

Hitchhike adventure to Chiba prefecture



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. □

[Hitchhike adventure to Ikebukero](#)



Ikebukero is one of the large commercial centers in Tokyo with one of the busiest train stations. I intended to spend the night with a friend in

Ikebukero so that I could easily go from there the next day to the American Embassy to renew my passport. It's been ten years since I got the passport in Hawaii.



Typical night scene in Ikebukero, Tokyo

The first driver was a off duty policeman who specializes in the Japanese mafia known as the “Yakuza”. I hear these days the Yakuza are not very powerful. I hardly see them anymore. The Chinese and Russian mafia have taken over.

I talked to the policeman about my experiences with the Yakuza – usually OK. They normally don't bother the common people. I've been treated to lunch by at least two of them. One thing that strikes me about mafia type of people is that they usually think they are pretty righteous and that society is wrong, not them. The policeman agreed with that point. I then brought out that man in general has this same attitude toward God. It's called “self-righteousness”. We often think we know better than God. Many people even think they are “gooder” than God! But in reality, we are all sinners and criminals in God's sight. Only Jesus did no sin and therefore paid the price for our crimes of ungratefulness toward God and unloving actions toward our fellow man. He paid the price with His own death!

The concept of “sin” is pretty clear in Western cultures, but very vague in the Japanese mind. Even Japanese who have come to know Jesus Christ and are still young in faith don't understand very clearly what sin means. The policeman identified with what I had to say about the average criminal, but did not include himself as a “sinner” in his relationship with his Creator.

Unfortunately many church people in America seem to equate sin mainly with sexual pleasures, or even any type of pleasure while at the same time justifying truly horrible crimes in the eyes of God such as the occupation of Iraq! But Jesus didn't condemn the drunks and harlots. In His eyes, the self-righteous **religious leaders** of His time were the real sinners!

I forgot my hat in the policeman's car without giving him any way to contact me. I don't think he even knew my last name. Somehow he figured out where I live and brought the hat back!

[Making new friends on the way to](#)

Isezaki



A scene from Akagi Kogen Service Area

Isezaki City is in Gunma Prefecture and only about 2/3 of the way to Tokyo from my home. I wasn't in an especial hurry to get there because all that awaited me was to check into a hotel for the night. I had to be in Isezaki in the morning of the next day, February 28, for certain important business. I dislike staying at hotels and rather would stay with friends, but I have no close acquaintances living in that city.

There was relatively little waiting for the first two cars which took me to Sakae Parking on the expressway, but I had to wait nearly two hours for the third driver. In every case, though tiring and taxing on my patience, I find it is worth the wait because God usually sends somebody special. This time it was a kind foreigner, a Russian man by the name of Sasha.

At first I didn't recognize Sasha as a foreigner and spoke Japanese to him, but he told me in English that he doesn't speak Japanese and is from Russia. I then greeted him in Russian and he was so happy! I was happy too because I realized he didn't speak much English, and therefore it gave me a chance to practice speaking again the Russian language that has lain dormant in my mind the past 12 years since living in Russia. I could understand nearly everything he said.

I asked Sasha if he believed in God and he said he is an atheist having been born in Soviet times and was taught atheism. He said he believes the world happened without God. I asked him if he thought his car happened without man, or if he thought the road we were riding on happened without man. I hope I gave him food for thought. Sasha is a very friendly man like most Russians, and our conversation was pleasant the two hours I was with him.

Sasha dropped me off at Komayose Parking area just before Maebashi. Isezaki is about 15 kilometers east of Maebashi. I thought that probably the next car would take me to either Maebashi or Takasaki a bit past Maebashi, and from

there I would take a train the rest of the way. But wonder of wonders, 3 young men heading directly to Isezaki picked me up and took me directly to the hotel! Two of them are 24 years old, and one only 22. They really seemed to like me and one of them, Shinpei, invited me over to his house for supper after checking in at the hotel. I accepted and he took me to his apartment. There I met his wife, Tamami. They are still newlyweds being married only 3 months. I had a great time and shared my faith with them and the two other boys, Yuki and Hidenori. Shinpei wants me to visit again someday. I hope I have further business in Isezaki and meet up with them again in the near future.

[Hitch-hike back to Niigata from Saitama](#)



After waiting only a minute at the entrance of the Kan'etsu Expressway in Kawagoe, Mr. Aikawa picked me up and took me to the Takasaka Service area. This was excellent because it is in the direction toward home in Niigata. Often I get picked up by drivers going in the opposite direction, southbound toward Tokyo. I'll go with them as far as Miyoshi Service Area and then walk 20 minutes to get to the northbound area. I was making good time and knew I might be able to even stop for an hour in Tokamachi to see more friends on the way back.



Nobu



Nobu's camping car

From Takasaka, a retired man named Nobu driving a camping car took me as far as Akagi Kogen in Gunma. This was excellent because it is past Takasaki and Maebashi. Often I have to get off at Kamisato, a service area just before these two cities. Many of the drivers will go only as far as Takasaki or Maebashi. I normally reject offers from them to go only that far because I learned from experience it is difficult from those points to get back on the expressway.

Nobu lived 8 years in the USA and spoke good English. His hobby is snowboarding. He said he would travel all the way to Hokkaido in that camping car to go snowboarding. He knew of my friend in Aomori, Simon Bernard (www.hakkodapowder.com), who helped save the lives of skiers caught in an avalanche on Mt. Hakoda in 2008.



Young people heading toward a ski resort

After waiting around 30 minutes at scenic Akagi Kogen, two cars of young people passed me by but then stopped a few feet away. The driver of the second car drove back toward me in reverse and asked my destination. They were going snowboarding to a mountain resort in Shiozawa just past Yuzawa. Both cars were full of both people and luggage. The driver of the second car had to persuade the driver of the first car to take me and part of my luggage which was two cases. After a bit of negotiation he agreed.

I was glad to get to Shiozawa, but it wasn't exactly an ideal location to hitchhike from. There was too few cars in the parking area. I decided to leave the expressway parking area and walk to the regular highway, route 17. From there I knew it would be fairly easy to hitchhike further. But though route 17 was fairly close within eye shot only about half a kilometer away, I didn't see a road leading to it. I was separated by a snow covered rice field. In the summer it may be possible to walk across the banks of the rice field, but not when it is covered with a meter of snow! I had to walk a long circuitous path just to leave the expressway and then walk along a road that went somewhat parallel to route 17 hoping to get to an intersection. But there was none in sight! There was hardly any traffic along that road and the drivers of handful of cars that passed by ignored me. But God sent another angel to rescue me, a lady who at first said she wasn't going exactly the way I wanted to go but decided to take me to the highway later. I probably would have been walking close to an hour in all if she hadn't come.



People in front of a castle from
from snow!

From Shiozawa man heading to Nagaoka took me as far as Muika Machi. From

there a family took me to Tokamachi. This city is famous for its deep snowfalls in the winter and it's snow festivals. I saw many well crafted snow sculptures throughout the city. The only other city in Japan where I have seen such snow sculptures is Sapporo in Hokkaido.



Mr. Saito

In Tokamachi I spent an hour with my friends Keiji and Miyoko, and then hitchhiked the remaining 100 kilometers back home – in a single car! The driver, Mr. Saito, was heading to a town right next to mine and dropped me off at a point only a few minutes walk to my house! This is nothing short of miraculous considering the distance involved and the numerous other places a person may be heading to from that point. I walked in the door at 5:15PM, in plenty time for our Sunday evening weekly Christian fellowship meeting.

Talking to a Soka Gakkai truck driver



Miniature Schnauzer

It was good weather and still early enough at 4PM to hitchhike the 48 kilometers down route 16 from Noda to Chiba city. Noda is famous for its production of Soy Sauce, and Chiba is the Prefecture capital. I was on my way to see friends before they leave Japan, perhaps this time for good.

Though the distance involved was not so far, because it is the regular highway, I knew I was taking a risk in my race with the sun. I could wind up standing at some traffic light after dark if I had to wait too long, or if it took too many cars. The likelihood of going to Chiba in a single vehicle was

slim – unless it happened to be truck. That's exactly what God provided for me, a kind truck driver. And he had two little dogs, both Miniature Schnauzers for me to pet along the way! I love dogs. I'm also fond of cats and all animals as well.

The driver turned out to be a member of SGI – Soka Gakkai International – radical sect of Buddhism. It is related to two other sects of Buddhism, Nichirenshu and Nichirenshoshu. All three sects are considered by most other Buddhists to be heretical to the basic teachings of Buddha because the founder, Nichiren, was a man of war, not peace and tolerance as almost all Buddhist sects teach.

You may now be able to visualize my reaction when the driver told me he is a member of SGI. But he said it with a smile. □ I always try to open the door to witness to people like these by asking them questions about their faith. In this case, he seemed to be more interested in hearing about my faith in God and Jesus Christ, and of course this made it even easier for him to talk to him. He told me that Buddhism doesn't teach the concept of God as the Creator. I asked him if this fact didn't make Buddhism more of a philosophy rather than a religion? This seemed to be food for thought for him.

I told him my God is Love and love is the main positive power of the universe. God the Father showed His love to us by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for us and pay the penalty of our crimes of not acknowledging or thanking Him for all He does for us. The driver remarked that he could see how quickly his dogs took to me. The female Miniature Schnauzer went to sleep on my lap.

The timing was perfect when I arrived in Chiba because my friend and his wife just happened to be in a gas station only a couple hundred meters from where the truck driver dropped me off!

[Adventure hitch-hiking to Saitama](#)



Mr. Watanabe

I had to return to Sayama City in Saitama Prefecture to help my friend Jonas clean his PC from a Trojan. Sayama is just a few kilometers NW of Tokyo. This time it took me 10 rides because it took 5 just to get to the expressway interchange in Sanjo.

One lady who picked me up wanted to take me to a train station in Kamo city, but I insisted I would rather be dropped off on the highway. Sometimes the drivers think they know better than me and want to take me to places I know from experience would not be good for me. I try to reason with them, but when that doesn't work, I usually yield to their wishes. But not if they want to take me to a train station when I don't want to take a train!

Mr. Watanabe, a man who works in an employment agency, took me to Sanjo City from where I could get on the Kan'etsu Expressway heading toward Tokyo. As you might notice from the photo, Mr. Watanabe is a very cheerful fellow! He seemed impressed to hear all the things God has given me the skills to do. Perhaps Mr. Watanabe will continue to be a friend when I return home.

A young man who says he designs tests for junior high school children took me a considerable distance close to Yuzawa, a famous ski resort in Niigata Prefecture. I made the mistake of getting off at a rest stop just a few kilometers before Yuzawa. Normally parking areas are better than expressway entrances to hitch-hike at, but not when there are less than 10 vehicles present! I realized it would have been better to get off at Yuzawa and looked for a exit from the Parking area. It was surrounded by snow too deep to walk through and so I had to find the road that I knew the Service Area workers had to use to get to work every day. My first attempt took me down a road that went nowhere. The low road that runs parallel with the expressway was only 30 meters away but to get to it from where I stood I would have to walk through snow over my kneecaps! I knew there had to be a better way. After backtracking my steps I found it.

But though I was able to leave the expressway Service Area, I realized it was just too far to walk to Yuzawa. It would have taken me over an hour and I was at a race with the sun. Unless I catch the last ride before sunset, it gets progressively more difficult to make progress. After walking 15 minutes or so, a 21 year old lady by the name of Yuka rescued me and took me all the way to Yuzawa!

After only a few minutes wait at Yuzawa, a 38 year old truck driver picked me up and took me all the way to Akagi Kogen in Gunma! He said that I am as old as his father and he was one year old when I first came to Japan.

Now I was making progress and knew for sure I would make my destination by evening. It is quite rare for a truck driver going on the expressway to pick me up, perhaps only as much as once a year.

After that a 24 year old man from Kanazawa in Ishikawa Prefecture took me as far as Takasaka Service Area in Saitama! It just started to get dark when I

arrived.

A few minutes later a grammar school principal Higashi Matsuyama took me as far as Tokorozawa! From there it was only a 200 yen train ride to get to Sayama.

February 20, 2009: Today was cold and raining with even snow on the ground! This is quite rare for southern Saitama just north of Tokyo. I took a train to Noda City in Chiba Prefecture just Northeast of Tokyo. My friend's PC needed repair.

I hitch-hiked from Noda city to Chiba city in a single vehicle, a truck with two small dogs. The driver is of the Sokagakkai sect. He asked me many questions about Jesus and was impressed that his dog's took to me so quickly. I told him that the God of Creation is a God of Love. All of His creation can understand love, not only people and animals, but even plants. It could be that even non-living materials can react to love or its absence as well.

Adventure from Kobe to Kanto



Mr. Notsu from
Matsui

February 7, 2009: I needed to be in Tokyo the very next day and so I hitch-hiked to Noda City in Chiba and stayed with friends. It's a long trip of over 600 kilometers but it only took me 3 cars. The longest ride was from Mr. Notsu who teaches mentally handicapped children. He's from Matsui in Shimane Prefecture but lives in Hiratsuka in Kanagawa Prefecture, over 1000 kilometers from where he was raised.



Mr. Fuji from Ashigara Service Area
on the Tomei Expressway

Just a few minutes after they left, a good English speaker, Carl, picked me up took me as far as the Kamisato expressway near Gunma. Carl works as general manager of automotive lighting sales for General Electric.

From Kamisato I got a ride to Shibukawa Parking area which is just past Maebashi city. An older couple, Mr and Mrs. Tomaru, took me. The Mrs. Tomaru was looking at me constantly and always smiling as we talked.

After waiting a relatively short time in Shibukawa Parking area, a man driving a fine car took me as far as Akagi Kogen. He is a owner of a golf club. I asked him how much he pays in taxes every year. He replied their are three separate taxes of 20 million yen each from an average yearly income of 200 million yen.



Mr. and Mrs.
Tomaru

From Akagi Kogen a man took me as far as Echigo Yuzawa. I knew from experience most of the cars from that point would be going back toward Tokyo, and so I decided to hitch-hike on the low road to Muika Machi, about an hour further, and get back on the expressway from there. From before I wanted to visit Muika Machi to check out a job offer. A young man who said he is a road building took me to the company where I left my contact information. After that I walked the rest of the way to the Muika Machi Interchange, a good half hour hike!

From the Muika Machi Interchange a 29 year old man who works in a tool company took me as far as Sanjo. From there it was only a short train ride back home.

The total approximate distance hitch-hiked in this trip was 1917 kilometers or about 1200 miles. The total cost for the short bus and train rides was \$65, and I spent about \$40 for food during the 12 days. I brought back home \$470 made from gifts for my computer work. If didn't hitch-hike but took regular transportation, I surely would have run out of money along the way. Transportation alone would have cost an approximate \$780!

[Adventure to Osaka and Nagoya](#)



Nanami (9) and mother, Mrs. Kondo

January 29, 2009 Today I went to the city of Kashiwazaki to see my friends Nobuo and Miwako. Kashiwazaki is home to the largest nuclear powerplant in the world – built right smack dab on an earthquake fault! The area was hit by a magnitude 6.8 earthquake on July 16, 2007. The nuclear reactors immediately shut down and continue to remain down at the time of this post. It may be several more months before the inspectors are sure the reactors are safe enough to turn back on.

I left home around 9:15AM and walked 20 minutes to the main highway. While waiting at the usual traffic light, a Mrs. Kondo pulled up and asked my destination. Next to her sat her 9 year old daughter Nanami. She offered to take me all the way to the expressway IC in Sanjo – about 20 kilometers out of her way – if I wouldn't mind a slight detour so she could drop her daughter off at school first. I accepted. Mrs. Kondo told me that they returned to pick me up after passing me. Nanami told her, "Mama, there's a man who seems to be in trouble, we have to help him!"

After Mrs. Kondo dropped me off at Sanjo, I took two highway buses to get to the Hokuriku Expressway because I needed to gain some time to make my 2PM appointment with Nobuo. Two drivers took me the rest of the way. One of them was a life insurance salesman. I asked him how any life insurance company can make any money at all when people die and they have to pay out such hefty sums. He replied they invest money in stocks, etc.



Mr. Ohashi, Nobuo and Yuka

In Kashiwazaki I helped Nobuo teach English to his students from 2PM to 8:30PM. It was nice to see Mr. Ohashi again who I met at least 3 times previously, and I got to meet Yuka for the first time. That evening I stayed at Nobuo's parents house.

The next morning after eating a great breakfast, Nobuo's mother took me to the Kashiwazaki expressway entrance. I still didn't know where I would wind up this evening but my general direction was south. The next day I had an appointment to visit friends in Ogaki City in Gifu Prefecture and I had 3 options where to go before that.

Only a few minutes after the first driver picked me up, Nobuo called my cell phone telling me I left my reading glasses! I just had to go back and pick them up. Nobuo's mother kindly went back to the expressway entrance and I got a quick ride back and met her.



Chieko, husband Jun and
baby Shishi

January 31, 2009: Today my destination is Ogaki City in Gifu to see Philip and Maria. I took a bus to the Suita Service area on the Meishi Expressway. The first car was a young couple with a one year old boy. They took me as far as Kyoto. The second driver, a software engineer, took me all the way to Ogaki city – a good 150 kilometers from Kyoto. But he could take me only as far as the expressway bus stop exit. I still had 10 more kilometers to go, a bit too far to walk and the city is not familiar. But I learned I learned I don't really need to learn the roads because the local people know them well. After a quick lunch, I just went to the road and started hitch-hiking again. A young man picked me up and took me right to my destination. □ He says he makes good money maintaining Bullet train tracks.

Feb. 1, 2009: I went to Nagoya and met my good friend Silvio from Brazil and his Japanese friend Junko. We had a good chat about their projects.

February 2-3, 2009: I visited my Brazilian friend Paulo and his school, 'Escola Sao Paulo' in Anjo City, Aichi Prefecture. He had lots of work for me making sure all the school computers were free of web-bugs, trojans and viruses. I looked at 7 PCs in all, all Notebook computers, and installed Avast Anti-virus on most of them.

Being in the Brazilian school is almost like being in Brazil itself. I had fun picking up Portuguese words and talking to the dear Brazilian people. Most of them cannot speak English, but they all do know some Japanese. Many of them are very good Japanese speakers.



Mrs. Iida

February 4, 2009: Because my business in the Osaka area was not finished, I hitch-hiked from Kamigo Service area near Anjo City back to Osaka in 4 cars. The third car was Mr. and Mrs. Iida and their dog, Rimi. I love dogs and Rimi let me pet her, but she still didn't seem to trust me completely throughout

the trip. The Iida family took me as far as Yoro Service Area on the Meishin Expressway. From there a man who works as postal carrier took me the rest of the way to Osaka. He happened to be going to the very area I needed to go, and took me right to my friend's house!

February 5, 2009: I went to Kyoto to help my friend Joseph teach English at his school. Spent all day with him from 10AM till 8:30PM.

Making new friends through hitchhiking



Making a new friend through hitchhiking.

Hitchhike to Tokyo, New Years Eve 2008



Hiromi

I hitch-hiked to Tokyo in 5 cars from Niigata. The third driver was Hiromi, 24 years old from Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture. She took me from Sakae Parking area just after Sanjo in Niigata, to Akagi Kougen in Gunma, a distance of about 150 kilometres. I told Hiromi the Good News of eternal salvation in Jesus and she prayed with me to receive Christ!

The next driver was a 25 year Takayuki from Oita city who took me all the way to Tokyo. I told him about Jesus as well and he also believed! I wanted to introduce Takayuki to Hiromi because they both work in the same city, but this is contingent on whether Hiromi contacts me first. She said she would write me after seeing her photos on my web page, but if she did I may have missed it. I get a lot of spam and a new Japanese address may have been filtered to the spam box by mistake. Maybe she'll still write me later.



Valentin and Yoshiko

In Tokyo I visited my friends Russian Valentin and Japanese Yoshiko. I first met Valentin in 1994 in Khabarovsk, Russia, and a second time in Aomori Japan in 2006. Valentin and Yoshiko work in the national Japanese travel agency.