

Adventure hitchhiking to Okabe station in Saitama



Nov. 6, 2010: Today my destination was Konosu city in Saitama Prefecture, some 250 kilometers from home. I got to Okabe station on the Takasaki line in 4 cars. The third vehicle was Mr. Mrs. Noda, dentists who live in Kamo City in Niigata Prefecture. Every time I meet a dentist, I always show them my teeth and they exclaim how nice they are. I inherited exceptionally strong teeth from my mother who had all of hers up to when she turned 80. I'm 60 years old and never had a cavity.

The Nodas took me to the Yorii parking area on the Kan'etsu expressway which is not far from Hanazono interchange. I hoped to catch a ride exiting the expressway at Hanazono that was going in the direction of Kumagaya city, the big city not far from Konosu. But after waiting over 30 minutes with no success, I opted to leave the parking area out the back parking area workers' gate and try to catch a ride on the regular road. I never got off the Kan'etsu expressway at Yorii before and was unfamiliar with the area. I soon learned it is an especially remote place, far from a large city, and there was no traffic along the country road I was walking on! I only had the setting sun to my back to know I was going in the right direction. I've joked sometimes that because Japan is so small with so many trains, if you walk in any direction for any length of time, you are bound to arrive at a train station that goes somewhere. This is true but that "length of time" could be very long indeed if you are deep in the country like I was. It would have taken me well over an hour to walk it, and I was hauling a rather heavy piece of luggage.

Finally a car approached me. The nice thing about being deep in the country is that usually the very first car will stop, and so was the case today. The driver was glad to give me a lift to the closest station for he was going that way. I would have walked further than I needed to without him not knowing the roads.

Ten day hitchhike adventure circling central Japan



The red line is the route I traveled by hitchhiking.

October 24 to Nov. 3, 2010: I hitchhiked 1390 kilometers in 18 vehicles to cities in the Kanto plain (Tokyo and vicinity), Osaka, and then returned home by a different route along the Sea of Japan. As you can see from the map, I didn't hitchhike the entire distance. On two occasions friends happened to be going toward my destination and gave me a lift, and several times I had to take trains for expediency sake.



Tokyo Bay
Aqua-Line

I traveled along the Tokyo Bay Aqua-Line for the very first time, a bridge and tunnel that crosses Tokyo bay. By car this is the fastest way to get from southern Chiba to Kawasaki bypassing the traffic congested Tokyo area and saving 65 kilometers in distance. I had wondered how it could be possible to build a bridge that spans the bay at one point and goes into the bay midway, but as you can see from the photo on the right, the bridge reaches a man made island at the point the tunnel begins.

Because I had to take three trains from Kawasaki after getting off the Aqua line to get back to the expressway at Kokuho parking area on the Tomei, I wondered if I really *did* save time. It was a case of a "bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" because the driver just happened to be going that direction and getting rides through Tokyo was far less certain. I wanted to be in Osaka that evening to avoid the rains of a coming Typhoon, and so

spending 770 yen train fare to help speed my journey seemed worth the money.

I met a hitchhiker while heading toward Osaka at the Kohoku parking area on the Tomei expressway, a lady from France who was going to Shimoda, the southern city of the Izu peninsular in Shizuoka Prefecture. It's very rare to see other hitchhikers in Japan, and this is the first time ever to find a female hitchhiking, an older lady at that! She said she's older than me so that would be in her mid 60s. I felt sorry for her because her Japanese is not very good though she says she's lived in Japan already for 10 years, and because her destination was rather hard to get to, mostly by low road. I told her it would be better if we hitchhike together. I found the Japanese are more apt to pick up male/female couples. The first car, a married couple, took us to Ebina service area past Atsugi, and the second driver took her as far as Ashigara near Mt. Fuji.

Hitchhiking on a rainy day to Saitama



Hisami and Toshio Yamaguchi. They went out of their way to take me to Sakae PA on the Hokuriku Expressway

October 15, 2010: Today was cloudy with light showers from time to time. I needed be in the city of Kumagaya in Saitama Prefecture by 10:30AM the next day for important business. My destination was Noda city in Chiba Prefecture, about 300 kilometers from home. Noda is close to Tokyo to the northeast. From there I would make it in two trains to Kumagaya in plenty of time if I left by 8AM.

The first ride, Mr. and Mrs. Yamaguchi who were heading to Nagaoka City by regular road, went out of their way for me to take me to Sakae Parking area on the Hokuriku expressway. After waiting slightly over an hour at Sakae and getting a bit impatient, a man from the Tohoku Power Co. offered to take me

to Muika Machi, nearly a 1/3 of my journey. He took me to the Muika Machi interchange.

After a few minutes it started to rain. I spotted a Jusco department store only a couple hundred meters away and walked to it. By the time I got there, it began raining pretty hard. I was glad to have shelter and eat lunch at the Jusco.

Thirty minutes later the rain stopped and I walked back to the interchange. After about 15 minutes, a Noodle shop man took me to Echigo Yuzawa, about 22 kilometers further. He looked different from most Japanese because of his long sideburns, something uncommon in Japan. There is a Parking Area called Ishiuchi about 6 kilometers before Echigo Yuzawa, but I didn't want to get off there because there were only a dozen cars parked in the area. That might have been a mistake because things did not go according to expectation at Echigo Yuzawa! Half a dozen drivers offered me rides, but they were all going back in the direction I just came from. This is just the opposite of what I experienced at the same place a couple years ago! I was heading home to Niigata, but all the drivers were going the opposite way toward Tokyo.

After waiting over an hour, it was getting dark just a little after 5PM. I checked the train time with my cell phone's Internet connection and found a train leaving at 5:56PM. This train with its connections would get me to Noda before midnight. The station was about a 20 minute walk from the interchange and I started walking toward it going up route 17 with traffic heading to Saitama and still holding out a paper sign showing my destination in a last ditch effort to catch a ride. It paid off! A kind man who sells Japanese pastries took me as far as Shinmachi Station on the Takasaki line in Saitama Prefecture! This saved me over 2000 yen and at least an hour of time because he took the expressway which is much faster than local trains.

[Hitchhike adventure to Misawa city, Aomori city, Saitama prefecture Soka city, \(next to Tokyo\) Niigata city](#)



On October 8th, 2010, from Sendai, the largest city in the northeastern area of Japan, I hitchhiked in 8 vehicles to the city of Misawa in Aomori Prefecture. Misawa city is host to a US Air Force military base. Yours truly served the Air Force and the government of the United States of America from February 10, 1970, to February 9, 1974. I appreciated the discipline of military life, and seriously considered before my tour of duty expired to continue my server my government, the United States of America. However, after 3 years and 9 months left in my military duty, I felt called to a higher calling. I wanted to do more in life than follow my wife's shopping cart when buying groceries to feed me and the rest of the family. I felt called to be an ambassador to the Kingdom of the Creator, Jesus, Yeshua.

Every person I encounter in life is a unique experience for me to understand why the Creator made us like Him but yet so different from each other. A few of the kind Japanese people who picked me up:





Hitchhike adventure to Sendai through Fukushima



22 year old Takeshi who took me to Nihonmatsu

Oct. 6, 2010: Today was one of those “as good as it gets” experiences when hitchhiking in Japan. I traveled on a rainy day in 6 cars some 250 kilometers from Niigata to Sendai, the largest city in the Tohoku area. It was ALL on normal highway! Usually I try to catch cars that are going on the expressway, but I learned from experience that it’s not easy to do so going from Niigata. There are too few cars going east on the Ban’etsu expressway that goes to Fukushima. Route 49 is slower but surer.

My purpose was to visit friends to fix their PC. The hard disk on their PC was registering an Ultra DMA CRC error count of 9478, and I believed that to be the cause of it failing from time to time.

The rain was light and intermittent. I didn’t think it would be too much of a problem. Normally I try to avoid hitchhiking in the rain, but I had a certain schedule to follow that made traveling today unavoidable.

A truck driver, Mr. Miura, took me in a single ride from Niigata to Route 4 near Koriyama city in Fukushima. He was driving a rather large truck. It’s pretty rare these days for truck drivers to stop for me. I couldn’t be in a better situation than to go directly to Route 4, for it was well over half way to my destination and a straight shot to Sendai.

On Route 4, the first driver was 22 year old Takeshi. He took me to the Nihonmatsu interchange on the Tohoku Expressway. Takeshi told me that the people of Fukushima are very kind, and I certainly found that to be true considering the ones I met later! He would have taken me as far as Fukushima, but I had hoped to catch a car going on the Tohoku expressway and save a bit of time. After waiting some minutes at the expressway entrance, I realized I

made a mistake. There were too few cars going on the expressway and it was likely I would have to wait a few long time to catch a ride. I walked back to Route 4 which was a good kilometer away from the interchange.

The next driver, Mr. Motoyuki, (27) said he used to be a professional boxer but quit after too many losses. Now he sells supplies to beauty salons. Mr. Motoyuki took me to Fukushima city.

The next driver was a man who sells motorbikes. He took me to Mikuni.

After about 15 minutes standing at a traffic light with an umbrella over my head during a light rain, a man pulled up and offered me a ride. He saw my sign, turned around and came back from me. His name is Mr. Aizawa. Though he had just come from Sendai, some 70 kilometers further, he offered to take me there, all the way to my destination! This meant he was willing to go 140 kilometers out of his way just to help me! I protested saying that I didn't want to trouble him, but he insisted saying he wanted to help a person in need. Mr. Aizawa is a caretaker for elderly people. I often get rides from people whose job it is to care for others. I had a great time sharing with Mr. Aizawa basic truths from the Bible, especially from the first 3 chapters of the book of Genesis, and he seemed to enjoy and appreciate it.

[Return trip from Saitama](#)



Oct. 3, 2010: Today I hitchhiked from Sayama City just north of Tokyo back home to Niigata in 6 cars. At first, I had to walk about 45 minutes to get to the highway that goes to the Kan'etsu expressway. After that, a driver in a sports car took me to Kawagoe Interchange. He said his dream was to become an F-10 jet fighter pilot but couldn't because he would have had to become an American as well. I told him that once I met a fighter pilot in the Japanese self-defense force. He said it's no fun having your body daily

subjected to tremendous g-forces in sharp turns during training exercises.

The next car took me to the Miyoshi Service area. Though Miyoshi is actually in the opposite direction, the direction going to Tokyo instead of Niigata, because it is only a few minutes up the road I usually accept rides there because I know how to walk around to the other side of the service area. There is an access road that goes under the expressway. It's about a 10-minute walk.

From Miyoshi two cars took me to Kamisato just before Gunma. After a relatively short wait, 4 men picked me up and took me the majority of the way back home, about 200 kilometers further. But I still had about 15 kilometers left. Though I could have taken a train the rest of the way, because it was still early and good weather, and the men left me off on a road that is relatively a straight shot back home, I hitchhiked and caught a ride with the Saito family. There were 3 small children in the car, the oldest being 11. Mrs. Saito was so amazed to hear of my hitchhiking adventures over the years, and how far I have traveled and met so many people.

October 1st hitchhike adventure to Saitama



Yuki Sakai who
took me to Saitama
from Niigata

Oct. 1, 2010: Today I hitchhiked from Niigata city to Sayama city, a distance of about 280 kilometers, in only 3 cars. There was very little waiting time for the first two cars, but I had to wait 2 hours for the third and final ride. The driver was only 19 years old and has been driving for only one year. It was very interesting to talk to such a young man.

Adventure hitchhiking in Akita Prefecture



September 20, 2010: Today I was in Noshiro City, a town in northern Akita Prefecture, northern Honshu, the main island of Japan. My goal was to hitchhike as much as possible the 330 kilometers back home to Niigata. I ended up hitchhiking nearly a 1/3 of the distance, and this brought me [just over the 100,000 kilometer mark](#) since keeping statistics from August 2, 2003! I had hoped to hitchhike a million kilometers before I leave this world, but at the rate I'm doing it, I need 60 more years. ☐



Man who helped me
get to the road
leading out of
Noshiro

After some business in Noshiro city, a town in the northern part of Akita Prefecture, I walked toward what I thought was route 7 to head home to Niigata. I used to visit Noshiro often from 1976-77 but now it was an unfamiliar place. It turned out that my directions were totally mixed up and I was standing on the side of the street with traffic heading north, not the southern direction I needed to go. A kind man saw my Niigata sign and informed me of my mistake. He then circled around, picked me up, and took me to a good spot to hitchhike on route 7 which was a considerable distance from where I had been standing!

It's always amazing to me how God engineers the timing just right for me to meet special people. After waiting just a few minutes where the man dropped me off on Route 7, Akiko, a 32 year old dental clinic receptionist picked me up and took me as far as Iwakawa Sakura station, a distance about 30 kilometers.

Akiko is still single and likes to study and speak English. I told her that she might be happier to marry a Westerner some day, rather than a Japanese man. Because Christianity and principles of New Testament love has influenced

Western culture a great deal, most Westerners are used to showing affection toward their spouses. This is something sadly lacking to a great degree in Japanese culture. Husbands and wives hardly hug each other in private, and never in public. I explained to her that when in Russia, I frequently saw public displays of affection, and not only among lovers, but between older married couples.

Because Akiko had been to Hawaii before, I thought she might be interested to know my theory of the Hawaiian word "*aloha*" which is said in both greeting and parting. Most people don't know that *aloha* in the Hawaiian language means "[a way of living and treating each other with love and respect.](#)" Before the Hawaiians became Christians after their Queen Kapi'olani, shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ to her people in the 19th century, I do not think they used this word in greetings. The Hawaiians used to be a barbaric savage and cannibalistic people. I believe that it was only after coming to know the love of God in Jesus Christ they started using the word *aloha* for greetings and partings.

An external website that I believe confirms my theory: [Queen Kapi'olani, the First Christian Convert in Hawaii.](#)

After waiting nearly an hour in intermittent rain, a mother and daughter picked me up and took me as far as Akita City. The mother looks so young that at first I thought they were sisters! The daughter went to a Christian high school which is not common among the Japanese. The education is good but the tuition is 3 times more than a regular school.

From experience I knew the spot where the mother and daughter dropped me off in Akita city was not a very good one. I walk down the road to get to a better traffic light. At the third traffic light further down, a young man picked me up and took me to a truck parking stop on the other side of the city. The area was deserted with no trucks waiting, not a very desirable situation for me, but I was glad to be past Akita city because that greatly increased my chances of catching a ride.

Just a couple minutes after getting dropped off, a police car pulled up and two policemen walked up to me questioning me what I was doing and why I was there. I knew I wasn't doing anything wrong and it was OK for me to be standing where I was. The policeman said they just thought it was unusual to see somebody standing in the truck parking area without a car nearby. I smiled and answered their questions. They thanked me for my cooperation and left.

I also immediately left the parking area to walk to an intersection, but I knew there may not be one for a considerable distance in that country area. After walking some 30 minutes, a lady named Nanae picked me up. I asked her if she often picked up hitchhikers and she said it was her third time experience. Nanae operates a machine to demolish houses.

It was already 5PM and raining. Rather than hitchhike further I opted to take a train the rest of the way spending 4300 yen. I did save some 2000 yen by hitchhiking. But much more than saving a bit of money, I value the experience

of meeting the kind people I met.

Akita Prefecture for some reason has the highest suicide rate among all the prefectures in Japan. My prayer is they will come to know that God's love is the ultimate answer to their problems.

[Return to Niigata from Saitama](#)



Masako's daughter Saori with her 8 month old baby

Today I traveled back home from Toride city in Ibaragi prefecture. At first I took three trains to get to Fujimino station on the Tobu line, the station that is closest to Miyoshi parking area on the Kan'etsu expressway. Normally I would take a bus from the station to get to an even closer point, but I got tired of waiting for the bus and decided to hoof it. It was only a 30 minute walk.

After another 30 minute wait, two ladies, a mother and her daughter holding her 8 month old baby girl picked me up and took me as far as Akagikogen service area. This is excellent for it is past Takasaki and the junction that runs toward Nagano.



Masako who took me to Akagi kogen

Road trip to Tokyo



Mother with her 7 week old baby

Yesterday I had a very smooth trip hitchhiking to Tokyo from Niigata in only two cars. This was an encouragement to me because the previous 3 trips were difficult and caused me considerable discomfort.

The first driver was a lady with a 7 week old baby in the car seat in the back. She took me to the Sanjo-Tsubame interchange of the Hokuriku expressway. From there I took a 180 yen 5 kilometer bus ride to Sakae parking area.

At the parking area I saw two bikers, one of whom appeared to be a foreigner. The Japanese biker told me, "Japanese people don't like to pick up hitchhikers." I replied, "Some do!"



Eddy

And after a relatively short wait at Sakae, I was picked up by two men. The driver's name is Eddy, a real estate agent, who spoke some English. He told me he is a Christian and proved it by sharing some of his favorite Bible scriptures with me! Usually the Japanese Christians I meet are merely church goers whose religion appears to be more of tradition than real faith, but I could tell that Eddy is different. He recently married a lady from Harbin China and said he will visit me in October after picking up his wife at Niigata airport. He wants me to do a little ceremony to give him and his wife a blessing for their marriage. I am honored to have Eddy for a new friend.

I told Eddy I have a lot of Chinese Bibles at home and I would be happy to send him one. He promptly gave me 1000 yen to do so. Upon returning home to Niigata, that was one of the first things I did. Eddy called me the next day

thanking me for the Bible. It is an entire Bible in new Chinese for the People's Republic of China, and I would be happy to send one to anybody in exchange for a donation to cover postage.

[Fun hitchhike back home from Saitama](#)



Tuesday, August 10, 2010: Today I had another relatively hard experience hitchhiking. The root of the word "hitchhike" comes from "hitch" (to ride) and "hike" (to walk) and today I did a whole lot of walking, more than yesterday.



Children of the
mother who took me
to Hanazono

In the beginning it went very well. A lady going to Nagano said she will take me to the Kamisato service area, but as we approached Hanazono, we faced a big traffic jam that was caused by a car accident. The electronic sign said it would take 70 minutes to travel the next 20 kilometers! So she decided to get off at the Hanazono interchange and take the low road. This meant that I had to get off at Hanazono.



Traffic jam due to
accident. The sign
says "70 minutes
to go 12
kilometers"

As soon as I started to hitchhike at the Hanazono IC, a policeman saw me and ordered me to leave the area! I was too close to the toll booth which is part of the expressway.

I walked to the normal road and tried to catch cars going on the expressway, but they were going too fast to stop. Then looking at the map, I saw that Yorii Parking area may be close enough to walk to. It appeared to be about 5 kilometers and I thought maybe I could walk there in an hour. But after walking 45 minutes I saw a sign that Yorii was yet 3 kilometers further up the road! In all it took me an hour and 20 minutes to walk it. The total distance is 8.4 kilometers or 5.25 miles. I walked at a rate of 6.3 kilometers an hour or about 4 miles an hour. My shirt and undershirt was drenched with perspiration when I arrived in Yorii and so I changed to another shirt at the parking area restroom.



Dr. Suzuki who
took me to
Kamisato just
before Gunma. We
have a mutual
friend.

But the effort to get to Yorii paid off. After a relatively short wait, a man, Dr. Suzuki, picked me up and took me to Kamisato. He is a medical doctor. And it turned out we have a mutual friend, James Rudow of Sayama city!



A chemical
engineer from
Yokohama who took
me to Niigata

After another relatively short wait in Kamisato, a man from Yokohama took me to Sanjo city which is the next town to Niigata. From there a lady took me to a train station only 3 stations away from mine and I caught a train the rest of the way. Total transportation cost from Sayama: 190 yen.

[Tramatic adventure hitchhiking from](#)

Kansai



Monday, August 9, 2010: After an unsuccessful attempt to hitchhike from Suita service area in central Osaka yesterday, today I thought to make it easier on myself by taking a train to Otsu city in Shiga Prefecture, just on the other side of Kyoto. The Hankyu line is the cheapest train in Japan and it only cost 390 yen to get as far as Kyoto.



Young couple who took me from Otsu toward Kussatsu



Young couple who went out of their way to take me to Kussatsu interchange

After searching more than an hour for a ride at Otsu service area, I felt the situation wasn't any better than the one yesterday. This is now Obon season during which time the Japanese like to visit their home towns. Normally I find Obon an easy time to hitchhike, but this year seemed to be different. Is it because I'm getting older?

I realized that since the completion of the Shin (new) Meishin highway that connects to the Meishin just 10 kilometers down the road, the preponderance of traffic would be taking the ShinMeshin to go to Nagoya. But I needed to continue down the older route, the one that goes to the Hokuriku junction at Maibara. I therefore thought that by leaving the expressway parking, and hitchhiking down the low road just 10 more kilometers further, I would be on the other side of the Shinmeshin entrance and more likely to catch a ride. It took me over 2 hours to hitchhike only 10 kilometers in two rides! The first ride I caught immediately from a young couple, but the second ride took me

well over an hour. Now finally at the Kussatsu interchange I had to wait yet another 1.5 hours for the next ride! I wondered if I made a mistake leaving Otsu. Now was stuck where I was at and couldn't go anywhere else. The Kussatsu interchange where I was waiting was my only hope. Just a couple days ago I told a driver that when it sometimes takes a long time to catch a ride, it always ends up in a wonderful experience meeting somebody special. Now God was really testing me to see if I really believed that statement and have patience to wait further! I started to think about retiring from hitchhiking.

Finally the most unlikely looking vehicle picked me up. It was a deliver truck with two men in the front, and the back was so full of packages I had no room to sit down anywhere. I had to squeeze between a box and the side of the truck. The men were going the direction from whence I came, toward Kyoto. The Kussatsu Service Area was just a couple minutes down the road, and I got off there.

Now my problem is figuring out how to get to the parking area on the opposite side of the expressway with traffic going the way I needed to go. I found an overpass and walked to a gate that appeared to be used for the parking area, and I saw a lady passing through the gate. I realized she must have come from the parking area, but on the other side of the gate was a sound barrier with no apparent entrance or way to get either over it or around it. I walked toward the left, found a siding door on the wall, and tried to open it. It was locked. I walked toward the right, found another sliding door, and it opened!



Mr. Mochihara who took from Shiga prefecture to Sayama city, Saitama

The parking area going toward Niigata and Tokyo is much smaller, with fewer cars, but it was my only hope. After only a few minutes, I met a man who was traveling all the way from Miyazaki in Kyushu and asked him for a ride. His name is Mr. Mochihara, he speaks English, and was friendly. This is the man who made it worth it all that suffering! Our conversation was not only pleasant, it was deep about the basic things of life. And went out of his way to take me directly to my friend's house in Sayama city, and saved me from having to hitchhike further in the heat of this hot summer.

[On the road in Osaka](#)



It took me nearly 14 hours today to hitchhike 560 kilometers to Osaka! I got stuck for a period of time at the halfway point in the city of Kanazawa. A parking attendant at Fudoji parking area on the Hokuriku expressway asked me to leave. I walked down to the regular road, hitchhiked to the next big interchange, and got back on the expressway two hours later.



Man who took me to Kanazawa in his BMW



Mr. and Mrs. Izumi with 3 year old daughter Chitose. They took me from Yoneyama SA to Nadachihama after a brief stop for shopping in Joetsu City



Kohei and Kayo who took me from Kanazawa to Fukui



Ken and Shigeru. They took me to Shiga Prefecture from Fukui Prefecture.

The highlight of this trip was to get a ride in a convertible two seater BMW sports car with the top down. Though it rained a bit when riding, the rain didn't fall on us but was blown over the car's windshield.

Adventure hitchhiking home from Ajigasawa



Route of trip from Ajigasawa to Niigata

I was invited to do some work for a hotel in the city of Ajigasawa on the northern coast of the Sea of Japan in Aomori Prefecture. The hotel people treated me like a king and served me a dinner of what the Japanese would consider to be a gourmet specialty – half of which was [biblically unclean seafood](#) which I couldn't eat! But the breakfast was fantastic, a smorgasbord type of setting from which I could choose what I liked. The hotel paid the 10,000 yen (\$90) train fare to get me there, but as usual I always opt to hitchhike as much as possible to save money getting back home. I couldn't leave Ajigasawa until 11:30AM the next day to begin my race with the sun to try to catch the last ride before dark. In the summer I have two extra hours to hitchhike, but I knew it would still be pretty tough considering the distance of 450 plus kilometers to Niigata, and most of it on a regular road.

This trip brought me one ride over the 2000th mark of the number of rides I caught hitchhiking since keeping records from Aug. 2, 2003. Since then, I've traveled 97.900 kilometers.



Scene from route
101 in Aomori
Prefecture



Couple who took me
from Ajigasawa to
Noshiro city in
Akita



Lady with her
Terrier dog who
took me just past
Akita city

After waiting over 40 minutes for the first ride, a couple picked me up and took me as far as Noshiro City in Akita Prefecture, a good distance of 100 kilometers! They even bought me lunch, a bowl of Ramen noodles.



Makoto Hasegawa

After that a lady took me about 40 kilometers toward Akita city. After her, a second lady with a cute little Terrier dog took me just past Akita city. This lady was very talkative. And it turns out that she knows a person who picked me up in 2006, Makoto Hasegawa, the captain of a professional basketball team in Niigata! She says that Mr. Hasegawa comes to visit her house from time to time because his native town is Akita and she has something to do with promoting basketball in Japan. This sport is not nearly as popular in Japan as it is in America. The average player works for a salary no better than an office worker in a regular company.

The 4th driver works for the income tax bureau. He was friendly, but not too talkative, and not very responsive to my questions about his work. But he took me with 10 minutes to spare to Sakata station from where I caught a train the rest of the way home. It was 7:30PM, already dark (no daylight savings time in Japan) and the train from Sakata City was the last one that day I could catch to avoid hitchhiking in the dark the rest of the way. I saved 2/3rds of the train fare I would have paid had I taken a train all the way.

Adventure Hitchhiking During Golden Week



children of a couple who took me to a parking area on the Hokuriku Expressway.

Trip 1: From Niigata to Osaka

Japan enjoys a string of holidays from April 29 to May 5th known as [Golden Week](#). I took advantage of this time to travel.

On May 2, 2010, I hitchhiked to Osaka from Niigata, a distance of 585 kilometers in 10 cars. Five of the cars were married couples and three of them had small children in the back seat. During holidays like Golden Week and [Obon](#) in August, I often get picked up by families visiting their hometowns. Sometimes they have the family dog with them. In the back seat of the seventh car was a beautiful three-year-old Golden Retriever named Mary.



The children's
parents

At the Amagozen parking area in Ishikawa Prefecture after waiting for an hour for a car, **I was asked to leave** by one of the parking attendants! He told me I couldn't hitchhike there. It is extremely rare for me to be asked to leave an expressway parking area, and I have no choice but to comply. It was still only a little over halfway to my destination and didn't have enough money to take a bus or train the rest of the way to Osaka.

The parking attendant told me where I could catch a bus from within the parking area. I walked halfway toward it, saw a man, and making eye contact with him, I told him I wanted to go to Osaka. He asked where in Osaka. Anywhere I said. It turned out the man was going exactly to the very parking area in Osaka I wanted to get off at, the Sakae Parking area! He is a rather well-to-do man, a company president owning 3 companies, and his wife was in the back seat. I consider it a real miracle to run into him just when I needed a ride most desperately! We had a most pleasant conversation with him and his wife who happens to be Chinese from Taiwan! This was the second time today to ride with a foreigner. The wife of the driver in the previous

vehicle is from the Philippines.

Trip 2: From Osaka to Hamamatsu City in Shizuoka



Couple with two
year old daughter
who took me from
Osaka to Kyoto

On May 5th I traveled in 4 cars 273 kilometers from Osaka to the city of Hamamatsu in the Tokkai area of Japan. [Tokkai is famous for its earthquakes](#) and occasional tsunami. It also happens to be one of the most popular areas to live in Japan due to its warm and sunny weather throughout the year. Only this year I found it *unusually cold* during my previous trip last April. Where's "[global warming](#)" when you need it? I remember the Tokkai area being warmer in mid-winter than it was last April, and that was 25 years ago!

Three of the 4 cars were families, and two had young children in the car. The first car took me to the Katsugawa Service area just before Kyoto. Sometimes I have to wait a relatively long time just to get to the other side of a large city like Kyoto, but today I caught the second ride in a matter of minutes. An older couple took me to a parking area close to Nagoya.

The last driver was a father of 3 children and a minister of the [Tenrikyo faith](#), a religion that began in the city of Tenri Japan in 1838. Tenrikyo is unusual for Japan because it is neither Buddhist nor Shinto and is a monotheistic religion, a belief in only one God. It seems to have had a lot of influence from Christian missionaries to Japan.

[More about Tenrikyo.](#)

Trip 3: Hamamatsu to Tokyo



Three young men who took me to
Fujikawa near Mt. Fuji

The next day on May 6th I needed to go to Noda city in Chiba on the eastern side of Tokyo. I also had an appointment at 7 PM to meet a man in Otemachi, the heart of Tokyo, a man from the U.K. who wrote me during this trip and expressed interest in my website!

From Hamamatsu, it only took 3 cars to go to Tokyo. The first car was going the opposite direction toward Nagoya, but I grabbed it because the Hamanako Service area is only 8 kilometers from where I was at the Hamamatsu Nishi interchange, and it is very easy to walk to the side of this particular service area to catch traffic going the opposite way.



Mt. Fuji as seen from the Fujikawa
Service Area in Shizuoka

Three young men, all younger than my own two sons took me to the Fujikawa Service area. The view of Mt. Fuji today was better than I expected it to be. Normally the best time to see it is mid-winter when the sky is clearest with fewer clouds surrounding it.

The last car was elderly two ladies, one 75 years old, who took me to Yoga in Tokyo. I got to Tokyo by 4PM, and decided to use the extra time before the 7PM appointment to meet with my friends Steven and Teiko. and helped Teiko set up her own [WordPress blog](#). (Japanese only)



Mt. Fuji as seen
from Susuno
snapped from a
moving car.

Trip 4: The return home

May 7, 2010: Japan enjoyed good weather throughout the Golden Week holiday, but today was Friday, a regular work day, and the weather turned cloudy and raining. But the rain in the Kanto area of Tokyo was light and intermittent, and I had a fold-up umbrella that I usually carry. I decided to go home today to have a couple of days of rest before work on Monday at my new job. I'm so glad I did because it took me two days to recover from this trip! When I travel I usually feel great, but upon returning home it's as if God pulled out the plug and I'm exhausted.

The first vehicle from the Miyoshi Service area near Tokyo was a truck which is unusual on the expressway. Trucks don't usually pick me up, but perhaps this one did because I asked the rider in the parking area and he asked the driver. They took me as far as Kamisato in Saitama which is next to the border of Gunma and just before the junction of the Joshi'etsu expressway that goes to Nagano. Not many cars are going to Niigata from Kamisato. Most go only as far as Takasaki or Maebashi in Gunma, and many take the Joshin'etsu toward Karuizawa and Nagano city. I could catch a ride going that way, but it's a longer roundabout way to Niigata and would get me home later. I opted to go for the road and wait for the direct route.

After about an hour a man saw my Niigata sign and offered to take me as far as Sanjo city. This was great because Niigata city is only 40 kilometers further and I could take a train from that point. The man's name was Mr. Sato and he was talkative throughout the remaining 200 kilometers of the trip.

Monday adventure from Aomori to Niigata



Mr. Kato who took
me to Kuroishi on
the Tohoku
Expressway

April 19, 2010: I had intended to hitchhike back home on Sunday morning but stayed in Aomori city in northern Honshu an extra day to deal with a friend's PC problem. Hitchhiking on a weekend or a holiday is always easier. There are more cars on the road with families traveling longer distances. Weekdays, and especially a **Monday** mean people traveling for business reasons, and they are usually not in a happy mood.

But this morning I had help to get started. Rather than walk to the highway and try to hitchhike 5 kilometers to the Aomori Chuo entrance of the Tohoku expressway, the friend with whom I stayed with offered to drive me there. This gave me a 30 minute head start. My home in Niigata is 580 kilometers distance via the Tohoku and Ban'etsu expressways and I hoped to return the same day.



The Kitayama
brothers who took
me to Hirosaki
Owani interchange.

The first driver, Mr. Kato, said he would only go as far as Kuroishi, about

20 kilometers down the road. The traffic at Kuroshi was only a tiny fraction of Aomori Chuo, and I wondered if I made a mistake taking the ride from Mr. Kato. I knew the next expressway entrance at Hirosaki Owani would be much better for me, and headed that direction on foot. I knew it was too far to walk all the way, but nevertheless I continued walking down the road until I caught the next ride nearly an hour later. Twin brothers with the family name of Kitayama picked me up! They are highly skilled carpenters who make Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. One of them said when he was young just after graduating from university, he traveled in Europe for 3 months hitchhiking from place to place. Japanese who have traveled overseas, and the ones who themselves have experienced hitchhiking will usually stop for me.



Former Sumo
wrestler, Yoshi

The most interesting person to pick me up today was Yoshi, a former Sumo wrestler. He said he lived in a Sumo world from 8 years old till 20, and all he wanted to be in life was a professional sumo. But that dream suddenly ended with an injury to his knee. The doctor told him he couldn't wrestle anymore. In despair he left Japan and moved to San Diego to start a new life. There he grew fond of the local Mexican people, and learned to speak Spanish. He also met a Japanese girl in San Diego with whom he fell in love with and expressed that love. She told him, "Yoshi, you know nothing about real love! Come to church with me tonight and learn about love." So he went with her to a Spanish speaking church in San Diego, heard the Gospel of Jesus for the first time in his life, and was so moved with [the Message](#) he wept with emotion! God came into his life that night and by and by, he felt called to become a missionary to Peru! Yoshi described to me in detail life in Peru, the poverty and the lack of morals. And I thought Japan is tough! The Japanese are hard to sell but they do have a strong sense of morals in their culture. Though they don't know the teachings of the New Testament, many Japanese live by its principles better than Westerners who do know the Bible.

Yoshi took me to the Adatara parking area just before the junction of the Ban'estu expressway that goes to Niigata. It was 4:30PM and I still had an hour and a half of sunlight left. The previous time standing at Adatara I caught a ride in only 20 minutes, but 3 hours later by 7:30 I still hadn't caught a ride and was standing in the dark unable to even read the license plates until the car was about to pass me. Over 95% of the traffic was heading toward Tokyo, not toward Niigata. I realized rather than wait for cars to come to me, I would have to walk up to drivers in the parking area, the ones that have Niigata license plates. Normally I don't do this because drivers who do give me rides this way are usually not friendly or talkative, but I was in a desperate situation! The first driver I asked did give me a ride, and I was so grateful to know I would be home in two hours and not have to try to figure out how to sleep at Adatara that night. □