February – March 2014 Adventure in Kansai

February 28, Day 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At Oyabegawa, lo and behold, I saw another hitchhiker was standing waiting for cars! He was a young man from Fukuoka City in Kyushu. His signboard says, “Ishikawa” the next prefecture past Toyama. As I talked with him two other men approached us. One asked me how old I am, “I’m 63,” I replied. He put his hands on my shoulders and said, “You’re really healthy and going strong!” The second man offered to take both me and the young man hitchhiker to Tokumitsu Service Area in Ishikawa which is just past Kanazawa.

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

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

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

March 1st. Day 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

March 2st. Day 3

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

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

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

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

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

The married couple who took me to Otsu.

March 9, Day 10

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

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