

Day after the Sendai earthquake – hitchhike adventure from Tokyo to Osaka



Saturday, March 11, 2011: The morning after the major earthquake in the Pacific not far from Sendai, the largest city in the Tohoku area, I accessed the Internet news and saw more horrific photos of destruction by the tsunami. A friend with whom I stayed with said, “Over 10,000 people were killed!” I began to weep but learned later he got it wrong. So far the number of reported deaths is 1/10 of that number, but it will probably go much higher.

I have been to the city of Sendai many times, and even lived there once from 1976-1978. The year I left there was a major earthquake that destroyed part of the city. I used to visit from time to time the very towns along the Pacific coast that were destroyed by the tsunami.

The purpose of my trip is to search for employment to earn more money. Jobs are now scarce at home, and my previous source of income was terminated. I had considered visiting friends in Yaizu city in Shizuoka Prefecture, but because their house is right on the coast, I didn’t consider it a safe place to be at this time. Osaka was a better option for me. I had only 1500 yen left in my pocket, but I knew it would be enough to get me to Osaka. This is why I headed the opposite direction from the destruction in Tohoku. I am not running from danger. I know another earthquake can happen at any time no matter where I am, and I’m now in Osaka, not far from Kobe which was destroyed in 1995 by a major earthquake.

The trains in Tokyo all stopped immediately after the earthquake, but the next morning they were all running again. I took a 260 yen train ride to Fujigaoka station on the Denentoshi line and walked from there to the Kohoku Parking Area on the Tomei expressway. In just a few minutes a car with 3 men offered me a ride as far as Nagoya.

Part of the Tohoku expressway in Shizuoka Prefecture runs right next to the ocean, and there was a tsunami warning alert out. The police closed that section of the expressway till the alert was lifted. In spite of the alert,

vehicles waited in a long line for many kilometers in anticipation that the alert would be lifted. I don't know how long the first cars waited but we had to wait only 15 some minutes.

In order to keep some of the impatient drivers from speeding after the expressway re-opened, a police car and an expressway maintenance truck led the procession of traffic at a slow pace at first, only 60 kilometers per hour. A few kilometers later they increased the speed to 80. Finally both left at the next exit and the traffic took off! The driver in the car I was in started to cruise at 150 KM an hour and reached up to 180 KM an hour from time to time, 60 KM over the limit. It would have been a hefty fine and his license taken away if he was caught.

From Nagoya a 31 year old man took me to Kyoto. From there it was only a 360 yen train ticket to Osaka.

During times of major catastrophes such as the earthquake, the Japanese become more open to hearing about God and matters of faith. The man listened intently as I shared with him the meaning of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The first 3 chapters of the Bible hold the key of understanding all the rest of the Scriptures. Most Japanese have no interest in religion per se, but are highly interested in history. I try to share faith with them from this point of view.

As i write this I am siting in my friend's apartment in Osaka walking the news about the earthquake on CNN. I know as much as you do about it. Osaka is far from Sendai and nobody here even felt the quake.

Hitchhiking during Golden Week, 2009



Hirosaki Castle the beginning of
May

I had a fantastic 10 day trip traveling 1460 kilometers in 28 vehicles during the Japanese holiday season from April 29 to May 5th known as "[Golden Week](#)".

April 30th: It took me over two hours and 6 vehicles just to get out of Niigata City! A lady took me as far as Toyosaka on the edge of Niigata City. She said her 29 year old daughter lived one year in Montana. After that a Russian man took me as far as East Port in Niigata and after that a lady with her mother took a me a few kilometers further up route 113 to the middle of nowhere somewhere between Niigata city and Murakami city. It was a less than desirable spot to catch a ride with few cars passing through a forested area, but I had a scenic view of the Sea of Japan on my left that kept me inspired. After a long wait a young man who works in a travel agency who says he is a Christian and whose father is from Nagasaki took me to route 7 in Murakami. In all it took 16 cars in all to get to Akita City 270 kilometers down route 7 arriving at 7:30PM, but the last driver took me to the very area where I spent the night with friends.



Chieharu and Jun

May 1st: It took took two hours just to get out of Akita city. After waiting at least 30 minutes on route 13, a lady who works in a kindergarten took me about 10 kilometers to a point close to route 7. From there an elderly man took me a short ways to a gasoline station on route 7 but from there I had to walk a long distance of nearly an hour to get to a good traffic light. The third person was a truck driver who took me all the way to Odate in Akita Prefecture. The 4th car was a young couple, Jun and Chieharu who took me all the way to the very door of my destination in Aomori City! They actually went a hundred kilometers out of their way to take me because their destination was Hirosaki city, about 50 kilometers before Aomori City. They were on their way to Hirosaki Castle Park to see the cherry blossoms. I had a lot of time to share my faith in Jesus with Jun and Chieharu. They happily prayed with me to [receive Christ as their Savior](#).



Koinobori

May 5th: This is the last day of the Golden Week holiday which is called "*Kodomo no hi*" which means "Children's Day". Everywhere there are waving flags in the shape of Carp that are called "[Koinobori](#)" meaning "Carp banner". I left Aomori to go to Chiba in the Tokyo area, nearly 700 kilometers due south. Previous experiences in trying to catch a ride from a driver entering the Tohoku the expressway from Aomori have been difficult with long waits of over an hour, but today I caught the first ride within a minute! The driver was a policeman who flashed his badge at me after riding with him for a few minutes. I was glad to meet a friendly officer of the law, for I told him on April 15 I had been [stopped by two policemen for hitchhiking](#) and was detained

for 10 minutes in their patrol car. He smiled sympathetically. I asked him if hitchhiking is illegal in Japan or not, and he replied that it is not. The officer took me up to Hanawa Service Area in Akita Prefecture. The area was crowded with parked cars and people.

After waiting only a few minutes at Hanawa, a couple, Mr. and Mrs Nagata with Kawasaki license plates stopped to pick me up. I rejoiced because I knew they would take me over 95% of the rest of the way to my destination of Noda City in Chiba! This must be the longest I've ever went in a single vehicle for it was at least 600 kilometers.



Takaaki, Atsumi, Minori
and Ryota

Mr. and Mrs. Nagata have been married for 16 years but have no children. Mrs. Nagata told me that they would like to adopt a child, but Japanese law makes it difficult to adopt unless you already have at least one child! She would need to be a registered kindergarten teacher to qualify.

The travel time from Niigata City to Aomori city of 480 kilometers was 17 hours averaging 29 kilometers per hour in 20 vehicles. By comparison, the trip from Aomori to the Tokyo area only took 3 cars and 8 hours to go 670 some kilometers, and this was in spite of traffic pileups on the expressway during the last day of Golden Week. It was 3 times faster to travel on the expressway than the regular road.

May 9th: The sweetest people who picked me up on the way back home were four young people on the way to Numazu in Gunma Prefecture, Ryota, Minori, Takaaki and Atsumi. Their average age was 25 years old. One of the girls, Minori, often touched my arm showing affection. They all visited the USA for a month a few years ago and spoke some English. One of the young men, Ryota, gave me his pen that he said he used in his university.

From Akagi Kougen Service area, Mr. Katou took me as far as Koide, a small town between Kawaguchi and Muika Machi. He travelled all the way from Shizuoka to visit his mother for mother's day which was the next day.



Truck driver who took me to Koide
in Niigata.

From Koide I opted to take the low road to Ojiya knowing that few cars would be entering the expressway from that point. A Suntory Juice truck picked me up. The driver said that he had never picked up a hitchhiker before. I told him, "congratulations!"

A sweet middle aged couple took me the rest of the way back to Niigata. They

were on their way to Nakajo to see their son.

Detained by the police for hitchhiking!



Sunday, April 5, 2009: A lady picked me up and told me at first she would take me to the center of Niigata City which was my destination. However, when I learned that she was on her way home, at about 2/3rds of that distance, I offered to disembark at an intersection that I thought would be convenient for me to continue to hitchhike from so that she wouldn't have to go out of her way.

However, the timing and place where I got off her car were not ideal. Just a few minutes earlier at that very intersection, there was a traffic accident. Two officers of the law were present collecting information. During the past 11 years in Japan, I have never ever been told by the police that I could not hitchhike on a normal road. It's supposed to be legal to hitchhike in Japan. I had nowhere else to hitchhike without walking a long distance of a couple kilometers, so I pulled out my sign to show the drivers and proceeded to hitchhike right in front of the faces of the two officers. They immediately stopped me. According to those two police persons (one was a woman), it is illegal to hitchhike. Jesus said to "agree with your adversary quickly" and so I didn't argue with them. I learned a long time ago that it doesn't pay to get mad at the police and so I smiled a lot, especially in the beginning. They [invited me into their patrol car](#) where they proceeded the usual routine of collecting all the information of my identity. It's a good thing I had my Alien Registration card with me or I would have been arrested. There is no [writ of habeas corpus](#) in Japan. A person may stay in jail for a few weeks for questioning even though not formally charged. [You are considered guilty of a crime until proven innocent](#) and may be badgered to sign a confession of something you did not even do! If you sign a confession of a crime of which you are innocent, it will not be overturned in a Japanese court of law and you will be convicted. (A big thank you to [Arudou Debito](#) for sharing this information!)

After the police got what they wanted (including my cell phone number!), they

let me go. I promised I would look for a bus. I ended up walking about 30 minutes to get to a street from where I caught a bus the rest of the way to town. I met and talked to a young man from New Zealand on the bus, so maybe it was worth it all. I wouldn't have met him otherwise.