

Hitchhike adventure to Chiba prefecture



With another man also hitchhiking! His partner with him took the photo



Nobuo and Miwako

March 27, 2009 The main purpose of this trip was to bring a desktop PC to a friend in Noda city, Chiba. I took it in a carrying case with wheels so it wasn't so hard to carry. The destination today was the city of Kashiwazaki, [home of the largest nuclear power plant in the world](#), to see my friends Nobuo and Miwako and their friends. An elderly couple with their one year old granddaughter sleeping in a child seat in the back took me out of their way to the city of Sanjo from where I caught a highway bus to go to the Sakae parking area just 5 kilometers down the road.

This was the first day of a special offer from the Japan Highway company. Any car equipped with an "ETC" device can drive as far as they like on the expressway the last two weekdays of every month for only 1000 yen! This means that it's possible to drive from Hokkaido to Kyushu for a 1000 yen when it would normally cost 30,000 yen or more. I expected the expressway to be crowded with traffic, but it wasn't. Only people who frequently use the expressway for business have ETC devices equipped to their vehicle.



Miyuki Saisu

It was for this reason that when I told the the driver of the next car my destination of Kashiwazaki, he didn't hesitate to say he would take me there. The driver and his wife were just taking advantage of the cheap highway toll to take a drive to places they normally would not go. They didn't even have a particular destination that day.

The last driver was Miyuki Saisu, a young mother who took me the last 7 or 8 kilometers from the expressway exit to an area near Kashiwazaki station. She says she has a 2 year old daughter. About 15% of the drivers are women, both married and single. It used to be as high as 19% five years ago but it's slowly going down. Could it be because of my age? ☐

March 29th, 8:00 AM It was snowing and the temperature was just at freezing in Kashiwazaki. Nobuo asked me where he should take me, to the train station, or back to the expressway. It's uncommon for it to snow in this part of Japan so late in the year! At first I said the train station, but that would mean I would be aborting my trip to Chiba and going back home instead. Immediately I changed my mind and decided to go for the gold and head for the expressway. Nobuo brought me an umbrella he said I didn't have to return. I was dressed only in a light jacket and a summer cap, but I had some good warm long underwear on. I was glad that at least it wasn't windy.

Nobuo dropped me off at the Kashiwazaki expressway entrance. After 20 some minutes a couple who said they turned around to pick me up took me to a parking area on the expressway just before the Nagaoka junction. It started to snow harder and I took refuge in the parking area restaurant facility and waited 15 minutes for the snow to subside. I wasn't in a hurry and had already an early start.



Parking area of Echigo Kawaguchi on the Kan'etsu expressway. The background shows a mountain of piled up snow.

The next driver was Mr. Kaneko who was on the way to Koide between Echigo Kawaguchi and Muika Machi. He is a good English speaker, but I switched to Japanese when he asked me about what I thought about the U.S President Obama. I told him that the [U.S. government has been in the hands of the International Bankers from 1913](#). It's [Wall Street and the Bankers](#) who are the *real* rulers of America. The President is only their representative who does what he's told to do! Mr. Kaneko was fascinated.

Echigo Kawaguchi was the epicenter of a [major earthquake in October of 2004](#)

The next driver was Mr. Maezawa, a grammar school teacher who took me the furthest, all the way to the Miyoshi parking area near Tokyo. Mr. Maezawa is Sokka Gakkai, a sect of Buddhism that many Japanese consider to be very narrow minded and cultish. In a previous post, I wrote about [talking to a Sokka Gakkai truck driver](#). The problem with Sokka Gakkai and the Nichiren sect of Buddhism it is based on is that the adherents do not acknowledge other faiths as possibly valid. This is very much unlike the average Buddhist who is tolerant of other religions. I shared some things with Mr. Maezawa from the Bible before I knew he was Sokka Gakkai, and true to form, he interrupted me when he didn't want to hear any more and started to share his beliefs. I try to find points of agreement as much as possible with such people and just agree to disagree with the points I don't accept.

I did learn some interesting things from Mr. Maezawa. He told me that his political party, [New Komeito](#), was the party that caught and prosecuted the various companies that polluted Japanese waters with poisons such as [mercury that causes Minamata disease](#). He also told me that the reason Gunma prefecture is so windy is because the clouds from the Sea of Japan on the west dumps its snow on the mountains dividing Japan down the middle of Honshu. It then becomes a dry wind over the Kanto plain.



Nori and Naomi

At the Miyoshi Service area a young man named Nori who was driving a fine car spoke to me in such perfect English I didn't think at first that he is Japanese! It turned out that Nori lived in New York City for a short period when he was 12 years old. He says he's been learning English from 3. Nori offered to take me to Omiya Station. That would have been perfect for me because from Omiya I could pick up a train on the Tobu Noda line and get to my destination for only 400 yen.

Nori took me to a convenience store where he bought me a cup of coffee. After that we picked up his girlfriend Naomi who he said he has met only for the third time. Naomi was impressed at Nori's English. I think impressing his girlfriend was the real reason why Nori picked me up, because instead of taking me to Omiya as I had hoped, he drove me a mere 5 kilometers to the Fujimino station on the Tobu Tojo line saying that Omiya was too far! From there I had to take two more trains to get to Omiya which cost me double than what I had originally thought I would pay for transportation that day. Such is the life of a professional hitchhiker. □