

Day 5 after the Japan earthquake: Hitchhiked back home



The red line shows the route I took back to Niigata. The right arrow points to one of the nuclear powerplants in trouble.

March 16, 2011: While in Kobe I joined a NPO project and worked nearly all my waking hours for two days to setup a new web site, Help Japan 2011, to help raise aid for the earthquake victims. The next day I traveled back to my home in Niigata partly by train but mainly by hitchhiking. I started off at Kanda parking area on the Hokuriku expressway in Shiga prefecture. It was surprisingly cold and snowing the front license plates of the cars were covered with wet snow and unreadable. I brushed off the snow from several license plates to determine how far the driver may be going.

Parts of the Hokuriku expressway run very close to the Sea of Japan. There was no threat of tsunami danger as they rarely occur on this side of Japan. However, on 26 May 1983, [104 people were killed in close to the Sea of Japan in Akita](#) by a tsunami after an earthquake.

You can see from the map that I traveled back to an area closer to possible danger. But I do not believe Niigata will be affected much even if the situation in Fukushima worsens.

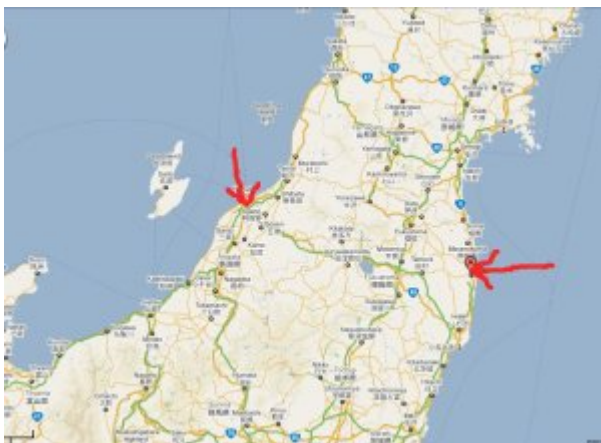
God was good to me and I saved thousands of yen getting lifts as far as Uozu city in Toyama Prefecture in 5 cars. It was past dark by that time and so I took trains the rest of the way. To save money, I took local trains. However at Joetsu the trains were stopped due to a plastic sheet that had wrapped itself around a power-line of the train. In order to get home that day, I was forced to take an express train from there for which I was charged an extra 1150 yen express ticket to Nagaoka city. For some reason I wasn't charged for an express ticket the rest of the way.

The first driver was a young man who listened intently to the Bible stories I shared with him. The second was a father and son who run a Buddhist Temple. The son was dressed in a Buddhist monk's clothing and had a shaved head. They asked me to explain who Jesus Christ is and what He means to the world, and of course I was more than glad to do so.

You may wonder why I would talk of matters of faith at such a time of crisis as Japan is in now. Most Japanese are very apathetic to matters of religion, but now they are seeking comfort, and are open to hearing answers from the Bible about their problems. One man even told me to pray for the earthquake victims!

One of the drivers was a young single lady, Kana Chan, who lived in Australia for two years. Thank you Kana Chan for the ride!

[News from friends affected by the earthquake](#)



The left arrow points to my location and the right one is the location of one of the nuclear power plants in trouble.

Two days ago I was finally able to contact a friend in Sendai, the largest city closest to the epicenter. He said that he and his family are OK and that their apartment building had only minor damage. Dishes have fallen off the shelf and many were broken.

The friend met up with news journalists from America and took them close to the towns of the Rikuzen coast that were destroyed by the tsunami. The towns are completely gone with only rubbish remaining.

Due to concerns of a possible meltdown of the nuclear reactors in neighboring Fukushima, he and his family will move from Sendai to avoid possible radiation contamination.

A family with 7 children who live next door to me moved to Nagoya, far from

Fukushima. They had planned to move even before the time of the disaster and it gave them greater motivation to leave quicker than planned. But as I said in a previous post, I do not think nuclear radiation will come to the Niigata area where I live. The prevailing winds blow from the west to the east, and there is a mountain range between us and one of the Fukushima power plants, 180 kilometers away.

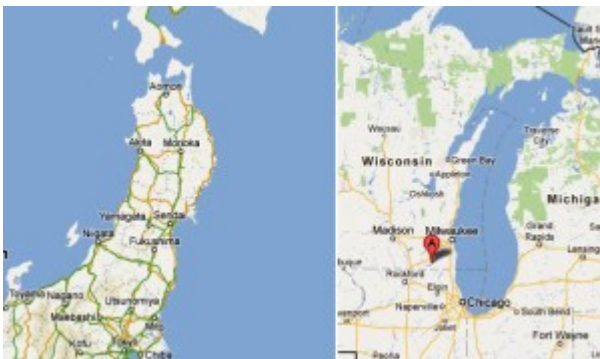
A family I know who has a house in Chiba just east of Tokyo has left the country entirely.

Fukushima prefecture is one of the neighboring prefectures of Niigata, where I live. Fukushima is one of my stomping grounds.

The Chinese ideograph of Fukushima literally means, "happy island". Who is the author of life? Yeshua Hamashiach – AKA Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Who is the author of unhappiness and death – Lucifer, AKA Satan, the hairy one.

The Rikuzen coast was one of the most beautiful areas of Japan to visit. It became a wasteland.

[Joined an NPO project to help the Sendai Earthquake Victims](#)



The Tohoku or Northeast area of Japan is about the size of Lake Michigan. The earthquake moved this massive amount of land 2.4 m (8 ft) east into the Pacific! That's what caused the tsunami that killed 19,759 people.

It was an auspicious time for me to come to Osaka after the earthquake. I was contacted by a friend, Josh DeSantis, the chairman of Hiyaku28 NPO, to come to Kobe to set up a new website to raise donations for the earthquake victims. Josh participated in the relief efforts of the 1995 Kobe earthquake. Kobe is only a 360 yen train ride from where I was in Osaka. I had just enough money to get to Kobe with 69 yen left in my pocket, the remainder of 5000 yen I started with a week ago. Please see the web site I put up so far: Help Japan 2011

There is no chance for me to have a direct face to face contact with the

earthquake victims at this time. Authorities have been telling volunteers not to come! Rescue operations are still underway. Much of the devastated area is still under water. Only professional rescue workers are allowed.

The Situation of my Family and Friends after the Tohoku Earthquake



I've been calling all my friends, especially the ones that live close to the earthquake epicenter near Sendai, Japan. Nobody I know was hurt during the earthquake in the slightest. Everybody in Northern Japan experienced the shocks of the quake, but nobody was close enough to the coast to be affected by the tsunami.

My family in Niigata reports that they all went outside during the earthquake, but then went back inside when it was over because of the cold. Simon in Misawa in Aomori Prefecture says he was without power for 40 hours. Sam in western Tokyo was also without power, but he has a generator that generated enough power for lights. Paul in Nasu, northern Tochigi prefecture said that he and his family were not at home during the quake. They returned to find many broken dishes on the floor. I tried calling friends in Sendai which is close to the epicenter, but their phones were not working. However, I heard from others that they are all OK.

I lived in Sendai from 1975 – 1977. During that time I used to visit the towns of the Rikuzen area that were destroyed by the tsunami. There is not a single city in the area I haven't been to.

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.

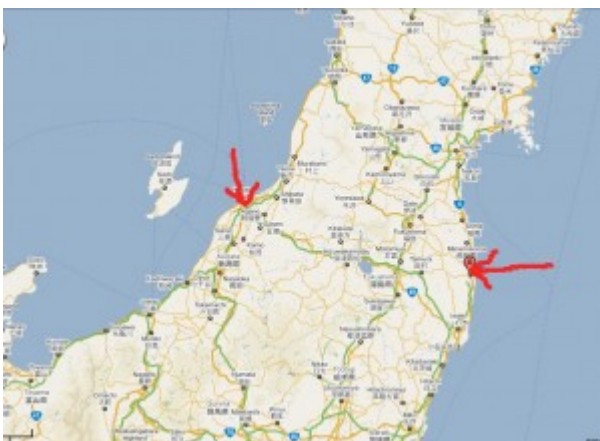
In order to keep some of the impatient drivers from speeding after the expressway re-opened, a police car and an expressway maintenance truck led the procession of traffic at a slow pace at first, only 60 kilometers per hour. A few kilometers later they increased the speed to 80. Finally both left at 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.

Shook up while in Tokyo by Massive Earthquake



The pointer on the left points to where I lived in Niigata City, and the pointer on the left is where the Fukushima nuclear reactors are that were damaged by the earthquake and tsunami.

March 11, 2011: At 2:46 PM local Japan time I was sitting in a MacDonald's in Sangenjaya, only two train stops from Shibuya, a major commercial center of

Tokyo. An earthquake began shaking the building. There are earthquakes in Japan from time to time that are strong enough to be felt without doing any damage, but this one was the strongest I have experienced in my life doing damage right before my eyes! It got stronger and stronger to the point that the women in the MacDonald's started to scream and a few people ducked under the counters to protect themselves. A large picture window close to where I was sitting was shattered to pieces! Glass fell on the street and on the floor of the MacDonald's, and one piece even landed on the counter where I had my laptop PC. I grabbed the laptop and the rest of my stuff, and went outside and watched as the police brought brooms and swept the broken glass. A police box is just next to that MacDonald's.

At first I thought the earthquake was local because only the MacDonald's seemed to have damage, but I hear the main part was the Northeast of Japan, which meant the entire north half of Honshu felt the earthquake.

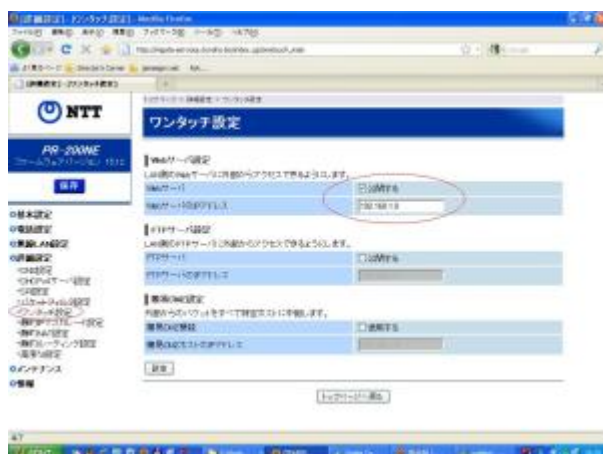
It was a good time to meet people and talk with them. It seems people are more willing to take time and stand and talk when something big happens that shakes them up!

Thirty minutes later there was an aftershock and more broken glass fell from the window. The police tried to keep the people away from the building, and the MacDonalds closed for business that day. It's funny but that was the only business that closed from what I could see. Everybody else continued business as normal.

A few hours later in the evening, I heard for the first time how massive the earthquake was, all of northern Japan and especially the Northeast area, an area I sometimes visit.

As I write this post, I can still feel aftershocks from time to time.

Adventure Setting Up a Home Web Server



Following instructions from a couple web articles, I learned to set up my own

home web server!

Troubleshooting Thunderbird IMAP – email on server but not in the Inbox

I advised a friend to use the Mozilla Thunderbird mail archive feature to move all his email from his Inbox so that I could move his WordPress web site to a different server. He did that, but to our dismay, only email from 2010 was archived; all email he received this year had disappeared!

I immediately accessed the mail server via Cpanel and Horde webmail program, and saw all the email of 2011 was still on the server, but with a line through each of them. This meant they were in a deleted state. I immediately highlighted all email, and un-deleted them. However, for some reason though I could see all the email using the webmail program, my friend *still* could not download them in his Inbox! Every time he clicked on Get Mail in Thunderbird, he got the message “No new mail”. But I knew they were there. IMAP is a service that is supposed to keep the Inbox synchronized with mail on the server so that a person can read the same email on any PC with that IMAP email account setup on it. But because of some glitch that did not allow all of the Inbox to be archived properly, IMAP had marked the mail as already downloaded. My friend wanted all the mail back in the Inbox in the previous format as before for reference sake.

After an hour of searching the Internet for an answer and not finding any, I went back to the mail server and thought maybe I could trick IMAP to allow the mail to be downloaded again by highlighting them all and using the copy mail feature in Horde to copy them all on to themselves. I thought this may restore the IMAP attributes which would allow Thunderbird’s Inbox to synchronize again with the old email on the server. It worked! My friend’s Inbox was restored with all the email he received this year.

Moved from Fedora 14 to Linux Mint Debian



The other day I discovered that [Linux Mint recently came out with a Debian edition](#) with features that are still lacking in Ubuntu. One of the main features that caught my interest is the ability to install Linux Mint Debian on a PC with **multiple hard disk drives**. It has been my practice for a few years now to have the /home partition on a second hard disk, and to use the first hard disk for the OS on a 40 gigabyte first partition and the second partition as a backup of the /home directory on the second drive. Ubuntu's installer still does not recognize more than one hard disk during installation.

Other features of Linux Mint Debian that interested me are said to be:

- Better sound support (addressing conflicts between Pulse Audio and Flash) – This is something Fedora still has a problem with. Sometimes the microphone for Skype works, and sometimes it doesn't.
- Performance boost using cgroup, the notorious 4 lines of code better than 200 in user-space.
- The fact it is a "rolling distribution", meaning there will be no major releases every 6 months, just one constant upgrade over time. This means I won't have to do a clean re-install twice a year as I did with Fedora..

So far so good! The installation procedure is different than Fedora, but pretty straightforward and easy to follow. The PC didn't boot after installation, but changing the BIOS settings of the primary boot drive fixed the problem.

I am now working in Debian for the very first time thanks to Linux Mint!

The good thing I've seen so far:

- All multimedia codecs seem to be already installed. MP3 and WMF files played with no further tweaks. I have to add a third party repository in Fedora to make most multimedia play.
- Skype was installable from the package manager.
- Flashplayer is part of the default installation. Youtube videos played at full screen even without having to install the device driver of my Nvidia card.

- Nvidia drivers were installable from the package manager without further tweaks. Fedora needs the RPM fusion repository for this.
- Fedora 14 used to hang during a certain point in booting. This happened after upgrading my CPU to a newer one. Pressing the Esc key would continue the process. I don't have to do this now.
- Performance does seem to be better. Openoffice writer and Gimp load faster.

I read so far one negative user experience of an upgrade breaking Linux Mint Debian. He couldn't fix it. Perhaps I'll have a better experience.

I've been using Fedora since Fedora Core 3. So far Fedora has been the only Linux distro that has worked consistently well for me. Ubuntu live CDs have come in handy to fix certain Windows problems, but I never could quite get everything to my liking using a Ubuntu installation on my own PC. Fedora has had it's own quirks from time to time, but I learned either how to fix them or they ironed out over time. Everything I need to do on a PC, Fedora and its friends have provided both the software and the know how. Will Linux Mint Debian be better overall for me? Will I eventually get sick of it and go back to Fedora? Will Linux Mint Debian eventually break so bad that I won't be able to fix it? In a few weeks I'll know for sure!

Niigata to Kanto – tramatic 4th 2011 hitchhike adventure



Walls of snow along road in Japan

February 1, 2011: I started out very well with the first ride on my trip to Noda city in Chiba prefecture, just east of Tokyo. The purpose of this trip was to attend a fellowship meeting at 7 PM. It was good weather and I left home at a very good time, just after 10 AM. Tokyo is 300 kilometers away but it usually takes me less than 6 hours, only half a day. I found that weekends are best for hitchhiking, but today was a weekday, a Tuesday. I finally arrived in Noda at 8:25 PM!

After waiting only a minute, the first driver took me all the way to Sanjo city, the entrance of the Hokuriku Expressway. He kindly went out of his way

to do so. From there I took a 180 bus ride to Sakae parking area on the Hokuriku. The preponderance of the traffic was local. Hardly anybody was going to the Kanto plain.

After waiting at Sakae PA in Sanjo for over 90 minutes, I accepted a ride from a young single couple to Ozumi parking area. This is further down the road but just past the Nagaoka junction going towards Joetsu city which is not the direction I needed to go. However I knew I could walk to the other side of the expressway and catch traffic that could go toward Kanto.

I found my situation at Ozumi even worse than it was in Sakae! There was much snow and ice in the parking area, and most of the traffic was going back in the direction I just came from. After waiting another hour and a half, I accepted a ride from a lady going to Nagaoka city. Normally I would not want to get off the expressway in Nagaoka, but the situation was so that my only hope was to hitchhike from Nagaoka down National Highway route 17 and get back on the expressway – this time the Kan'etsu – to catch a car to Kanto.

The lady took me only as far as National Highway route 8, too far to walk to route 17. Snow was piled up so high along the road I had very little room to stand between it and passing cars. A police car approached me and the officer said in very good English, "Don't enter this road! There are many truck accidents here!" Oh my, things could hardly be worse! It was already past 2PM and I have yet 250 kilometers to go. I couldn't walk further down the road without disobeying the police officer. The only option was to stand at a rather poor intersection with more room to stand hoping to catch a car. Cars whizzed past me. Drivers coming to route 8 from the road perpendicular to it were only 2 or 3 every few minutes.

Finally, after waiting there for about 20 minutes, an older man in a pickup truck took pity on me and offered me a ride. He went out of his way to take me to route 17.

At route 17 I caught the next ride within a minute! The driver offered to take me to the Yamaya Parking area on the Kan'etsu. I had never been to Yamaya before because it is a rather small parking area with few cars. It took a while to find it. Snow in that area is one of the deepest in all of Japan. Walls of snow higher than our heads lined the roads everywhere making navigation harder than it would have been without them.

The driver, being a local man, was able to figure out Yamaya's location and took me to the back entrance. As soon as I got there, I saw a man and told him I needed to go to Kanto. He looked at me warily and asked me who I was, and if I didn't have anything dangerous in my luggage. He was a Yamazaki bread truck driver with a load of bread going all the way to Tokorozawa in Saitama and offered me a ride to Higashi Tokorozaka station. But because of company rules, he couldn't go any faster than 80 kilometers an hour which meant at least 40 minutes longer than most cars would take me. But in this case, it was a "bird in the hand" situation and I was happy just to get to Noda. It turned out being an hour and 25 minutes late wasn't such a big problem after all, for the meeting continued to 10 PM, and I had a good time and made new friends. The trip was worth the effort.

My return trip was the exact opposite of the previous day. It only took one car with hardly any waiting to get all the way back home. A 25-year-old man named Takuma who sells wasabi offered me a ride to Niigata station but then decided to take me a bit further to my area.

The first hour of our conversation was just asking him questions about his life and background. It didn't seem to be leading to anything deeper. I feel I owe to every driver who picks me up a message of Salvation in knowing the Author of life, Jesus Christ, but because Takuma wasn't asking me anything about what I do, I didn't see any openings to the subject of Biblical/spiritual things. Finally, I got the inspiration to ask him if he knew the story of the Garden of Eden. This worked and lead to deeper talk! Most Japanese are open to hearing bible stories, and Genesis chapters 1-3 is a good place to start because it explains so many things about why the world is as it is today.

How to reinstall Windows on a Notebook PC with no CD / DVD drive



My friend's daughter has a lightweight Sotec notebook PC with Windows XP. As often with the case of browsing the Internet with Windows XP logged in with Administrator privileges, in spite of the antivirus program in use, some virus crept in and was causing poor performance. Moreover, it corrupted some Window system file so that no hardware devices displayed in the device manager! And, the Network device went missing so that the Notebook could not connect to the Internet any more. The only solution I knew was to either run a repair using a Windows XP installation, or to reinstall Windows. But because this Notebook had no internal CD/DVD drive, I had to figure out how to create a bootable media from the USB port. Thankfully this particular Notebook has an option in the BIOS to boot from a USB device.

I attached an external IDE DVD drive to it using a IDE to USB connector, and set the boot settings in the BIOS to boot from the USB port. However for some

reason the Notebook's BIOS would not recognize my DVD drive. I knew there was no problem with the DVD drive itself.

I have a 2 gigabyte USB flash memory stick and plugged that into the USB slot. The Notebook's BIOS recognized the stick! Now all I have to figure out is how to make the USB stick bootable with a Windows XP installation on it.

After some googling for the answer and after a couple failed attempts to make the USB stick bootable, I found an excellent free program called WintoFlash which did the job very well. The Notebook booted from the USB stick and gave me a menu. I chose the first menu item which ran the Windows installation program on the stick, If you're technically savvy enough to be interested in reading this post, you'll have no trouble figuring out the rest after downloading and installing this software. ☐

Saitama to Niigata – 3rd hitchhike adventure 2011



January 25:☐Today in 4 cars I hitchhiked back to Niigata. The third driver would have taken me to Nagaoka train station, but because it was not too late, still 4PM with a hour of sunlight left, and because I would have had to wait 50 minutes at the train station for the next train, I decided to try to try to hitchhike a bit further. It was now the beginning of the rush hour, in spite of many cars on the road, nearly everybody was ignoring me. The ones who didn't gave me a cross arm sign meaning, "NO!". I always turn my eyes away from them when they do that and don't take it personally. This is the only type of rejection I find no trouble to handle. ☐

The 20 minutes wait on snowy route 8 proved indeed to be worth it, for Miss Mao, a young lady in her 20s, took pity on me and turned around to pick me up! Miss Mao is one of those special people who I know God especially has His eyes on, for she has love for others, and she listened intently as I told her stories from the Bible.

Hamamatsu City to Tokyo – 2nd hitchhike adventure 2011



Mr. Yasunori who took me to
Nihonzaka service area

January 24: Today I traveled in 3 vehicles to a train station in Kawasaki which is close to Tokyo. Two of these were trucks which is pretty rare seeing that only 6% of the vehicles are trucks and hardly any of them on the expressway. It was a fine day and I had a great view of Mt. Fuji.



Mt. Fuji as seen from the Tomei
Expressway

Niigata city to Hamamatsu – second hitchhike adventure 2011



English speaking couple who took me
to Echigo Kawaguchi

January 22: This morning it snowed constantly, not too hard but enough to make me want to take a train the first part of this 500 kilometer plus journey. My destination was a port town in beautiful warm and usually sunny Shizuoka Prefecture. I knew the enough though it continued to snow in Niigata, on the other side of the mountains separating Niigata and the Kanto Plain, it would be sunny with little or no snow.

The train took me 30 kilometers to the Tsubame Sanjo train station which is next to the Hokuriku Expressway. From there I caught a 180 yen bus to the Sakae Parking Area. It connects to the Kan'estu expressway, a straight shot to Tokyo.



Snow at Echigo Kawaguchi

After only a few minutes wait I met a young married couple who were on their way to Muika Machi. They took me to Echigo Kawaguchi Service area, one of the snowiest areas of all of Japan. After I while I started to regret accepting that ride because I had a relatively long wait to catch the next ride, about 40 minutes. I had a warm coat and wasn't cold but it continued to snow as I stood in the parking area. Finally another young couple with a 3 year old son offered me a ride to Tokyo.



Mr. and Mrs. Maehara and 3 year old
son who took me to the Kohoku PA

It's easy to hitchhike to Tokyo from Niigata. The trick is to somehow get on the other side of Tokyo to the Tomei expressway which runs to Nagoya. This

couple was going to Yokohama which meant they would be going in the direction I needed to go, and they took me to the Kohoku Parking Area which is on the Tomei – as good as it gets! It was just past 3PM, but now I was in a warmer dry area with a blue sky overhead and much traffic passing by. Success looked pretty certain.



Portuguese Water Dog



Man with Matsuda Mx5 sports car who took me to Ashigara SA.

Two more drivers took me as far as Ashigara Service Area with a beautiful view of Mt. Fuji toward the north. At Ashigara I saw an unusual looking dog. The owner said it is a Portuguese breed. I found on the internet what I think is the breed, a Portuguese water dog. But the dog on that page sure does look cuter than the one I saw!

It was now 5PM and soon to get dark. From experience I knew Ashigara was not an ideal place to hitchhike at. The traffic splits into two parts of the parking area. Standing too close to the place they merge was not fruitful because the cars are going too fast at that point. Mt. Fuji slowly faded into the darkness and I began to despair wondering if I would make it to Hamamatsu that day. I still had 200 kilometers left. There was plenty of traffic going at least that far or further, but everyone was ignoring me.



Mt. Fuji as seen from Ashigara just at sunset

By 5:45 PM it was already dark. I stood in a place with a bright lamp and tried to make eye-contact with the drivers passing by standing as close to the passing traffic as I deemed to be safe. One thing I've learned though the years is that no matter what the conditions I find myself in, the drivers who truly have a heart for those in need will stop no matter what. It's usually just a question of time. And of course there is the "God factor". I find when I have to wait the longest, it's usually because God has somebody special He wants me to meet. And today again it was so. At 6:40PM a man in his 30s on his way to Nagoya offered me a ride. His name is Mr. Inukai – a rather rare family name in Japan. It literally means "Dog care".

Mr. Inukai is an interesting man because he had a problem of mental illness but largely recovered from it. He still has a problem with speaking – something I can identify with because I also have had Moses' handicap as

written in Exodus 10:4 being 'slow of speech and of a slow tongue" At one point Mr. Inukai said he didn't want to talk anymore because his month was tried; it took him considerable effort to communicate orally which is something I understand very well.

I got to my destination in a good time, just before 9PM.

[Dutch man builds an exact scale replica of Noah's Ark](#)



A working replica of Noah's Ark opened In Schagen, Netherlands. Man Builds Noah's Ark to the exact scale given in the Bible.

[First hitchhike adventure 2011](#)



Koji, an employee of
a nuclear power

plant. He took me
from Misawa city to
Hichinohe.



Family who took me
from Hachinohe to
Iwatesan Service
Area

On January 9th I hoped to hitchhike from Misawa City in Aomori Prefecture back home to Niigata but I ended the day 130 kilometers short of my goal! The main reason was accepting a ride from Mr. Suzuki,(24) from Kushiro in Hokkaido, who I met at Iwatesan Service area. He asked me if I would mind a stopover in Morioka city so he could do some shopping. Because Mr. Suzuki would be going all the way to Fukushima and therefore passing the Atadara service area which is just before the Ban'etsu junction, I didn't mind the delay, for he said it would be only "30 minutes or so." I assumed he meant he was going to the center of Morioka city, only a few minutes drive from the expressway.



Mr. Suzuki
who took
me to
Fukushima
Prefecture
from Iwate

It turned out Mr. Suzuki wasn't really going to Morioka city at all, but a small town 76 kilometers to the east of Morioka, and most of the way on snowy mountainous road! This "30 minutes" Mr. Suzuki referred to really only meant the shopping and didn't include the 3 hour car ride just to get to the shop and back to the expressway! Besides that, we also stopped several times for rest and once for dinner. By the time we arrived at Adatara, it was half past midnight! I didn't want to go further with him to Tokyo because it would be nearly 4AM when arriving, but there were too few cars in the service area parking lot to make it worth the effort to hitchhike further that day. So I looked around in the inside customer area and found a nice comfortable soft bench to lay down on. It was warm but brightly lit. I used a piece of luggage for a pillow, pulled my wool hat over my eyes, and had a good 6 hours sleep. Nobody bothered me and I think hardly anybody even noticed me or cared if they did. If in my home country, the USA, I'm sooner or later an officer of the law would be yanking on my feet waking me up abruptly and asking me to leave. This is what happened in 1978 when sleeping my own car in a national park when traveling from Washington State back to Chicago.

The next morning there were still too few cars in the service area with no Niigata license plates, and so I opted to leave Atadara service area and take the regular road. Route 4 is only a 20 minute walk from there. In 3 cars and just before noon I returned to Niigata city. The final driver was a nurse on her way to Toyama Prefecture. She rescued me after waiting some 30 minutes at the cold and snowy Bansaisan Service area on the Ban'etsu expressway.

Japanese traditional drink for the new year: Otoso

お屠蘇

Otoso, the traditional Japanese drink during new year celebration.

Every year for three days from January 1st, the Japanese drink [Otoso](#) as part of their celebration of the new year. It is made of spiced Japanese rice wine.

Most Japanese don't know the root of the meaning of the word Otoso which literally means, "something that was slaughtered and resurrected." Yes! This name literally has Christian roots! It has to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Reading from left to right as in English, the first character for O makes a word honorific, the same meaning as the o in *Ocha*, Japanese green tea.

The second character with the sound of to means a person who was slaughtered or killed.

The third character, so, has the meaning of resurrection, coming back to life. Interestingly part of this character is the character for fish. A fish symbol was used among early Christians as a secret sign to know one other. The top part of the character is used in all characters that are plants. Some people say it represents a crown of thorns. The right part of the character has the meaning of tree with a cross.

There is not a single educated Japanese person who will argue the meaning of those Chinese characters! I repeat, not a single person. It is as clear as the difference between black and white to them. Some doubters may argue the Christian roots of that word, but they will not deny those characters mean something killed / resurrected.

There are **many** things in Japanese language and culture that indicate Christianity came to Japan far earlier than most Japanese believe. They were taught in school that Christianity first came to Japan with a Jesuit priest, Francis Xavier, who came to Japan in 1549. But evidence abounds that Christian missionaries came to Japan much earlier, from the 2nd century. This knowledge has been covered.

I hope to add to this blog from time to time more information about Christian influence in Japan that have become central to Japan culture.