

Explanation of Al Qaeda from a young man from Pakistan

“Al Qaeda” is a name given by the West to anyone in Pakistan they don’t like. It’s like a person in Japan “Yakuza” or somebody in America, “Mafia.”

Meeting Joe and Maria in Chiba



On September 5th when visiting the city of Noda in Chiba prefecture, my old friends Joe and Maria came to visit. I was so glad to see them again, especially Maria, for she used to take care of my children when they were young. I haven’t seen her in nearly 10 years.



Joe and Maria

100 Kilometer Cycling Adventure



Mt. Yahiko and Mt. Kakuda from a distance of 20 kilometers.

I enjoy taking long bicycle trips from time to time. I thought it would be a good day's challenge to circle two famous mountains of Niigata, Mt. Kakuda and Mt. Yahiko, and return home before nightfall. Mt. Kakuda and Mt. Yahiko are not famous for their height. Mt. Yahiko is only 600 some meters high. They are famous for being the only mountains smack dab on the coast of the Sea of Japan in the midst of the flat rice fields that Niigata is famous for. Click the photo to see an enlargement.

Niigata has some of the flattest areas in all of Japan. One reason it's so flat is that much of Niigata (Japanese meaning "new lagoon") was reclaimed from the ocean. All of the rice growing area between the Shinano and Agano rivers, meaning the area you see in the photo below, used to be underwater.

It took me a little over two hours to cycle 30 kilometers to Kakudahama which is the northern base of Mt. Kakuda. I didn't know the roads but followed what I thought was the closest route by line of sight. It turned out that I probably zigzagged back and forth on the roads between the rice fields a lot more than I needed to.

From Kakudahama I took the only road that runs along the coast of the Sea of Japan, a road over rolling hills and through several tunnels. The traffic was light and therefore a bit safer for a cyclist than on a normal highway. I needed to ride as far as the lowest point past Mt. Yahiko. I knew I reached it when I arrived at the mouth of Bunsui, a river that is a tributary of the Shinano river, the longest river in Japan. There is a road running parallel to it going in the direction I needed to go, and I knew it would be therefore flat.

I could add photos to this post. If you want to see them, please say so in a comment.

[New Home Member](#)



Princess with her toy

I took an overnight bus from Tokyo to Aomori City and met up with Judy who gave me her Shih Tzu dog, Princess. Judy and her family can no longer give 6 year old Princess the care she needs after moving to a new house where dogs are not allowed inside. I offered to take care of Princess. She now stays clean and warm and spends most of her time in my bedroom. □

Picked up by two Nichiren ladies



November 29, 2009: While hitchhiking to town I noticed a lady walking toward me from a distance with what appeared to be her car parked by the side of the road behind her. I correctly assumed she was going to offer me a ride. She had another lady friend with her who was the driver. They seemed a bit overly impressed to meet me which caused me to become suspicious.

I asked them, "Do you want to sell me something?"

"No!"

“Are you folks into some kind of religion?”

“No!”

They asked me if I had eaten lunch yet and invited me to a restaurant to talk. I accepted the invitation because I wasn't in any hurry and knew it would give me an opportunity to share my faith with them.

In the restaurant I offered to give them two Activated magazines. As soon as I pulled them out of my briefcase, they turned them down. The only kind of Japanese who refuses to accept literature from me are people into some type of religion, and sure enough, these two ladies turned out to be [Nichiren Buddhist](#) people, and their intent was to try to convert me!

Most Buddhists are very tolerant of other religions, and they have no problem toward Christians in general. The Nichiren sect is the **notifiable exception**. They will flatly tell you to forsake Jesus Christ and pray to their idol using their chant instead. Every time they chanted that horrible chant to me, I started to pray the “Our Father” prayer and told them that prayer works for me. To their credit, they did listen when I told them why Jesus died on the cross, and for what reason, to save all of mankind from sin.

Normally when a Japanese person invites me to a restaurant or coffee bar, they will pick up my tab. I fully expected this to happen but to my embarrassment I walked halfway out of the restaurant and was told I hadn't paid my bill yet! Next time I'll be more wary when a person seems overly interested in talking to me even though we just met. Either they want to convert you or sell you on some network marketing type of product. □

[Photo of Gary Sinise](#)



My friend Daniel sent me this photo of him with [Gary Sinise](#), the actor who played Lt. Dan in the film "Forest Gump"! He seems to be a really nice guy to pose for a photo with one of his fans. I learned that Gary was born in Blue Island Illinois which is only 9 kilometers (5.6 miles) from where I was raised in Hegewisch, a neighborhood of Chicago.



Gary Sinise with my friend Daniel

[Contact from my old neighborhood in Chicago](#)



A shop in Hegewisch I used to visit

I was happy to receive messages via [classmates.com](#) from long-lost friends I knew in high school! One of them was from Debbie Olson Chancey who I used to call "The Hot Dog Queen" because she worked at her father's Vienna Hotdog where I used to hang out in the Chicago neighborhood of Hegewisch where I was raised. The other two were from my old buddy, Jimmy Novak with whom I used to hang around with, and Donna Wright Krieps, one of my classmates at George Washington High School in Chicago. The graduating class of 1969 is having a reunion on June 27. Unfortunately, I won't be able to attend – no money for air travel. ;-(

[Candle wax on a plate](#)



A dear friend in Norway sent me this photo of candle wax dripping on a plate under the candle:

Awesome! I believe it to be a sign from Heaven! Or a coincidence? You decide. Click on the image once, and then one more time to see a closer view.

[Wedding for Nobuo and Miwako](#)



I attended a Shinto wedding ceremony of my good friends from Kashiwazaki, Nobuo and Miwako. I first met Nobuo's father while hitchhiking on August 11, 2006, a very hot summer day. I was making no progress that day on my way to Tokyo and actually purposely caught a car going the opposite direction so that I could at least be in an expressway service area and drink as much water as I needed. It was definitely one of God's setups because that day of suffering a couple of hours in the sun resulted in some of the best Japanese friends I have with every increasing possibilities to make new friends! It has also turned into a possible English teaching job in the near future.

Weeks earlier Nobuo asked me to do a speech at the wedding party so I had much time to prepare. Nevertheless, I dreaded having to do it. Talking to large groups of people is something I don't particularly relish doing but I knew God would give me the grace for it. It would have been hard enough to give a speech in English, but I had to give it in Japanese! The ladies at my table asked me if I was nervous to give the speech, and I replied I was.

Nevertheless, I gave it with everything in me and even ad-libbed adding things I didn't even have written down on the paper I was holding. The audience just loved it! The ladies at the table said that I made everybody happy. I told them that was exactly my intention. Nobuo commented, "A perfect speech!"

Please check out the [photos I took at the wedding party](#).

The wedding was traditional Japanese Shinto style. I felt honored to be invited to attend the ceremony. I was the only non-Japanese person in attendance and I'm only a friend of the family. Such ceremonies traditionally are open only to close relatives of the bride and groom.

Watch the YouTube video and you will hear some of the highly unusual music I heard during the ceremony.

[Gathering in Shirone](#)



The fruit of my hitch-hiking adventure on January 15th was being invited to a new year's party in Shirone, a town now incorporated into Niigata city, by the former deputy mayor of the town, Mr. Tsubokawa. I met his friends, mostly ladies, and one gentleman by the name of Mr. Makiguchi. Two of the ladies are Christians who attend the local Lutheran church. All were former English students who like foreigners and especially Americans. Mr. Tsubokawa invited me visit Poland with him and his friends after he learned that my grandparents are Polish! I told him I have no money whatsoever to travel. He said he and his friends would foot all expenses in return for being their interpreter! Let's see if it happens. ☐



Mr. Makiguchi

I also met Mr. Makiguchi who is the director of an agricultural firm that

turns vegetables into bio-ethanol. He seemed quite interested in what I had to say about politics in the USA.