seeing that the ages of her four children ranged from 14 to only 11 months old! Her name is Kanako and she became convinced I am who I say I am and told me to get in the back with her 3 younger children.

It was fun because I was able to help car for the 11 month old baby. I fed him small pieces of bread. When he began to cry Kanako asked me to sing him, "Amazing Grace". The baby stopped crying immediately! And I had a lively conversation with Kanako who lived 4 years in Kentucky studying at a university. First we spoke mostly in English but then for some reason toward the end she switched to Japanese. Was it to test me? If so, I passed.

After visiting friends in Osaka, Kyoto and Otsu city in Shiga Prefecture which is the neighboring city to Kyoto, I hitchhiked back to Niigata from Otsu Service area in only 4 vehicles.



American Sherry and Japanese
Takashi



Takashi's and Sherry's 3 legged
dog.

The drivers of car #2 who took me to Toyama Prefecture from Shiga were the most interesting. It was a Japanese / American couple, Takashi and Sherry who were on their way home. They had 3 little dogs with them, and one of the dogs only has 3 legs! It was born that way. They rescued it from an animal shelter.

I love dogs and showed her the photos of the 3 dogs I've cared for so far since living in Niigata. Sherry is from Sacramento where I used to live when an Airman stationed at McClellan AFB in 1971. I was very impressed at how well Takashi spoke English and the amount of his vocabulary. He even knows words like "oxymoron". Probably 99% of Japanese people who speak English do not know that word.

The last driver, car number 4 was on his way to Noda City in Chiba. At first he said he would take me to Nadachitanihama which is just before Joetsu City but then changed his mind and took me all the way to Ozumi Parking area just before Nagaoka.

The man is a mountain climber who climbed most of the famous mountains in Japan. He also climbed mountains in the USA, and hitchhiked with two other men from Yosemite Park in California to Yellowstone park in Wyoming. It took them four days!

It was dark when I arrived at Ozumi parking area near Nagaoka. The parking area is small and the cars few. But this parking area had a convenient highway bus stop which many parking areas do not have, and it was only 10 minutes wait till the next bus. I took it to Tsubame Sanjo. From there I walked about an hour to Higashi Sanjo station, and then took a train home. The total cost of transportation that day was 1070 yen, about \$11.00.

[End of Year 2013 Hitchhiking Stats](#)



This year I hitchhiked 24,048 kilometers (15,030 miles) which is 4518 kilometers more than my previous record of 19,530 kilometers in 2009! The chart below shows the years from 2005 to 2013 the distances in kilometers traveled by hitchhiking.



At 15.4088 yen per kilometer on a local train, it means I saved 370,551 yen this year.

[Rainy Autumn day trip to Aomori City and Back](#)



October 25, 2013: My destination was Aomori City, 470 kilometers from home. I hitchhiked from Murakami City as far as Sakata City in Yamagata Prefecture, a distance about 90 kilometers. After that I had to abort due to rain.

It was worth the effort! Mrs. Fujiwara picked me up for the 6th time and she seemed happier than ever to do so. After her a young doctor who works as an anesthesiologist took me nearly all the way to Sakata. He left me near a highway viaduct. I stood under it while hitchhiking to be protected from the rain. Cars trucks were whizzing past at high speed! Often I had to draw back

from the road to keep from getting splashed with water. It was an undesirable situation to say the least, but I had plenty of time to spare. After 20 minutes Mr. and Mrs Mikuni picked me up and took me to Sakata Station from where I caught a train.

The Return Trip:



Yuzo Yamada and his friend. They took me nearly half the distance home by taking from from Hirosaki to the Chojahara service area which is not far from Sendai.

A bus of people, all 65 years old, who went to the same elementary school in Ofunato city, took me to Kunimi service area in Fukushima Prefecture. It's pretty rare for the bus driver to offer me a free ride! He did because the passengers liked me. Ofunato city is one of the towns that was devastated by the tsunami of March 11, 2011. One lady told me she was trapped on the second floor of a building. The tsunami washed out the stairway! About an hour later the fire department rescued her.□



The bus and some of the people who took me to Fukushima Prefecture.

After a few minutes wait at Kunimi, a couple offered me a ride as far as the Fukushima Matsukawa parking area which is just past Fukushima City. But after talking with me a few minutes, they decided to take me as far as the Adatara Service Area which is much larger and just before the Banetsu expressway junction. It is an idea place to catch cars going on the Banetsu expressway toward Aizuwakamatsu and Niigata.



Mr. Negishi who went over 60 miles out of his way for me to take me home! He also bought me lunch.

A man named Mr. Negishi stopped for me. Though he was on his way to Tokyo, he said he would take me to Aizu on the Banetsu expressway. After getting on the Banetsu, he said he would take me all the way home! I replied, "But going to Tokyo via Niigata is way out of your way!" He replied, "I don't have to be home till evening and so I don't mind. Later I calculated the extra distance to be exactly **245 kilometers or 153 miles** out of his way! It turned out that Mr. Negishi is a kindred spirit because he himself used to hitchhike when he was young. "I was very poor then," he said.

Autumn Hitchhike Adventure to Shizuoka, Osaka and Toyama



From October 4th to 6th over three days I traveled in 15 cars 1358 kilometers or 849 miles passing through Tokyo to Hamamatsu City in Shizuoka Prefecture, and then to Osaka, and then back home to Niigata. Total transportation costs was 590 yen, about \$6.00. The trip was one of the most fun ever! You can be the judge of that by seeing the photos.

The hardest part of the trip to Hamamatsu City from Niigata is crossing the Tokyo area to get from the Kanetsu Expressway to the Tomei Expressway. I did it in a single car from Echigo Kawaguchi in Niigata Prefecture! The driver was on his way to visit his daughter who lives near Ebina service area on the Tomei. I was now certain I would get to Hamamatsu before dark.



The green sign shows day 1 of my journey, the hardest part going around Tokyo. The red line is day 2 to Osaka, and the blue line shows my return along the Sea of Japan.



Mrs. Tamami who took me from Ebina SA in Kanagawa to Ashigara SA in Shizuoka.



Yorika and friends who took me to Hamamatsu from Ashigara

I arrived at Mikatahara Parking Area at 3:40 p.m. My final destination that

day is still 15 some kilometers, too far to walk. A driver saw me looking confused and asked me where I wanted to go. He took me to Kamijima station about 2.5 kilometers away. From there I took two trains to my friend's house.



Mr. Kohara who took me to Nagoya on the way to Osaka.



The "Kansha Box" that Mr. Kohara gave me. Kansha is the Japanese word for thankfulness. Shinto priests pour rice wine in it and give it to the bride and groom on their wedding day..

On my way to Osaka, Takayuki Kohara took me to a parking area near Nagoya. He asked a stranger to take this photo, and then when we found out the man was going to Osaka, Mr. Kohara asked him if he would let me ride with him. He did! Mr. Kohara is newly married only one month ago. He gave me a gift of the wooden box. In Japanese weddings the bride and groom and relatives drink rice wine out of it.



A man driving a Porsche took me 200 plus kilometers from Otsu SA near Kyoto to Kanazawa City in Ishikawa Prefecture. This is half way home to Niigata. He said supernatural events happened that convinced him he and his family are being protected by a power from on High.

His mother was in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb fell and only 3000 some feet away from ground zero while waiting for a train at Hiroshima Station! Her hair burned away and suffered burns on her skin, but she survived though most of the people around her died. And she had 3 normal children and now normal grandchildren and is still going strong!

His older sister and her son was saved from the fatal Jumbo 747 crash that killed 500 people in Gunma Prefecture in 1985. Her son got a fever just before the flight and so she decided not to take it.

He says there were yet more miracles of protection.

The last driver to take me was Koichi Takagi, 25, who is studying to be a doctor. We met at Oyabegawa Service area in Toyama Prefecture. Koichi asked me if I wouldn't mind him stopping for an hour or so at the Toyama Coast off Uozu City so he could do some spearfishing. He told me he would take me all the way home, and so I readily agreed. I had no idea he would actually be

diving in the water and disappearing for a whole hour! Below are the photos:



[April 2013 Hitchhike Adventure to Tokyo](#)



The other day, (September 13, 2013) I ran into a man at a park who said he picked me up hitchhiking during Spring this year! His name is Katsuhiro Itoh. He took me from Sakae parking near Sanjo City to Echigokawaguchi SA. He told me he checked out this website but didn't see the photo I took of him! Apparently I promised him I would post it. I felt bad about that and made a note to find the photo I took of Mr. Itoh and post it. Though I have not always faithfully wrote up each and every hitchhike adventure on this blog, I have kept records of names, places and distances in an MS Excel format file. Sure enough, I found the entry of the trip and all the information I need to write this belated post!



Mr. Bamba who took me from Niigata City to Kamo. He said this is the second time for him to pick me up! The first time was in 2012.



Katsuhiro Itoh and his cherry picker truck. He took me to Echigokawaguchi. I met him again on September 13.



Another man named Itoh, a software developer. He took me in that tiny

sports car to Ikebukero in Tokyo!



People crossing the street in front of Shibuya Station in Tokyo.